

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## UN LAUNCHES ROAD SAFETY PROJECT IN FOUR INDIAN STATES

### Context

- The United Nations launched a project in **partnership with four States for a road safety financing framework.**

### About

- To be implemented across **Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam** under the coordination of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office.
- The project will focus on building national and sub-national capacities** for the effective implementation of road safety action plans and on reducing road fatalities and serious injuries that lead to disabilities.
- The project will be funded through the **UN Road Safety Fund.**

### Road Traffic Deaths

- Global:** The world was not on track to achieve the pledge to reduce road traffic deaths and injuries **by at least 50% by 2030** under the **"Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030."**
  - There are those who are injured for the rest of their life, the World Bank estimates that **this amounts to 7% of GDP.**
- India:** India ranks **first** globally in terms of the number of annual road accident fatalities, claiming an estimated 153,972 lives annually, with a death rate of 15.4 per 100,000 (WHO).
  - Cities such as Delhi and Mumbai** see the greatest concentration of accidents, due to high-vehicle density, poor traffic management, and narrow roads shared by cars, motorcycles, rickshaws, and pedestrians.
  - Rural areas face a different crisis:** long emergency response times and limited access to trauma care mean even survivable crashes can become fatal.
- Economic Losses:** Families lose breadwinners and the nation faces economic losses exceeding 3% of GDP annually.

### Government Initiatives

- National Road Safety Policy India, 2010:** It emphasized the need for better road infrastructure, stricter enforcement of traffic rules, enhanced emergency medical services, public awareness campaigns, and improved post-crash care.
- Electronic Detailed Accident Report (e-DAR)/ Integrated Road Accident Database (iRAD):** Centralized system for reporting, managing, and analyzing road accident data to improve safety.

### Speedy Assistance to Accident Victims:

- Award ₹25,000 for Good Samaritans who help accident victims.
- Faster compensation: ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt, ₹5 lakh for death.
- Enhanced compensation for hit-and-run victims: ₹2 lakh for death, ₹50,000 for grievous hurt.
- Simplified procedures for third-party insurance, including hired drivers.
- Vehicle Fitness:** Old, unfit vehicles contribute to accidents. The Ministry is setting up model Inspection and Certification Centers across States/UTs (28 States/UTs covered by 2024).
- IIT Madras Collaboration:** Establishing a Center of Excellence for Road Safety to develop new products, conduct research, and promote safety initiatives.
- Accident Blackspot Rectification:** Priority on identifying and improving accident-prone spots on National Highways through engineering measures.
- Road Safety Audits:** Mandatory audits for all highway projects at design, construction, and operation stages.
- Brasilia Declaration:** India was one amongst the initial 100+ countries to have signed the Brasilia Declaration in 2015 committing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 3.6 i.e. to half the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes by 2030.
- Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019:** The act brought about higher penalties for traffic violations, including speeding, drunk driving, and not wearing helmets or seat belts.

### Way Ahead

- With India's road network **spanning over 6.6 million kilometers**, the second largest in the world, the challenge is vast but addressable.
  - Improved infrastructure, stricter enforcement of traffic laws, widespread helmet and seat belt use,** and better emergency response systems could save tens of thousands of lives each year.
- Global best practices** show that countries that adopted a **Systems Approach** have been able to achieve their targets of 50% reduction in fatalities or are close to achieving it.
- India has done substantial research on road safety through premiere institutions like Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) and Central Road Research Institute (CRRI).

- ♦ The government can collaborate with these institutes to improve policies and action plans.
- **The corporate sector can play a role** in helping strengthen road safety by funding research, spreading awareness.

Source: TH

## SCIENTISTS CONFIRM HIV CAPSID IS A GOOD DRUG TARGET DESPITE RESISTANCE

### Context

- A new study has found that to escape a drug called **lenacapavir**, HIV has to damage one of its own components, the **capsid**.

