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INDIA REFUSES IEA'S CALL TO RELEASE STRATEGIC OIL RESERVES

Context

- India is not going to join the **International Energy Agency (IEA) initiative** to release **strategic oil reserves** as part of an effort to cool oil prices.

About

- India is the **world's third-largest oil-importing and consuming nation**, and has 5.33 million tonnes of underground strategic reserves. But they are only 80% filled currently.
- **Due to the West Asia conflict** the crude prices jumped close to USD 120 per barrel, the highest in four years.
  - G7 nations are due to discuss the **possible release of oil reserves to calm markets.**
- India is **not a full member of IEA** and does not have an obligation to follow the mandate of the international body.

India's Oil Imports

- India imports **nearly 88%** of its crude oil requirements from around **41 countries.**
- Roughly half of those supplies in February passed through the Strait of Hormuz.
  - In February 2026, India received 2.8 million bpd crude, accounting for 53% of total imports, from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar.
- As of early 2026, **Russia remains the largest supplier** of crude oil to India, with Saudi Arabia and Iraq following closely as key suppliers.

International Energy Agency (IEA)

- **Established:** In 1974.
- **The IEA's founding members were** Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Kingdom, and the United States.
- **Reason:** It was created when major oil-exporting countries drastically reduced oil supplies, causing severe economic disruptions in industrialized nations.
- **Mandate:** IEA's original mandate was to ensure that oil supplies were kept stable, and potential disruptions in future were anticipated and prevented through timely action.
  - It also developed an elaborate mechanism to deal with oil emergencies in future, making

it mandatory for every member country to maintain certain minimum strategic stocks of oil.

- **Members:** The membership was kept open only for OECD countries.
  - There are now 33 full members with Colombia being inducted as 33rd members recently.
- **Associate Members:** In 2015, IEA opened the doors for non-OECD countries to become associate members.
  - The associate members participate in the policy discussions and activities, but do not have decision-making rights.
  - India became an associate member in 2017. There are 13 associate members right now.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD)

- The OECD is an intergovernmental organisation that promotes economic development, policy coordination, and global cooperation.
- **Motto:** "Better Policies for Better Lives."
- Established in **1961**, succeeding the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC).
- **Headquarters:** Paris, France.
- **Membership:** 38 member countries (mainly developed economies). India is not a member.

Source: BT

STATUTORY BODIES CANNOT SEEK LOOK OUT CIRCULARS: MHA

Context

- Recently, the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has modified the guidelines governing **Look Out Circulars (LOCs)** to streamline the process of preventing individuals from leaving India.

What is a Look Out Circular (LOC)?

- A **Look Out Circular (LOC)** is a notice issued by immigration authorities to **prevent a person from leaving the country or to track their movement through international borders**.
- **Key Features:**
  - Issued through the **Bureau of Immigration (BoI)** under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
  - Used against individuals who are wanted in **criminal investigations,** involved in **economic offences**, and posing **national security threats.**

- ◆ It alerts immigration officials at **airports, seaports, and land borders**.
- LOCs function as an important **law enforcement and border control mechanism** in India's internal security framework.

Key Changes in the New MHA Guidelines

- **Statutory Bodies Cannot Directly Request LOCs:** The revised guidelines specify that **statutory bodies without criminal jurisdiction cannot directly issue requests for LOCs** to the Bureau of Immigration (BoI).
  - ◆ **Examples of such bodies** include National Commission for Women (NCW); National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR); National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT); and other tribunals without criminal jurisdiction.
- **New Procedure:** These statutory bodies need to send the request to a **law enforcement agency** (e.g., police), and the **law enforcement agency evaluates the request**.
  - ◆ If justified, the agency will **forward the LOC request to the Bureau of Immigration**.
  - ◆ If the BoI receives a direct request from these bodies, it must **return the request and advise routing through law enforcement agencies**.

What are Statutory Bodies?

