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SUPREME COURT SLAMS META, WHATSAPP OVER PRIVACY POLICY

In Context

- The Supreme Court of India strongly cautioned WhatsApp and its parent company Meta for “**surveillance capitalism**” model and breaching the right to privacy of Indian users through data sharing and commercial exploitation.

Background

- In 2021, WhatsApp updated its terms of service, mandating that users share metadata with its parent company, Meta (then Facebook).
- Unlike the European Union, where the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** prevented such a move, Indian users were given a “**take-it-or-leave-it**” ultimatum: accept the terms or lose access to the platform.
- The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** identified this as an **Abuse of Dominant Position** under the Competition Act, 2002.
- In 2024, the CCI imposed a 213.14 crore penalty, noting that the “consent” sought was “manufactured” and forced.

Key Issues Highlighted By the SC

- **Vulnerability of the Masses:** In a country where WhatsApp has become a “digital utility” for banking, government services, and livelihood, “opting out” is often synonymous with social and economic exclusion.
- **Commercial Exploitation:** Enables Meta to monetize user behavior via cross-platform ads (e.g., Instagram, Facebook), turning users into “products” without revenue share.
 - ♦ Even if a message is end-to-end encrypted, the behavioral metadata (the “silos of data”) has immense market value.
- **Lack of Clarity:** Dense legal jargon inaccessible to rural/poor users, as SC noted—e.g., a Tamil Nadu vendor can’t navigate English terms.
- **Asymmetry of Power:** The court observed that the platform capitalizes on the “addiction” of consumers, turning them from users into “products” without their informed consent.
- **The Gap in the DPDP Act (2023):** While the Digital Personal Data Protection Act addresses the right to be forgotten and data processing limits, the SC noted it lacks provisions for “rent-sharing”.
 - ♦ The SC asked the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to compare the DPDP Act with the EU’s Digital Services Act (DSA).

India’s Data Protection Framework

- **Right to Privacy as a Fundamental Right:** In Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), the Supreme Court recognised Right to Privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 & linked privacy to dignity, autonomy and liberty.
- **Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee (2017):** It was constituted after the Puttaswamy judgment. It recommended companies as data fiduciaries, strong safeguards against power asymmetry.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:** India’s first comprehensive law on digital personal data.
 - ♦ Key provisions include consent-based data processing, purpose limitation and data minimisation & establishes Data Protection Board of India for enforcement.
 - ♦ However SC slammed that this mainly focuses on privacy protection but does not address economic value of data or compensation for data monetisation.
- **Competition Commission of India (CCI):** Recognised misuse of data as a form of abuse of dominant position.

Source: TH

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT LOCAL AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (MPLADS)

In Context

- A recent controversy erupted over alleged misuse of MPLADS funds and critics demanding the scheme should be discontinued.

Critical Arguments for Scrapping the Scheme

- Critics, including the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), have argued for its discontinuation based on:
 - ♦ **Breach of Separation of Powers:** The scheme allows legislators (MPs) to perform executive functions (deciding on specific local projects). This blurs the line between the legislature and the executive.
 - ♦ **Federalism Concerns:** The subjects covered under MPLADS (sanitation, local roads, etc.) fall under the State List and Local Bodies (73rd/74th Amendments). Critics argue the Union is “encroaching” on local government domains.

- ♦ **Inefficiency:** CAG reports consistently highlight that funds are often diverted to “improve existing assets” rather than creating “durable community assets.”

About MPLADS

- **Brief:** The Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) is a Central Sector Scheme launched in 1993, administered by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- **Objective:** To enable Members of Parliament (MPs) to recommend works for the creation of durable community assets based on locally felt needs such as drinking water, sanitation, roads, public health infrastructure.
- **Implementing Mechanism:** MPs only recommend works and have no role in execution. Projects are implemented by government departments, trusts or cooperatives, selected by the Implementing District Authority (IDA), usually the District Collector, ensuring executive control.
- **Funds allotted:** Each MP is entitled to 5 crore per year under MPLADS. The funds are intended to supplement existing development schemes and address local gaps.
 - ♦ It requires MPs to recommend at least 15% of funds for SC-inhabited areas and 7.5% for ST-inhabited areas annually.
- **Non Lapsable Fund:** MPLADS funds are non-lapsable, meaning unutilised funds are carried forward to subsequent years, ensuring continuity of projects.
- **Geographical coverage:** Lok Sabha MPs can recommend works within their constituencies, Rajya Sabha MPs within their state of election, and nominated MPs anywhere in the country.
- **Exceptions:** MPs may recommend up to 25 lakh per year outside their constituency/state, and up to 1 crore for an affected district during natural calamities.