### More about the News

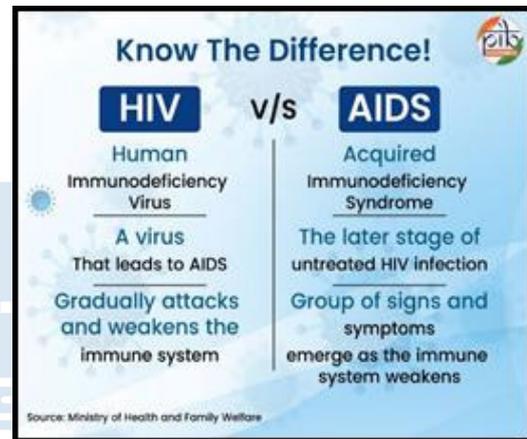
- Lenacapavir inhibits the **HIV capsid protein**, blocking viral replication, and requires just two subcutaneous injections per year. This biannual dosing markedly improves adherence over daily oral PrEP pills.
- Recently, Zimbabwe has **rolled out Lenacapavir** as a long-acting injectable PrEP option that addresses key challenges like adherence in high-burden regions.

### Background

- **First HIV Drug:** In 1987, four years after the discovery of HIV as the causative agent of AIDS, scientists reported the first drug effective against the virus, called **zidovudine**.
  - ♦ **Zidovudine** targeted a viral enzyme called **reverse transcriptase**, and prevented the virus from completing its life-cycle.
  - ♦ But HIV quickly learned to outsmart it, and the resulting **drug resistance** meant many patients soon lost the drug's protective effect.
- **Development of Drugs:** The insight led to the development of multiple antiretroviral drugs targeting different **viral proteins, including reverse transcriptase, protease, and integrase**.
  - ♦ It laid the foundation for combination therapies that could suppress the virus far more effectively and durably.
- **Lenacapavir:** The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved lenacapavir, the **world's first capsid-based HIV inhibitor**.
  - ♦ Lenacapavir is injected under the skin of the abdomen **just once every six months** and steadily delivers the drug into the bloodstream.
  - ♦ In clinical trials, it prevented HIV infection in high-risk individuals with 100% effectiveness.

### HIV AIDS

- **Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)** is a virus that attacks the body's immune system.
  - ♦ **HIV targets** the body's white blood cells, weakening the immune system. This makes it **easier to get sick** with diseases like tuberculosis, infections and some cancers.
  - ♦ **Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)** occurs at the most advanced stage of infection.
- **Spread:** HIV is spread from the body fluids of an infected person, including blood, breast milk, semen and vaginal fluids. It can also spread from a mother to her baby.
- **Treatment:** There is no cure for HIV infection. It is treated with antiretroviral drugs, which stop the virus from replicating in the body. Untreated HIV can progress to AIDS, often after many years.

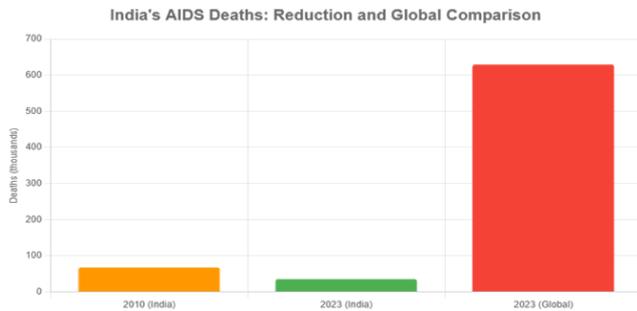


### Do you know?

- **World AIDS Day** is observed on **December 1 every year**.
- It is observed **every year** to **raise awareness** about the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- It was first marked in **1988** by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- **Theme 2025:** Overcoming disruption, transforming the AIDS response.
  - ♦ This theme highlights the urgency of addressing disruptions caused by pandemics, conflicts, and inequalities that limit access to care.

### HIV AIDS in India

- There has been a decline in infection from **0.33% in 2010 to 0.20 in 2024**.
- India's prevalence is **significantly lower than the global average** of 0.7%.
- India's new infections represent only about **5% of the global total** (1.3 million in 2024).



### The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP)

It has evolved through **five phases**, shifting from **basic awareness to comprehensive prevention, testing, treatment, and sustainability**.

- **NACP I (1992–1999):** It was India's first comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention and control programme.
  - ♦ **Aim:** Slow the spread of HIV and reduce morbidity, mortality, and overall impact of AIDS.
- **NACP II (1999–2006):** Strengthen long-term national capacity to respond to HIV/AIDS.
- **NACP III (2007–2012):** Halt and reverse the HIV epidemic by 2012.
  - ♦ **Strategy:** Scale up prevention among High-Risk Groups (HRGs) and the general population.
- **NACP IV (2012–2017):** 50% reduction in new infections (compared to 2007 baseline).
  - ♦ Extended (2017–2021) to advance the goal of Ending AIDS by **2030**.
  - ♦ **Major initiatives during extension:** HIV/AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017- It prohibits discrimination against people living with HIV (PLHIV).
  - ♦ **Mission Sampark:** Its purpose was to “bring back” people living with HIV (PLHIV) who had stopped antiretroviral therapy (ART).
  - ♦ Routine Universal Viral Load monitoring.
- **NACP V (2021–2026):** Launched as a Central Sector Scheme, aims to build on past achievements and address persistent challenges.
  - ♦ The goal of this Phase is to support the **United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 3.3** by helping end the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by **2030**.