- These are the organizations **established through legislation passed by Parliament or State Legislatures**, with clearly defined powers and duties.
- **Key Characteristics:** Created by a **statute (law)**; possess **legal authority and defined powers**; perform **specialised regulatory or advisory functions**; operate with **relative autonomy from the executive**.
  - ◆ Their functions and structure can only be modified through **amendment of the law**.
- **Need for Statutory Bodies:** Specialisation; Independent Regulation; Administrative Efficiency; and Protection of Rights.

Types of Statutory Bodies in India

- **Regulatory Bodies:** These organisations regulate economic sectors and ensure fair practices. Examples:
  - ◆ **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**: Regulates securities markets.

- ◆ **Competition Commission of India (CCI)**: Ensures fair competition.
- ◆ **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI):** Regulates telecommunications.
- **Advisory Bodies:** These provide expert advice to the government on policy matters. Examples:
  - ◆ **University Grants Commission (UGC)**: Advises on higher education policy.
  - ◆ **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**: Advises on statistical systems.
- **Welfare and Rights Protection Bodies:** These safeguard rights and address grievances of vulnerable groups. Examples:
  - ◆ National Human Rights Commission (NHRC);
  - ◆ National Commission for Women (NCW);
  - ◆ National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR);
- **Administrative and Development Bodies:** These implement policies and development programmes. Examples:
  - ○ **National Green Tribunal (NGT):** Environmental justice.
  - ○ **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI):** Food regulation.

Difference Between Constitutional and Statutory Bodies		
Aspect	**Constitutional Bodies**	**Statutory Bodies**
Creation	Created by Constitution	Created by an Act of Parliament
Legal Basis	Constitutional provisions	Statutory law
Amendment	Requires constitutional amendment	Parliament can amend law
Examples	UPSC, Election Commission, CAG	SEBI, NHRC, TRAI

Source: IE

DESALINATION PLANTS HAVE BECOME THE LATEST FOCAL POINT IN WEST ASIA WAR

Context

- As the conflict in West Asia enters the 10th day, the military strikes by both **sides have found a new target: desalination plants.**

What are desalination plants?

- Desalination plants **convert seawater into fresh drinking water** by removing salt and other minerals.

- The most widely used method is a process called **Reverse osmosis,** which pushes seawater through **ultra-fine membranes** that filter out salt.

- The freshwater produced is used to supply households, industry, hotels and some agriculture across the region.

Why are they so important to the Gulf?

- Many Gulf countries depend heavily on desalinated water because they lack natural freshwater resources such as rivers or large lakes.

- According to the IFRI report, desalination plants in the UAE supply 42% of the country's drinking water needs.

- Such plants meet 90% of Kuwait's needs, 86% of Oman's, and 70% of Saudi Arabia's.

- The report also anticipated that desalination capacity in West Asia would almost double by 2030.

Challenges/Risks with Desalination Plants

- **Disabling of Desalination Plants:** Experts say major cities could lose most of their drinking water within days if key desalination plants were disabled.

  - A 2010 analysis by the Central Intelligence Agency warned that attacks on desalination facilities could trigger national crises in several Gulf states.

  - More than 90% of the region's desalinated water comes from just 56 plants, making them highly vulnerable to sabotage or military action.

- **Climate Change:** Beyond war, climate change is also increasing risks to desalination infrastructure.

  - Rising ocean temperatures and stronger cyclones in the Arabian Sea could threaten coastal facilities, while storm surges and

extreme rainfall could damage plants or overwhelm drainage systems.

- **Emissions and Pollution:** Desalination is also energy-intensive, with plants worldwide producing between 500 million and 850 million tonnes of carbon emissions each year.

  - The process also produces highly concentrated brine, which is often discharged back into the ocean and can harm marine ecosystems such as coral reefs.

Do you Know?

- **International humanitarian law,** including the **Geneva Conventions,** prohibits the targeting of civilian infrastructure indispensable for survival. This includes drinking water facilities.

- **During the 1990-91 Gulf war,** retreating Iraqi forces sabotaged Kuwaiti desalination facilities. They also released millions of barrels of oil into the sea.

  - This massive slick threatened water intakes across the entire region. Kuwait was left largely without fresh water and required years to recover.