Judicial Stand

- **Supreme Court (2010):** In *Bhim Singh v. Union of India*, the SC upheld the constitutionality of MPLADS. It ruled that “separation of powers” is not rigid in India and that as long as the MP’s role is limited to “recommending” and the District Authority “executes,” the scheme is valid.
- **Accountability Regime:** The SC noted that mere misuse by some is not a ground to scrap the scheme, as checks like CAG audits and Parliamentary committees exist.

Way Ahead

- The **monitoring mechanism of MPLADS should be strengthened** through real-time digital dashboards, geo-tagging of assets and time-bound completion norms to reduce delays and improve outcomes.
- There is a **need to enhance transparency by mandating public disclosure of recommended works**, fund releases, utilisation certificates and completion status at the district level.
- **Third-party audits and social audits** should be institutionalised to curb misuse, diversion of funds and political favouritism, especially in high-value projects.
- MPLADS should be **better integrated with district planning processes**, ensuring convergence with Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, in line with the spirit of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments.

Source: TH

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT (SWM) RULES, 2026

In News

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has notified the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026, superseding the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.

Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026

- The rules have been notified under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986** and will come into full effect from April 1, 2026.
- The rules provide for the levy of environmental compensation based on the **‘Polluter Pays’ principle for non-compliance**, including cases of operating without registration, false reporting, submission of forged documents or improper solid waste management practices.
- The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** will prepare the relevant guidelines, while State Pollution Control Boards and Pollution Control Committees will levy the environmental compensation.

Major Features

- **Four-stream Segregation of Solid Waste at Source:** Four-stream segregation of solid waste at source has been made mandatory under the SWM Rules, 2026.
 - ♦ Waste is required to be segregated into wet waste, dry waste, sanitary waste and special care waste.

Types of waste

- **Wet waste** includes kitchen waste, vegetables, fruit peels, meat, flowers, etc., which shall be composted or processed through bio-methanation at the nearest facility.
- **Dry waste** comprises plastic, paper, metal, glass, wood and rubber, etc., and shall be transported to Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) for sorting and recycling.
- **Sanitary waste** includes used diapers, sanitary towels, tampons and condoms, etc., which shall be securely wrapped and stored separately.
- **Special care waste** includes paint cans, bulbs, mercury thermometers and medicines, etc., which shall be collected by authorised agencies or deposited at designated collection centres

Clear definition of Bulk Waste Generators: Bulk Waste Generators include entities with a floor area of 20,000 square metres or more, or water consumption of 40,000 litres per day or more, or solid waste generation of 100 kg per day or more.

- ♦ It includes government departments, public sector units, institutions, commercial establishments, and residential societies.
- ♦ They must ensure their waste is collected, transported, and processed environmentally, easing the burden on urban local bodies.
- ♦ The rules also allow local bodies to levy user fees and introduce **Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR)**, making BWGs accountable for their waste, requiring on-site wet waste processing or an EBWGR certificate, covering nearly 30% of total solid waste.
- **Faster Land Allocation for Waste Processing and Online Monitoring of Complete Solid Waste Management:** The rules establish graded criteria and buffer zones for waste processing facilities over 5 tonnes per day to speed up land allocation, with CPCB guidelines based on capacity and pollution load.
 - ♦ A centralized online portal will track all stages of solid waste management, including legacy waste treatment, and enable online registration, authorisation, reporting, and audit submissions for facilities, replacing physical processes and improving transparency.
- **Duties of Local Bodies and Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs):** Under the revised rules, local bodies must collect, segregate, and transport

solid waste in coordination with Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs), which are now officially recognised for sorting waste and can serve as deposition points for e-waste, sanitary, and other waste streams.