### Conclusion

- India's AIDS decline is more prominent than the global average, supported significantly by broadened testing, enhanced access to antiretroviral therapy, focused outreach to high-risk groups, and initiatives to combat stigma, all implemented through collaborative state and community actions.

Source: TH

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TRANSFORMING RURAL INDIA

### Context

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly emerging as a foundational technology for accelerating inclusive rural development in India.

### Applications of AI in Rural India

- **Geospatial Monitoring of Rural Assets:** AI-powered platforms such as **BhuPRAHARI**, use high-resolution satellite imagery to track the creation and maintenance of rural assets like roads, water harvesting structures (Amrit Sarovars), and buildings, replacing manual inspection.
- **The Digital ShramSetu Mission** is a coordinated initiative to deploy AI and other frontier technologies within the informal sector. By aligning technological deployment with regulatory frameworks and impact assessment, the mission enhances service delivery and livelihood support for informal and rural workers.
- **AI Infrastructure in Agriculture:** The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has deployed AI through initiatives such as **Kisan e-Mitra**, a virtual assistant providing information on government schemes, including income support programmes.
- **Promote AI in Rural Development:** The **Suman Sakhi WhatsApp Chatbot** of Madhya Pradesh employs AI-enabled conversational tools to provide women and families with accessible maternal and newborn health information.
- **AI for Language Inclusion and Multilingual Governance:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is playing a transformative role in expanding linguistic access in India by enabling citizens—especially those in rural, remote, and tribal regions.
  - ♦ **BHASHINI** is an AI-powered national language platform launched in July **2022** to reduce linguistic barriers in accessing digital services. It provides translation, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and voice-based interfaces across more than 36 Indian languages.
  - ♦ **BharatGen**, launched in **2025**, is India's first government-funded sovereign Large Language Model designed specifically for Indian linguistic and socio-cultural contexts.
  - ♦ **Adi Vaani** is an AI-enabled platform designed to address communication challenges faced by tribal communities living in remote and underserved regions.

### National AI Policy Framework for Inclusive Development

- Launched in **2018 by NITI Aayog**, the National Strategy for AI identifies AI as a transformative tool to address India's developmental challenges.
- The strategy prioritises sectors with **high social impact, particularly agriculture, healthcare, education, and governance.**
  - ♦ The strategy emphasises improving access, affordability, and quality of essential services in underserved regions.
- The policy emphasises **augmentation of human capabilities rather than replacement of labour.** It promotes inclusive economic participation through digital skilling and technology-enabled employment.

### India AI Governance Guidelines

- The India AI Governance Guidelines, launched by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** in 2025, for responsible and trustworthy AI deployment.
- The framework comprises four key components:
  - ♦ **Seven guiding principles** (Sutras) for ethical and responsible AI.
  - ♦ Key recommendations across **six pillars of AI governance.**
  - ♦ An action plan mapped to **short, medium, and long-term timelines.**
  - ♦ Practical guidelines for **industry, developers, and regulators** to ensure transparent and accountable AI deployment.

### Challenges

- **Digital Infrastructure Deficit:** Reliable electricity, high-speed internet, and digital connectivity remain uneven across rural India.
- **Low Digital Literacy:** A significant proportion of the rural population lacks digital skills required to use AI-enabled platforms.
- **Data Availability:** AI systems depend on large volumes of reliable and representative data, which is usually scarce in rural contexts.
  - ♦ **Fragmented databases** across departments hinder integrated decision-making.
- **High Implementation Costs:** Developing, deploying, and maintaining AI systems requires substantial financial investment.
  - ♦ Rural local bodies often face budgetary limitations and competing developmental priorities.

### Way Ahead

- Expand digital infrastructure, including broadband connectivity and data ecosystems, in rural areas.