Source: IE

DIGITAL BLUEPRINT FOR EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

In News

- India has leveraged digital transformation to boost business growth, streamline regulations, enhance transparency, and improve Ease of Doing Business.

Business Registration & Regulatory Framework

- India's advanced digital infrastructure makes business registration easy, fostering an environment that promotes ease of entry.

- By harmonizing central platforms with state-led reforms, India provides entrepreneurs and businessmen with an efficient, transparent, and reliable gateway to growth.

India's High-Speed Business Entry Registration

| MCA21 Version 3 | SPICe+ Form | Udyam Registration Portal | Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP) and District Reforms |

Various Steps

- **Corporate Governance & Business Regulatory Systems:**
  - **MCA21 Project :** The Ministry of Corporate Affairs's MCA21 Project is an AI-driven platform enhancing transparency and Ease of Doing Business for company and LLP services since 2006.
    - Version 3 adds features like e-Scrutiny, e-adjudication, e-consultation, Compliance Management, MCA Lab, a cognitive chatbot, mobile apps, dashboards, improved UI/UX, and API-based data sharing.
  - **Business Reforms Action Plan (BRAP):** Implemented since 2015, BRAP was designed to compare regulatory requirements across States and encourage them to reduce compliance burdens and create a more business-friendly environment .
  - **SPICe+ Form:** SPICe+ Form, an integrated web form, offers 11 services by 3 Central Govt Ministries & Departments and 3 State Governments (Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal) and NCT – Delhi.
  - **National Single Window System (NSWS):** The NSWS is a digital platform which guides in identifying and applying for approvals according to the business requirements.
  - **PARIVESH 3.0:** Digital platform for environmental and forest clearances.
- **MSME & Entrepreneur Support Systems:**
  - **India's Udyam Registration Portal**: It has enabled over 7.71 crore MSME registrations and supported 33.97 crore jobs by offering a free, paperless, self-declaration system integrated with CBDT (Central Board of Direct Taxes) and GSTN (GST Network) databases for a fully digital experience.
  - **TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System):** TReDS is an electronic platform that facilitates financing / discounting of trade receivables of MSMEs through multiple financiers.
- **GeM (Government e-Marketplace):** GeM has grown into a digital procurement system connecting sellers and service providers across the country, including women entrepreneurs, startups, micro and small enterprises (MSEs), artisans, self-help groups (SHGs) and Divyangjans.

- **Trade Facilitation & Export Promotion Platforms:**
  - **ICEGATE (Indian Customs Electronic Gateway):** Interface for customs clearance and electronic filing.
  - **eCoO 2.0 (Enhanced Certificate of Origin):** Digital certificate system for exports.
  - **Trade Connect e-Platform:** Provides global trade information and services to exporters.
- **Logistics & Infrastructure Connectivity Platform:**
  - **PM GatiShakti National Master Plan:** Integrated infrastructure planning platform.
  - **National Logistics Portal (Marine):** Digital maritime logistics platform.
  - **Logistics Data Bank (LDB 2.0):** Real-time cargo and container tracking system.
- **Digital Taxation & Compliance Systems:**
  - GST Network (GSTN): IT backbone for GST administration.
  - E-Way Bill System: Electronic document for goods transportation.
- **Digital Commerce Ecosystem:**
  - **ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce):** ONDC is an initiative aiming at promoting open networks for all aspects of exchange of goods and services over digital or electronic networks.
  - **GeM:** Government procurement marketplace.

- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):**
  - UPI (Unified Payments Interface): Instant real-time digital payments.
  - cKYC Registry: Centralized KYC database for financial services.

Importance

- **Economic Growth Driver**: Simplifies regulatory processes, reducing bureaucratic delays and fostering entrepreneurship.
- **Transparency & Accountability:** Digital platforms minimize human intervention, curbing corruption and ensuring fair practices.
- **MSME Empowerment**: Udyam Portal supports small businesses with easier registration and access to schemes.
- **Global Competitiveness:** Aligns India's reforms with international standards, attracting foreign investment.

- **Citizen-Centric Governance:** Enhances trust in institutions by making compliance and transactions seamless.