- ♦ Local bodies are encouraged to generate carbon credits, and rural sanitation departments must focus on peri-urban areas.
- **Use of Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) by Industries:** The new rules define Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) as high-calorific fuel made from shredded, dehydrated non-recyclable waste like plastic, paper, and textiles. Industrial units, including cement and waste-to-energy plants, must gradually increase RDF use from 5% to 15% over six years.
- **Restrictions on Landfilling and Remediation of Legacy Waste Dumpsites:** The rules tighten landfill restrictions, allowing only non-recyclable, non-energy-recoverable, and inert waste, and impose higher fees for unsegregated waste to encourage segregation.
 - ♦ They mandate annual landfill audits, oversight by District Collectors, and time-bound mapping, biomining, and bioremediation of legacy dumpsites, with quarterly progress reported via the online portal.
- **Solid Waste Management in Hilly Areas and Islands:** The rules introduce special provisions for hilly areas and islands, including tourist user fees, regulated tourist inflow, designated collection points for non-biodegradable waste, and decentralized wet waste processing by hotels and restaurants.
 - ♦ They also establish Central and State-level committees, chaired by Chief Secretaries or UT heads, to advise the CPCB on effective implementation.

Importance

- India produces over 620 lakh tonnes of waste annually, with most collected but only part processed and some landfilled; the Centre plans circular economy reforms to improve waste management.
- It Reduces landfill dependency and curbs greenhouse gas emissions.
- Scientific waste processing minimizes risks of vector-borne diseases.
- It integrates the principles of Circular Economy and Extended Producer Responsibility, with a specific focus on efficient waste segregation and management.
- It supports Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 and AMRUT 2.0 goals of clean, livable cities.

Challenges

- Past failures show weak enforcement at municipal levels.
- Many cities lack adequate composting and recycling facilities.
- Household-level segregation remains inconsistent due to low awareness.
- Smaller municipalities struggle with funds for modern waste systems.
- Ragpickers and waste workers need formal inclusion and protection.

Way Ahead

- The SWM Rules, 2026 aim to establish disciplined waste governance, relying on effective execution, infrastructure, and citizen participation.
- Their success requires strengthening municipal capacity through training and funding, engaging citizens via awareness campaigns, adopting digital and AI-based waste monitoring technologies, partnering with private and NGO sectors for recycling and innovation
- There is a need to align the rules with broader climate, plastic, and renewable energy policies to turn India's waste challenge into an opportunity for sustainable urban growth.

Source :IE

DEATH PENALTY IN INDIA

Context

- According to an annual report on capital punishment published by Square Circle Clinic at NALSAR University of Law, the **Supreme Court of India** has not **confirmed a single death sentence** in the past three years, reflecting a highly restrictive approach toward capital punishment.

Key Findings of the Report

- **Lower Courts Continue to Impose Death Sentences:** Sessions Courts imposed 1,310 death sentences between 2016 and 2025, including 128 sentences in 2025 alone, despite growing skepticism at higher judicial levels.
- **Low Confirmation Rates in High Courts:** Of the 1,310 death sentences, 842 cases reached the High Courts. Only 70 sentences (just 8.31%) were confirmed.
- **Supreme Court Overturns Confirmed Sentences:** Even where High Courts confirmed death sentences, the Supreme Court has not upheld a single one in the past three years.
 - ♦ Of 37 such cases decided, most ended in acquittal or commutation.

- **Record Acquittals in 2025:** In 2025, the Supreme Court acquitted 10 death row prisoners, the highest number of such acquittals in a decade.
- **Large Death Row Population:** India had 574 prisoners on death row, **including 24 women (as of December 31, 2025)**.
- **Prolonged Time On Death Row:** Prisoners spent an average of over five years on death row before acquittal, with some waiting nearly ten years for exoneration.
- **Widespread Procedural Violations:** Nearly 95% of death sentences in 2025 were imposed without following mandatory Supreme Court guidelines on mitigation and sentencing procedures.
- **Shift Toward Alternatives:** Courts are increasingly opting for life imprisonment without remission as an alternative to the death penalty.