- Promote digital literacy and AI awareness among citizens and local officials.
- Ensure robust data protection and ethical safeguards to prevent misuse and exclusion.
- Strengthen institutional capacity for AI adoption at the Panchayat level.

Source: PIB

## BLOCKING OF OTT PLATFORMS FOR OBSCENE CONTENT

### Context

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) has ordered the blocking of five OTT platforms like **MoodXVIP, Koyal Playpro, Digi Movieplex, Feel and Jugnu** for streaming obscene and pornographic content.

### What is Obscene Content?

- "Obscene content" refers to material that is **lascivious, sexually explicit, or appeals to prurient interests**, and tends to **deprave or corrupt persons** who are likely to read, see, or hear it.
- However, obscenity is **not defined in absolute terms**, it is shaped by law, judicial interpretation, and evolving societal standards.

### Regulatory Evolution of OTT Platforms

- **Earlier Phase (Regulatory Vacuum):** OTT platforms initially operated without direct censorship like films under the CBFC.
- **IT Rules, 2021:** It brought digital news and OTT under a **three-tier grievance redressal mechanism.**
  - ♦ It mandated content classification (U, U/A 7+, U/A 13+, U/A 16+, A).
  - ♦ It required age-gating for adult content.
- **Proposed IT (Digital Code) Rules, 2026:** Draft rules propose stronger age-based classification, clearer norms on obscenity, incitement, religious attacks.
  - ♦ Response to Supreme Court directive to ensure balance between **Article 19(1)(a)** and **19(2).**

### Constitutional Dimensions

- **Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression):** Protects artistic and creative expression, including digital content.
- **Article 19(2) (Reasonable Restrictions):** Allows restrictions on grounds of decency or morality, public order, defamation, sovereignty and integrity.

- ♦ The current action reflects the State's attempt to balance **free speech with reasonable restrictions**, especially concerning obscenity and protection of minors.
- The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasized that while free speech is fundamental, it is **not absolute**, and must conform to constitutional limits.

### Legal Framework Involved

- **IT Act, 2000:** Blocking orders follow due procedure under the **Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009**.
  - ♦ **Section 69A:** Empowers the Central Government to **block public access to information** for reasons including sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, and decency or morality.
  - ♦ **Section 67:** Punishes publishing/transmitting obscene material electronically.
  - ♦ **Section 67A:** Specifically penalizes sexually explicit content.
- **Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986:** It prohibits indecent depiction of women in any form, including digital platforms.

### Role of Institutions

- **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR):** It flagged obscene content affecting children, and highlighted the child protection dimension in digital regulation.
- **Judiciary:** Directed formulation of safeguards ensuring protection of free speech, and enforcement of reasonable restrictions.

### Related Issues

- **Governance:** Regulatory challenges in digital media; executive powers under Section 69A; and transparency in blocking orders.
- **Polity:** Balance between Fundamental Rights and restrictions, judicial review of executive action, and doctrine of proportionality.
- **Society:** Impact of unregulated digital content; protection of children and women; and changing morality standards in the digital age.
- **Ethics:** Responsible content creation, platform accountability, and digital self-regulation vs State censorship.

### Way Forward

- **Clear and Transparent Standards** for defining obscenity.
- **Independent Oversight Mechanism** for blocking decisions.

- **Stronger Age Verification Systems.**
- **Digital Literacy Campaigns.**
- **Balanced Regulatory Model** combining self-regulation, statutory oversight, and judicial safeguards.

Source: IE

## CENTRE DIRECTS EXPEDITED DEPORTATION OF FOREIGN DRUG OFFENDERS

### In News

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has instructed all law enforcement agencies to speed up the deportation of foreign nationals involved in drug cases.

### Statistics on Foreign Offenders

- In 2024, 660 foreign nationals were arrested for drug offences, mostly from Nepal, Nigeria, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, and Ghana.
- NCRB (2023) reports 6,956 foreign inmates in Indian jails: 1,499 convicts, 5,167 undertrials, and 25 detainees.
- West Bengal, Maharashtra, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh together accounted for over 65% of these inmates.

### Need for Deportation

- **Preventing prolonged legal stays:** Court delays often result in foreign offenders remaining in India for years, straining prisons and legal systems.
- **National security and public health:** Drug trafficking networks often link to organized crime and transnational syndicates, posing risks beyond narcotics.
- **Deterrence:** Swift deportation sends a strong signal discouraging misuse of India's hospitality and visa system.