Challenges

- Small businesses in rural areas may face limited access to technology or lack digital literacy.
- Reliable internet connectivity in remote areas remains a challenge.
- Integration across central and state agencies is complex.
- Many MSMEs and startups are still unaware of the digital services available, slowing adoption.
- With billions of digital transactions, robust safeguards against fraud and data breaches are critical.

Conclusion

- India's digital reforms have transformed the business environment by making approvals, registration, and trade processes efficient and transparent.
- Leveraging AI, automation, and robust digital infrastructure, these initiatives reduce costs, foster innovation, and simplify compliance, positioning India as a secure, investor-friendly, and globally competitive destination for enterprise growth.

Source :PIB

LIGO-INDIA: INDIA'S GRAVITATIONAL WAVE OBSERVATORY

Context

- The construction of the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO)-India in Hingoli district, Maharashtra has faced delays, as the Engineering, Procurement and Construction tender is yet to be awarded nearly a year after being floated.

About LIGO-India

- LIGO-India is a **major mega-science project aimed at detecting gravitational waves, ripples in spacetime,** predicted by **Albert Einstein** in his **Theory of General Relativity (1915).**
  - These waves are produced by phenomena such as **Black hole mergers, Neutron star collisions and Supernova explosions.**
- The project is part of the global LIGO network, working in coordination with facilities in the United States.

Key Features of LIGO-India Project

- LIGO uses **laser interferometry** to detect tiny distortions in spacetime caused by passing gravitational waves.
- Each interferometer has two arms measuring about **4 km in length,** arranged at **right angles in an "L" shape.**
  - These arms contain **ultra-high vacuum tubes** through which **laser beams travel and reflect off mirrors** placed at the ends.
- When **gravitational waves** pass through Earth, they cause extremely tiny changes in the length of the arms, which alter the interference pattern of the laser beams.
- By operating simultaneously, the interferometers act as **antennae that detect gravitational waves** produced by powerful cosmic events such as **black hole mergers and neutron star collisions.**

Significance of LIGO-India Project

- **New Window to the Universe:** Gravitational waves allow scientists to observe cosmic events invisible to traditional telescopes, such as Black hole mergers, Neutron star collisions and Supernova explosions.
- **Strengthening Global Scientific Collaboration:** LIGO-India will join the global gravitational wave detector network, improving signal accuracy and source localisation of cosmic events.
- **Boost to India's Scientific Capability:** It enhances India's role in frontier physics and astronomy. It also promotes high-precision engineering, lasers, vacuum systems, and data science.
- **Technological Spillovers:** The project will generate innovations in precision instrumentation, photonics, advanced materials, and big data analysis, which can benefit sectors such as defence, space research, and advanced manufacturing.

Challenges in LIGO-India Project

- **Technical Expertise:** The project requires highly specialised scientists, engineers, and technicians in fields such as photonics, precision instrumentation, and data science.
- **Environmental Sensitivity:** Gravitational wave detectors are extremely sensitive to seismic vibrations, human activity, and environmental disturbances.
- **Complex Engineering Requirements:** The project requires extremely high-precision

engineering to detect distortions smaller than a proton, making it technically challenging to maintain such accuracy across several kilometres of infrastructure.

Source: IE

═══ NEWS IN SHORT ═══

KIMBERLEY PROCESS CERTIFICATION SCHEME (KPCS)

In News

- India's chairmanship of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) offers a strategic opportunity to India to strengthen the global diamond governance.

Conflict Diamonds

- 'Conflict diamonds', also **known as blood diamonds**, are the rough diamonds mined and used by rebel movements or their allies to finance armed conflicts aimed at undermining legitimate governments.
- The term was **introduced in the 1990s** when international attention turned to the role of diamonds in financing violence in African countries like Angola, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia, etc.
- These diamonds entered the global market through **informal and illegal trade networks**, making it difficult to trace their origin.

Kimberley Process

- The Kimberley Process is a multilateral, voluntary certification mechanism aimed at preventing the trade of conflict diamonds.
- It represents over **99% of global rough diamond trade**.
- Every shipment of rough diamonds between participating countries must carry a **Kimberley Process Certificate**. The certificate guarantees that the diamonds are **conflict-free.**
- Trade with **non-participants is prohibited.**

India's Diamond Industry

- India is the world's largest cutting and polishing hub.