Capital punishment

Examining death penalty trends in India (2016-2025)

1,310
death sentences by
Sessions Courts

128 sentenced
in 2025

842
death sentences
were heard by the
High Courts

70 confirmed
(8.31%),
285 acquitted,
411 commuted

0 death sentences confirmed
by the Supreme Court in
the past 3 years

Of 37 HC-confirmed cases
decided by SC:

15 | **14**
acquitted | commuted

574
prisoners on
death row
(Dec. 31, 2025)
— highest
since 2016

What is Capital Punishment?

- It is the **most severe form of criminal punishment**, commonly known as the **death penalty**, in which the **State legally executes** a person convicted of the gravest offences.
- **In India**, capital punishment is permitted only in the **'rarest of rare cases'**, a **doctrine evolved by the Supreme Court** to ensure that death sentences are imposed only when life imprisonment is deemed wholly inadequate.

Legal Basis in India

- Capital punishment is constitutionally valid under **Article 21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), provided it is imposed through a **fair, just and reasonable procedure**.
- It is prescribed for certain offences under laws such as the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**, **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**, and other special statutes.
- Execution is carried out **only after exhaustion of all judicial remedies** and the decision on a **mercy petition** by the President or Governor.

Role of Lower Courts (Sessions Courts) in Capital Punishment Cases

- **Primary Trial & Sentencing Authority:** Sessions Courts conduct the **trial** for serious offences punishable with death. They examine evidence, hear witnesses, and determine **guilt or innocence**.
- **Sentencing Function:** If the accused is convicted, the Sessions Court conducts a **separate sentencing hearing**.
 - ♦ The court must weigh **aggravating circumstances** (nature of crime) against **mitigating circumstances** (background, mental health, possibility of reform).
- Under **Supreme Court guidelines (2022)**, the court must consider psychological evaluation, probation officer's report, and prison conduct and social background.
- **Reference to High Court:** A death sentence passed by a Sessions Court **does not take effect automatically**.
 - ♦ It must be **confirmed by the High Court** under the **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)**.
 - ♦ High Courts act as the **first appellate safeguard**. Every death sentence must be **confirmed, commuted, or set aside** by the High Court.
 - ♦ High Courts reassess **facts, evidence, and law**, not merely procedural correctness. They also examine whether the **'rarest of rare' test** has been correctly applied.

Role of the Supreme Court of India

- **Final Judicial Authority:** The Supreme Court is the **ultimate appellate court** in death penalty cases.
 - ♦ Appeals reach the Court through **Special Leave Petitions (SLPs)** or criminal appeals.
- **Constitutional and Due Process Oversight:** The Court ensures compliance with **Articles 14 and 21**, fair investigation and trial, and proper sentencing hearings and consideration of mitigation.
- **Sentencing Jurisprudence:** The Supreme Court has shaped death penalty law by developing the **'rarest of rare' doctrine**, mandating **individualised sentencing**, and requiring strict procedural safeguards.
- **Review and Curative Jurisdiction:** Even after dismissal of appeals, the Court can hear **review petitions, and curative petitions** (in exceptional cases).
- **Mercy Petition Interface:** The Court may review delays, arbitrariness, or procedural violations in