### Challenges

- **Diplomatic sensitivities:** Deportation involves coordination with foreign governments, sometimes complicated by strained relations.
- **Human rights concerns:** Deportation must comply with international conventions, ensuring due process and humane treatment.
- **Coordination gaps:** Multiple agencies (NCB, state police, immigration authorities) need seamless cooperation, which is often lacking.
- **Resource strain:** Monitoring foreign offenders until deportation consumes law enforcement and prison resources.

### Steps Taken by Government

- **The Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025** : It is effective from September 1, 2025, allows compounding of certain offences, enabling faster deportation without lengthy trials.
  - ♦ A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) covers withdrawal from prosecution, cases on bail, ongoing trials, appeals, and court-directed visa stays.
  - ♦ District SPs/DCPs act as registration officers under the Act.
- **Tracking & Visa Management:** Foreign nationals charged with offences have their visas cancelled immediately by the FRRO.
  - ♦ Authorities are required to track these individuals during investigation and trial.
  - ♦ The SOP ensures proper management of cases where foreign nationals are involved in legal proceedings, including those needing court consent for withdrawal of prosecution.
- The MHA issued guidelines directing law enforcement agencies to deport those convicted of petty offences immediately upon completing their sentences or paying fines.
  - ♦ If a fine remains unpaid, the individual should be deported and blacklisted.
- **Role of Police** : Police across states are compiling lists of such individuals and submitting applications for withdrawal of prosecution to avoid prolonged stays due to legal delays.

### Conclusion and Way Forward

- Deporting foreign drug offenders in India is crucial for reducing court and prison burdens, protecting national security, and disrupting international drug networks.
- While judicial delays, diplomatic coordination, and human rights concerns pose challenges, the government's recent fast-track deportation measures aim to balance law enforcement with international obligations.

Source :IE

## NEWS IN SHORT

### 75 YEARS OF EMPLOYEES' STATE INSURANCE CORPORATION (ESIC)

#### In News

- The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) commemorating **75 years since its launch in 1952**.

### About ESIC

- ESIC operates under the Ministry of Labour & Employment as a **statutory body** administering the ESI Scheme.
- It stemmed from the **1944 Report on Health Insurance by Prof. B.P. Adarkar** ("Chhota Beveridge"), influencing India's post-independence welfare model.
- **Dr. C.L. Katial** served as the **first Director General of ESIC**.
- Contributions 0.75% from employees, 3.25% from employers (total 4%).

### Key Benefits and Functions

- **Medical Care:** Full care from primary to tertiary levels for insured persons (IPs) and families.
- **Sickness & Maternity Benefits:** Wage replacement (cash) for certified sickness or maternity periods.
- **Disablement Benefit:** Lifetime pension for permanent disability from employment injury.
- **Dependents' Benefit:** Monetary aid to family if insured person dies from work-related injury or occupational disease.
- **Preventive Health Measures:** Mandatory annual check-ups for insured workers aged 40+ (introduced via new Labour Codes).

Source: PIB

### FREE HPV VACCINATION DRIVE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

#### Context

- The Union government is set to launch a nationwide immunisation drive against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) targeting girls aged 14 years, marking a major preventive step against cervical cancer.

#### About Human papillomavirus (HPV)

- HPV is a common **sexually transmitted infection. Most infections are asymptomatic and self-limiting.**
- **Nature:** HPV is a DNA virus from the Papillomaviridae family.
- **Diseases Caused by HPV:**
  - ♦ **Cervical cancer** (over 95% of cases linked to HPV).
  - ♦ **Other cancers:** anal, vaginal, vulvar, penile and oropharyngeal cancers.
  - ♦ **Genital warts** (non-cancerous).

- **High-Risk and Low-Risk Types:** HPV types **16 and 18** are high-risk strains responsible for the majority of cervical cancer cases (over 80% in India).
  - ♦ **Types 6 and 11** are low-risk strains that primarily cause genital warts.
- **HPV vaccination:** It prevents infection from the most dangerous HPV types. Most effective when given before sexual debut (ages 9–14 years).

### Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer is cancer that starts in the **cells of the cervix**.
  - ♦ The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus (womb). The cervix connects the uterus to the vagina (birth canal).
- Cervical cancer is the **second most common cancer** among Indian women. India reports about **80,000** new cases annually.