- It is a major importer of rough diamonds & top exporter of cut and polished diamonds ($13.3 billion in 2024–25).
- It is the second-largest diamond market after the United States.
- Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) is the nodal agency for implementing Kimberley Process Certificate. It works under the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Way Ahead

- India is reconsidering the definition of conflict diamonds, as it does not include diamonds linked to child labour, environmental harm, and human rights violations.
- The focus is also on strengthening transparency and traceability of rough diamonds across the global supply chain.

Source: IE

RBI CONDUCTS OMO PURCHASE TO INJECT LIQUIDITY AMID RUPEE PRESSURE

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conducted Open Market Operation (OMO) purchase auctions of Government Securities (G-Secs) worth 50,000 crore to inject liquidity into the banking system.

What are Open Market Operations (OMO)?

- Open Market Operations are **monetary policy tools** used by the RBI to **regulate liquidity in the banking system.**
- Under OMOs, the **RBI buys or sells Government Securities (G-Secs)** in the open market.
  - ◆ **OMO Purchase:** RBI buys government bonds from banks. This injects liquidity into the banking system.
  - ◆ **OMO Sale:** RBI sells government bonds to banks. This absorbs excess liquidity from the market.

What is Government Security (G-Sec)?

- It is a **tradable instrument** issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. Such securities are;
  - ◆ **Short term** (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year) or

> ◆ **Long term** (usually called Government bonds or dated securities with an original maturity of one year or more).
> - In India, the **Central Government issues both** treasury bills and bonds or dated securities while the **State Governments issue only bonds** or dated securities, which are called the State Development Loans (SDLs).
> - G-Secs carry practically no risk of default and, hence, are called **risk-free gilt-edged instruments.**

Source: **RBI**

WAR OF ATTRITION

Context

- As tensions between US, Israel and Iran continue, experts warn that this is becoming a **war of attrition.**

About

- The **war of attrition** is a military strategy where a warring side seeks to exhaust its **opponent's resources, personnel, and morale** until the capacity to fight collapses.
- The strategy involves a large amount of **equipment, soldiers, and supplies to maintain sustained pressure on the enemy.**
- The term attrition originates from the Latin word **attritionem,** meaning "a rubbing against".
  - ◆ In other words, the term attrition means **rubbing or wearing something away.**
- A major war of attrition was fought in West Asia between Egypt and Israel from 1969 to 1970 over control of the Sinai Peninsula, a large desert area between the two countries.
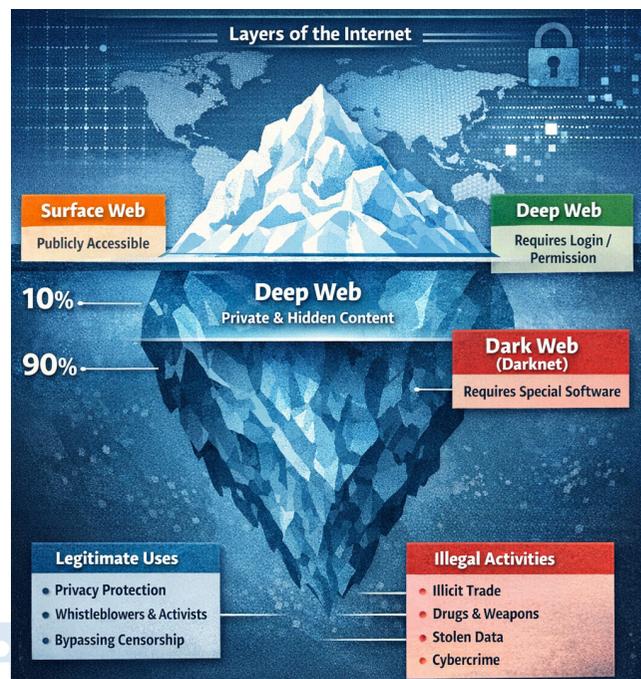
Source: IE

DARKNET

In News

- The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has busted the 'Team Kalki' darknet drug network operating nationwide since January 2025.