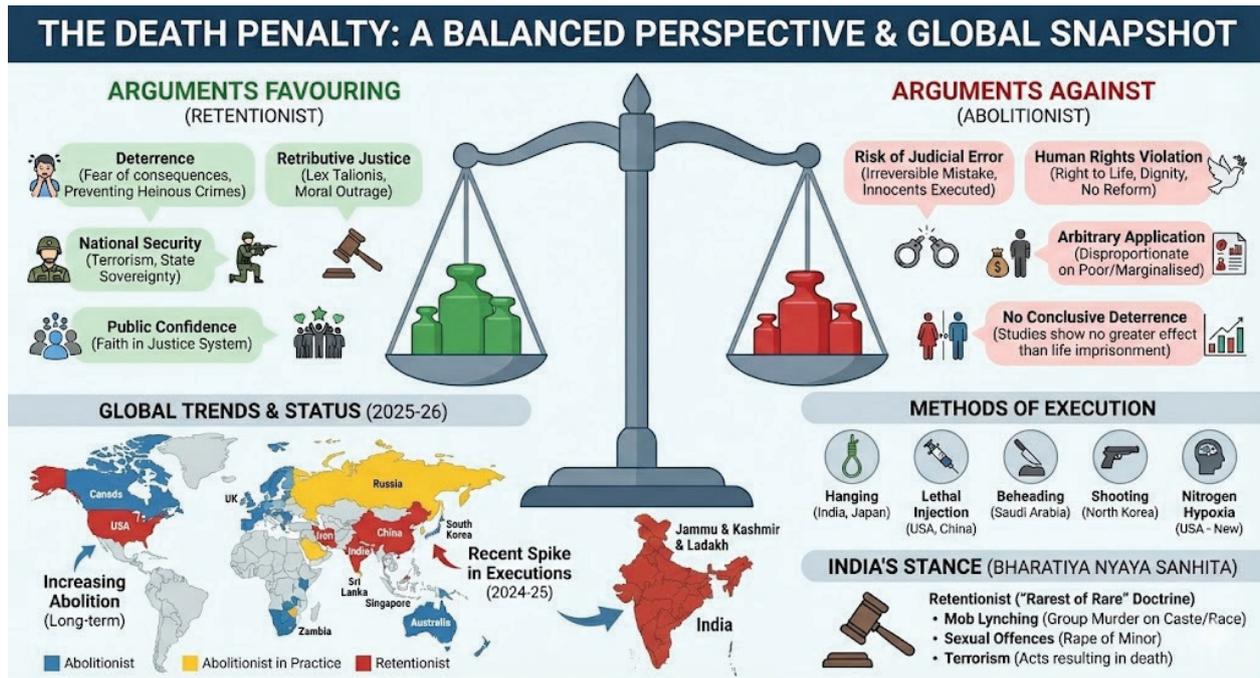
mercy petition decisions, after judicial remedies are exhausted.

Role of the Governor and the President in Capital Punishment

- **President of India (Article 72):** The **President** has the power to grant **pardon, reprieve, respite, remission, and commutation of sentence**. It applies in cases where:
 - ♦ punishment is a **death sentence**;
 - ♦ offence is under **Union law**;
 - ♦ sentence is by a **court-martial**;
- **Governor of a State (Article 161):** The **Governor** has similar powers for offences under **State law**, except, it **cannot pardon** a death sentence, but **can commute** it to life imprisonment or a lesser sentence.

Key Issues and Challenges in Capital Punishment in India

- **High Rate of Erroneous Convictions:** A large proportion of death sentences imposed by trial courts are **overturned by High Courts and the Supreme Court**.
 - ♦ It indicates **systemic flaws in investigation, prosecution, and trial-level adjudication**, especially in cases involving poor and marginalised accused.
- **Inadequate Sentencing Hearings and Mitigation:** Trial courts frequently conduct **rushed or perfunctory sentencing hearings**.
 - ♦ Mitigating factors such as mental illness, socio-economic background, and possibility of reform are often ignored or insufficiently examined.
- **Non-Compliance with Due Process Safeguards:** Despite Supreme Court guidelines (2022), trial courts regularly fail to obtain psychological evaluation reports, probation officer reports, and prison conduct records.
 - ♦ It weakens the fairness of sentencing and increases the risk of wrongful punishment.
- **Socio-Economic and Caste Bias:** Death row prisoners disproportionately belong to **economically weaker and socially marginalised groups**.
 - ♦ Lack of effective legal representation at the trial stage worsens outcomes
- **Prolonged Delays and Mental Trauma:** Long delays between conviction, appeal, and execution result in **severe psychological suffering**, often referred to as 'death row phenomenon'.
 - ♦ Delays in deciding mercy petitions aggravate this problem.



Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

NEW START TREATY

In News

- Experts caution that the expiry of the **New START Treaty** would eliminate the last remaining legally binding constraint on the nuclear arsenals of the world's two largest nuclear powers.