Source: BS

## NEW RULES ON COFFEE–CHICORY LABELLING IN INDIA

### Context

- India's food regulator, the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)**, has mandated new labelling rules for **coffee–chicory mixtures** to ensure transparency and prevent misleading practices in the packaged food sector.

### What Is Chicory?

- Chicory is derived from the roasted root of **Cichorium intybus**, a herbaceous plant belonging to the **daisy family**.
- It has a coffee-like flavour but contains **no caffeine**. When blended with coffee, it **enhances colour, thickness, foam, and aroma**.
  - ♦ Although safe for consumption, a higher proportion of chicory reduces caffeine content and alters the characteristic taste of coffee.
- Chicory is **native to Europe and Asia** and is now cultivated in several parts of the world, including India.
- **The root contains inulin**, a starchy soluble fibre with **prebiotic properties** that supports gut health. It has a mild laxative effect and helps reduce inflammation. Chicory is also a rich source of beta-carotene.

Source: LM

## KERALA TO BE NAMED KERALAM

### Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to rename Kerala as Keralam.

### Formation of the Modern State of Kerala

- **Pre-Independence Background:** Malayalam-speaking people were historically divided among multiple kingdoms and princely states. Major regions included Malabar (under British rule) and the princely states of **Travancore and Kochi**.
  - ♦ In the **1920s**, the **Aikya (Unified) Kerala Movement** demanded a single state for Malayalam speakers.
- **On 1 July 1949**, Travancore and Kochi merged to form the **Travancore–Cochin State**.
- **State Reorganisation Commission:** The Union Government appointed the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) under **Fazl Ali**.
  - ♦ It proposed the creation of a unified Kerala state.
- **The state of Kerala** was formally **created on 1 November 1956** under the States Reorganisation Act. It brought together:
  - ♦ Malabar district (from Madras State).
  - ♦ Travancore–Cochin State (excluding some Tamil-majority areas).

### Process to rename a state in India

- **Article 3** authorizes the Parliament to:
  - ♦ form a new state by separation of territory from any state or by uniting two or more states or parts of states or by uniting any territory to a part of any state;
  - ♦ increase the area of any state;
  - ♦ diminish the area of any state;
  - ♦ alter the boundaries of any state; and
  - ♦ alter the name of any state.
- However, **Article 3** lays down two conditions in this regard: a bill contemplating the above changes can be introduced in the Parliament only with the prior recommendation of the President; and before recommending the bill, the President has to refer the same to the state legislature concerned for expressing its views within a specified period.
- The **President (or Parliament) is not bound** by the views of the state legislature and may either accept or reject them.
- Moreover, the **Indian Constitution (Article 4)** itself declares that laws made for alteration of names of existing states (under Articles 3) are not to be considered as amendments of the Constitution under **Article 368**. such laws can be passed by a simple majority and by the ordinary legislative process.

Source: IT

## PRINCIPLE OF JUST DESERTS

### Context

- The Supreme Court flagged the **trend among high courts of reducing the sentences awarded to the accused persons.**
  - ♦ Considering the seriousness of the situation, the **Supreme Court laid down guidelines** to be followed by courts while dealing with imposition of sentences.

### Guidelines for courts

- Adherence to the principle of **“just deserts”** ought to be the primary duty of the courts.
  - ♦ Just Deserts is a theory of **punishment based on the idea that a person should be punished because they deserve it**, and the punishment should be **proportionate to the seriousness of the crime.**
  - ♦ It is also known as the **Retributive Theory of Punishment**
- Due consideration must be given to the **facts and circumstances of the case**, including the allegations, evidence and the findings of the trial court.
- The sentence should be **adequate to maintain the public trust in law and administration**; however, the court shall not be swayed by the outrage or emotions of the public and must decide the question **independently.**

Source: IE

## OVERSEAS CITIZEN OF INDIA (OCI)

### In News

- The Supreme Court dismissed a plea filed by an **overseas citizen of India (OCI)** seeking to be treated at par with NRIs for the purpose of practising law and obtaining state bar council membership.

### Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Scheme

- It was Introduced in August 2005 and provides for registration of all Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) who were citizens of India on January 26, 1950, or thereafter, or were eligible to become citizens of India on the said date.
- An OCI card holder — essentially a foreign passport holder — gets a multiple entry, multi-purpose life-long visa for visiting India, and is exempt from registration with local police authority for any length of stay in the country.

### Rules regarding OCI card holders

- In 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs amended rules for OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) card holders.