Darknet

- The darknet is a part of the internet that is intentionally hidden and cannot be accessed through standard web browsers or search engines.
- It requires specialized software (TOR), configurations, or authorization to access.

- Users remain anonymous, and their identities and locations are concealed through encryption. The darknet is a subset of the deep web.
- It is used for narcotics sale, exchange of pornographic content and other illegal activities.

Source :**TH**

WHITE PHOSPHOROUS

In News

- Human Rights Watch have now accused Israel of "unlawfully" using white phosphorus in Lebanon.

About White Phosphorous

- White phosphorus (WP) is a **highly reactive chemical substance** used mainly in military applications for smoke screens, illumination, and incendiary effects.
- It is a translucent yellowish-white waxy solid & **glows faintly in the dark** due to slow oxidation when exposed to oxygen.
- It is **stored under water or inert environments to prevent ignition**.
- White phosphorus is **extremely toxic and hazardous** as it causes deep chemical burns when it comes into contact with skin.
- It is **not explicitly banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention** but prohibited under International Humanitarian Law.

Source: TH

TERMINAL HIGH ALTITUDE AREA DEFENCE (THAAD)

Context

- Iran has reportedly struck a key radar associated with the **Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)** missile defence system used by the United States and Israel in West Asia.

About THAAD

- THAAD is an **advanced missile defence system** developed by the United States to counter short-medium-and limited intermediate-range ballistic missiles.
  - THAAD can engage ballistic missile threats at ranges of **around 150–200 km**.
- It intercepts missiles during the **terminal phase of their flight**, both **inside and outside the Earth's atmosphere**, providing a high-altitude defensive shield.
- The system uses **"hit-to-kill" technology**, in which interceptor missiles destroy targets through **direct kinetic impact rather than explosive warheads**, improving precision and reducing collateral damage.
- The **United Arab Emirates** became the first foreign buyer in **2011**, followed later by **Saudi Arabia**.

Do You Know?

- India has opted for the **S-400 Triumf air defence system** from **Russia** instead of acquiring THAAD from the United States.

Source: TH

EXERCISE LAMITIYE-2026

Context

- An Indian Armed Forces contingent has arrived at Seychelles to participate in the Eleventh edition of Joint Military Exercise LAMITIYE-2026.
  - Seychelles is an **archipelago in the western Indian Ocean**, comprising about 115 islands.

About

- 'LAMITIYE' meaning 'Friendship' in the **Creole language** is a biennial training event and has been conducted in Seychelles since **2001**.
- The exercise will enhance synergy in the domains of sub-conventional operations in a semi-urban environment and cooperation and interoperability between both sides during peacekeeping operations.

Source: AIR

FSI'S 'ANAVARAN' DEFORESTATION ALERT SYSTEM HALTED

Context

- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has reportedly halted the fortnightly alerts generated by its AI-based Anavaran–Deforestation Alert System, which monitored forest cover loss in near-real time.

What is the Anavaran–Deforestation Alert System?

- Anavaran is an **AI-enabled deforestation monitoring platform** developed by the **Forest Survey of India.**
- It **uses satellite imagery** and machine learning algorithms to detect forest cover loss and **send alerts to state forest departments** every 15 days.
- The system was **operational from 2024** as a pilot project to strengthen real-time forest monitoring.
- The Anavaran alert system is based on the **Google Earth Engine (GEE) platform,** and uses
  - **Sentinel-2** optical imagery (10–20 m spatial resolution).
  - **Sentinel-1** Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) for monitoring during cloud cover or monsoon.

Forest Survey of India (FSI)

- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) is the nodal national organisation responsible for **assessing and monitoring India's forest resources.**
- It operates under the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).**
- **Established** in 1981, and headquartered in **Dehradun**, it succeeded the **"Preinvestment Survey of Forest Resources" (PISFR).**
- It assesses and monitors forest and tree resources of the country and publishes the results in the **biennial India State of Forest Report.**

Source: IE

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