Background

- The term START originates from the "**Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty**," with the first agreement, START-I, signed between the **US and the former USSR in 1991 and coming into force in 1994**.
- START-I limited each side to 6,000 nuclear warheads and 1,600 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) but expired in 2009.
- It was succeeded by the **Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, also called the Treaty of Moscow)** and later by the **New START treaty** (signed in 2010 & entered into force in 2011).
- The **New START treaty** caps the number of deployed strategic warheads at 1,550 on each side, with no more than 700 deployed ground- or submarine-launched missiles and bomber planes, and 800 launchers.

Implications of Expiration

- Without a treaty, Russia and the US could freely expand their arsenals, risking a renewed nuclear arms race amid global tensions.

- The absence of a framework heightens nuclear risks and removes the transparency and stability that arms control agreements provide.

Source :TOI

PRADHAN MANTRI VIRASAT KA SAMVARDHAN (PM VIKAS)

In News

- PM VIKAS has allocated targets to train about 1.51 lakh beneficiaries through Project Implementing Agencies across States and UTs.

Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan (PM VIKAS)

- It is a Central Sector Scheme which is being implemented by the Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- It focusing on socio-economic empowerment of six notified minority communities through the following:
 - ♦ Skilling and Training (Non-traditional and traditional)
 - ♦ Women Leadership and Entrepreneurship
 - ♦ Education (through National Institute of Open Schooling)
 - ♦ Infrastructure Development (through Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram)
- minority groups—Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Zoroastrians (Parsis)

Do you know?

Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zoroastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992

Features

- The implementing agencies must ensure candidate placement in accordance with the scheme guidelines, as stipulated in the MoUs signed with the Ministry.
- For non-traditional (modern) skilling, Project Implementing Agencies are required to place at least 75% of trained beneficiaries in employment (wage, self-employment, or apprenticeship), with a minimum of 50% placed in the organized sector as defined under NSQF/Common Cost Norms.

Source :PIB

WHAT IS SUBORBITAL TOURISM?

In News

- Blue Origin has suspended its **New Shepard suborbital space tourism programme** for at least two years to prioritise development of **NASA's Artemis lunar lander**.

About Suborbital Tourism

- Suborbital tourism refers to **short-duration spaceflights that cross the 100 km Kármán line**, widely accepted as the **boundary of outer space**, but do not place the spacecraft into Earth orbit.
- These flights follow a **parabolic trajectory**, where the vehicle ascends steeply and then **descends back to Earth**. Unlike orbital missions, suborbital vehicles do not achieve the high horizontal velocity required to remain in orbit.
- The flight duration is brief, usually **around 10–15 minutes, making suborbital tourism significantly cheaper** and technologically less complex than orbital space travel.
- During the coasting phase, passengers **experience microgravity (weightlessness) for a few minutes** and can observe the curvature of the Earth against the blackness of space.

Source: TH

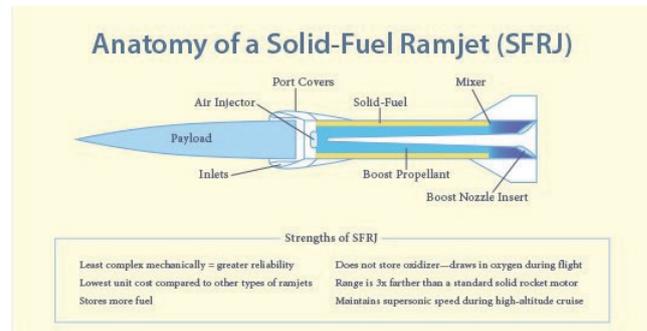
INDIA HAS ENTERED AN ELITE GROUP OF POSSESSING SFDR TECHNOLOGY

In News

- DRDO successfully demonstrated **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) technology** from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur, Odisha, advancing **India's long-range air-to-air missile capabilities**.

What is Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)?

- SFDR is a missile propulsion system that uses a ramjet engine to provide sustained thrust. Unlike traditional rockets, it is an air-breathing system, meaning it does not carry an onboard oxidizer, using atmospheric oxygen instead.
- Since ramjets only function at high speeds, the missile is first launched using a nozzle-less solid booster to reach supersonic speeds (Mach 2+).