- **Key changes include:** OCI holders must now obtain permission or permits to visit protected, restricted, or prohibited areas in India, similar to rules for foreign nationals.
  - ♦ New restrictions require OCIs to get special permits for research, missionary, journalistic, or Tablighi activities.
  - ♦ OCIs are treated as foreign nationals under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA, 2003) for economic, financial, and educational matters, reversing their earlier parity with NRIs, though prior RBI circulars still apply.
- **Eligibility Restrictions for OCI Cards:** Applicants cannot have parents or grandparents who were citizens of Pakistan or Bangladesh.
  - ♦ Foreign military personnel, whether serving or retired, are ineligible.
  - ♦ Spouses of Indian citizens or OCIs can apply if married for at least two years.
- **Rights Limitations for OCI Holders:** Cannot vote, become a member of Parliament or state legislatures, or hold constitutional offices (President, Vice President, Supreme Court or High Court judge).
  - ♦ Generally cannot hold government employment.

### Recent observations of court

- It ruled that OCI status, while providing certain privileges, does not equate to Indian citizenship, which remains a mandatory prerequisite for enrolment under Section 24 of the Advocates Act.
  - ♦ Section 24 of the Advocates Act deals with the persons who may be admitted as advocates on the state roll.

Source : AIR

## NATIONAL LAUNCH OF ACCESS PASS FOR FISHING IN INDIA'S EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ)

### In News

- Recently, the Government launched the Access Pass for Fishing in India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in all 13 coastal states.

### Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

- The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is the ocean area up to 200 nautical miles from a country's coast where it has sovereign rights to explore and use marine resources.
- Countries can claim additional areas beyond 200 nautical miles if scientifically validated to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf

(CLCS) as part of their extended continental shelf, allowing commercial exploitation of minerals, oil, and polymetallic nodules.

- India's maritime claims include 12 nautical miles of territorial sea and a 200-nautical-mile EEZ from its baselines.

#### Access Pass

- It is a key instrument under the EEZ Rules to empower Indian fishers to sustainably harvest high-value oceanic resources.
- It is required for mechanized and large-sized motorized vessels, which can be obtained free of cost through the online Registration and Licensing of Fishing Craft (ReALCRaft) portal.
- It aims to support the transition from near-shore to deep-sea fishing,
- It aims promote fisher organisation into cooperatives and FFPOs,
- It aims to enhance incomes through higher catch, better prices and export-compliant practices such as traceability and certification.

#### ReALCRaft portal

- It is developed as a national online platform by the NIC and Department of Fisheries.
- It provides web-based, citizen-centric services to marine fishers and coastal States/UTs for the registration and licensing of fishing vessels, transfer of ownership, and related processes, thereby promoting ease of doing business.
- It is also integrated with Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the Export Inspection Council (EIC) for issuance of Fish Catch and Health Certificates, which are key requirements for exporting seafood to premium international markets.
- This integrated digital system ensures end-to-end traceability, sanitary compliance, and eco-labelling, thereby enhancing the global competitiveness of Indian marine products.

Source :PIB

## EXERCISE DHARMA GUARDIAN

### Context

- The 7th edition of the annual India–Japan joint military exercise *Dharma Guardian* commenced at the Foreign Training Node in Chaubattia, Uttarakhand.

### About

- Exercise *Dharma Guardian* was initiated in **2018**. It is conducted annually and held alternately in India and Japan.
- The primary objective of the exercise is to strengthen military collaboration and enhance the combined operational capabilities of both forces to undertake joint operations in a **semi-urban environment**.

### Do you know?

- **Exercise JIMEX** is a bilateral naval exercise conducted between the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF).

Source: DDNews

## FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY

### Context

- Study finds **land-use change and elevation reshaping spider communities** in the **north-western Indian Himalayas**.

### What is functional diversity?

- **Functional diversity** is mostly about the **roles species play in a given ecosystem** and physical (morphological) or behavioural (life history) characters that allow them to play these roles.
  - ♦ **Each species performs different ecological functions cumulatively** contributing to functional diversity.
- **Higher functional diversity** makes ecosystems more stable, as if one species becomes locally extinct, another with a similar role can compensate.
- **Continued agricultural expansion** and other anthropogenic activities may simplify complex natural landscapes, **pushing Himalayan biodiversity towards new functional regimes with lower resilience**.

Source: DTE