Strategic Significance for India

- **Long-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (LRAAM):** SFDR will power the Astra Mark-3, enabling it to intercept high-speed, maneuvering enemy aircraft at ranges exceeding 150–300 km.
- **Expanded “No-Escape Zone”:** Because the missile stays “powered” until the very end, it can perform high-G turns near the target, making it nearly impossible for an enemy jet to out-manuever it.
- **Surface-to-Air Application:** It can be adapted for futuristic SAM systems (like the proposed SAM-X) to defend against hypersonic or highly agile cruise missiles.

Source: TH

AGRICULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

In News

- **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)** has sanctioned ₹80,224.15 crore in loans for over 1.5 lakh projects, mobilising investments of ₹1.27 lakh crore since 2020.

Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)

- It is a **central sector scheme** to mobilize **medium and long-term debt financing** for the development of post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets.
- It **focuses on strengthening agri-logistics, reducing post-harvest losses, promoting modern storage**, processing and value-addition facilities and improving farm-gate level infrastructure for efficient supply chains.

- Under the scheme, banks and financial institutions provide loans **with 3% per annum interest subvention** by Government of India.
 - ♦ Loan tenure is up to 7 years with a moratorium of up to 2 years.
- Credit guarantee coverage for loans up to 2 crore is also supported under **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)**.
- The Components B and C of Pradhan Mantri – Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) for solarisation of grid-connected agriculture pumps and standalone solar pumping systems were included as eligible assets for availing AIF benefits in convergent mode in September 2020.

Source :PIB

VOPPA ORDER, 2025

In News

- The Government of India has strengthened regulatory oversight of the **edible oil value chain** through the **VOPPA Order, 2025**, issued under the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**.

About

- The amended Order mandates compulsory registration of all manufacturers, processors, blenders and re-packers of edible oils on the **National Single Window System (NSWS) and the VOPPA portal**.
- Registered entities must submit monthly returns on production, stocks, imports, sales and consumption of edible oils, including vanaspati and blended oils.

Impacts

- India imports nearly **60% of edible oil needs**; VOPPA counters hoarding/pricing volatility, supporting food security amid Budget 2026 fiscal goals.

Source: PIB

DEBT-TO-GDP RATIO

In Context

- In the Union Budget 2026–27, the Finance Minister signalled a strategic shift in fiscal policy focus from short-term fiscal deficit targets to a **medium-term debt-to-GDP ratio**.
 - ♦ The government has set a target to bring **India's debt-to-GDP ratio down to 50%** by FY 2030–31, with a flexibility band of $\pm 1\%$.

About Debt-to-GDP Ratio

- It measures **total public debt as a percentage of GDP**.
- It indicates a **country's capacity to service and repay its debt**.
- Lower ratio means better fiscal sustainability and investor confidence.

Why is this Shift Important?

- **Fiscal Sustainability Perspective:** High debt limits government's ability to spend during crises, invest in infrastructure and social sectors & debt-based targeting ensures intergenerational equity.
- **Post-COVID Context:** India's debt increased sharply after pandemic stimulus & higher welfare spending.
- **Global Best Practice:** Many countries use debt anchors instead of only fiscal deficit limits. This aligns India with international fiscal responsibility norms.

Source: PIB

WASTE-PICKERS ENUMERATION UNDER NAMASTE SCHEME

In News

- For the first time, the Union government has released **nationwide enumeration data of waste-pickers under the NAMASTE (National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem) scheme**.
 - ♦ The data highlights deep caste-based social stratification in **informal urban sanitation work**.

About

- Over 52 lakh waste-pickers were enumerated across 35 States/UTs, with 84.5% from SC, ST, and OBC communities.
- In Delhi and Goa, the majority of waste-pickers are from the General category.

About NAMASTE Scheme

- Launched as a **Central Sector initiative** by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The Scheme integrates waste-pickers into formal solid waste management from FY 2024-25. It provides ID cards via a mobile app, safety gear, skill training, health insurance under Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY, e-Shram registration, and capital subsidies for waste vehicles.

Source: TH