

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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VIRLI KHANDAR EXCAVATION

Context

- Archaeologists believe the findings at **Virli Khandar** could significantly contribute to understanding **megalithic cultures in the region** and their broader cultural practices.

key findings from the site

- The site has a unique burial pattern like it has stone circles and within them menhirs, making it a **composite megalithic structure (a combination of two burial types)**.
 - In contrast, nearby sites such as **Pimpalgaon Nipani and Tirota Kheri** feature primarily **dolmen burials**, making Virli Khandar distinct.



- Significant artifacts have been recovered from one of the burials, including **copper objects such as a necklace**, iron implements like axes, chisels, ladles and arrowheads, semi-precious stone beads, notably etched carnelian beads, and a gold earring.
- One of the most striking discoveries is a unique cluster of pottery, not previously reported in the Vidarbha region. In one burial, **nearly 50 pots were found arranged systematically**, with larger bowls covered by inverted bowls.



- The pots were carefully placed over a **layer of black cotton soil laid above the natural lateritic (murum) base**.
- The **largest surviving menhir**, the Grand Menhir Brisé or the Great Broken Menhir in Brittany, France, once stood at 20.6 m tall.

What are Menhirs?

- A menhir is a **standing or an upright stone**, which is usually tapered at the top. It is man-made, in that it is sculpted and placed by humans, and usually quite large.
- Menhirs can **either be found alone, or as a part of a larger complex of prehistoric megaliths**, simply, large stone structures. While the exact purpose of many megalithic sites is debated, they likely served ceremonial functions.
- The Mudumal Megalithic Menhirs in **Telangana's Narayanpet district, dating back approximately 3,500 to 4,000 years**, have been added to a tentative list of **UNESCO World Heritage Sites from India**.

Iron Age Megalithic Culture in India (c. 1200 BCE – 300 CE)

- It represents a significant archaeological phase in India marked by the **use of iron technology** and **distinctive burial practices** involving **large stones (megaliths)**.
- It is found across **Peninsular India**, especially Deccan Plateau, South India (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh), Vidarbha (Maharashtra); and Eastern India (Odisha).

Types of Megalithic Burials

- Sepulchral (Burial) Monuments:** Stone circles; Dolmens (table-like structures); Cists (stone-lined graves); Menhirs (upright stones); and Cairn circles (heap of stones)
- Non-Sepulchral / Memorial:** Cenotaphs (symbolic burials without bodies).

Key Features of Megalithic Culture

- Iron Technology:** Extensive use of **iron tools and weapons** like axes, spearheads, arrowheads.
 - It marks the transition from **Bronze Age to Iron Age**.
- Pottery: Black-and-red ware (BRW)** is characteristic, often found in burials with grave goods.
- Grave Goods:** Objects buried with dead are iron tools, copper ornaments, beads, reflecting **status differentiation, and belief in afterlife**.
- Skeletal Remains:** Extended or secondary burials; sometimes absent due to preservation issues.

Source: IE

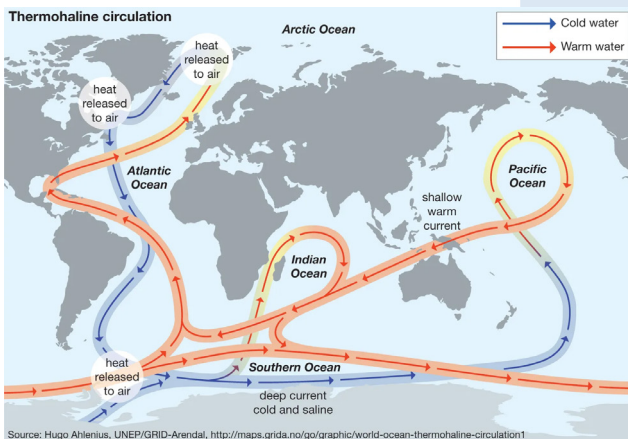
ATLANTIC MERIDIONAL OVERTURNING CIRCULATION (AMOC)

In News

- Recent research indicates that the **Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is at its weakest** in 1,600 years and is more likely to experience a severe shutdown or collapse than previously estimated.

Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC)

- It is a **large ocean current system** in the Atlantic that moves warm water northward and cold, dense water southward in a continuous cycle.
- It is a **major part of the global ocean conveyor belt** that distributes heat and nutrients across the world's oceans.
- It transports warm surface water from the tropics to the Northern Hemisphere, where it cools and sinks, before flowing back southward as a deep current.
 - From the South Atlantic, this water spreads into other oceans through the Antarctic Circumpolar Current.



Reasons for Weakening

- Global Warming:** Rising temperatures reduce density contrasts, slowing down sinking currents.
- Freshwater Inflows:** Melting of Greenland ice sheet and increased rainfall dilute salinity, weakening deep-water formation.
- Natural Variability vs Human Impact:** Studies show weakening since the 1980s, with pauses due to natural oscillations, but anthropogenic drivers dominate long-term decline.
- Deep Ocean Changes:** Antarctic Bottom Water inflows have reduced by ~12% (2000–2020), warming the deep Atlantic and raising sea levels.

Impacts of Weakening

- Regional Climate:** North America & Europe: Colder winters, disrupted rainfall.
 - Africa & South Asia: Monsoon weakening, drought risks.
- Sea-Level Rise:** Slower circulation raises sea levels along the U.S. East Coast and globally.
- Marine Ecosystems:** Alters nutrient flows, threatening fisheries.
- Carbon Cycle:** Reduced carbon uptake by oceans, worsening atmospheric CO levels.
- Extreme Events:** Greater risk of hurricanes and heatwaves due to altered ocean-atmosphere dynamics.

Suggestions

- The AMOC is a key part of Earth's climate system that regulates temperature, rainfall, and ocean health.
- Evidence shows it is weakening due to global warming and freshwater inflow, raising concerns about a possible collapse with severe global climate impacts.
- Hence, urgent emission reduction, better monitoring, and international cooperation are needed to avoid a climate tipping point.

Source :TH

DELHI'S TOD POLICY

Context

- The Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs announced a **new transit-oriented development (TOD) policy for Delhi**.

About

- TOD projects typically combine **residential, commercial and recreational spaces within walkable distances of transit hubs**.
- The push is part of a broader strategy to **promote integrated urban development along mass transit networks**, including the Delhi Metro and Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridors.
- Benefits of TOD:**
 - Higher quality of life with better places to live, work, and play.
 - Greater mobility with ease of moving around.
 - Reduced traffic congestion, car accidents and injuries.

- ◆ Reduced household spending on transportation, resulting in more affordable housing.
- ◆ Healthier lifestyle with more walking, and less stress.
- ◆ Increased foot traffic and customers for area businesses.
- ◆ Reduced dependence on foreign oil, reduced pollution and environmental damage.

Major Features of Delhi's TOD Policy

- **Aim:** Creating large-scale, planned affordable housing projects for lower- and middle-income groups in Delhi.
- **Areas Included:** The policy opens up areas within 500 metres of metro lines, as well as near Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridors and railway stations, for development.
 - ◆ A total of 207 sq km in Delhi has been identified for TOD. Of this, around 80 sq km, including areas identified for land pooling, low-density residential zones, and unauthorised colonies.
- **Planning:** 65% of the permissible built-up area in TOD zones must be used for housing, with unit sizes largely capped at around 100 sq m to keep them within reach.
 - ◆ The remaining 35% can be used for commercial activity, offices and other amenities, allowing the development of mixed-use neighbourhoods.
 - ◆ The policy also encourages walkability, with provisions for pedestrian links connecting housing clusters to nearby transit stations.
 - ◆ The revised norms reduce minimum plot size significantly and increase permissible Floor Area Ratio (FAR), enabling **denser construction**.
- **Shift in Policy Framework:** The most important reform is the shift in the policy's approach, from being **node-based to corridor-based**.
 - ◆ Switching to the corridor logic and reducing the minimum plot size from one hectare to 2,000 square metres means **more landowners, more plots, and more locations now qualify for inclusion**.
- **Single Window Clearance:** The single-window clearance and unified TOD charge are introduced as the earlier policy's insistence on Influence Zone Plans for approval was a **procedural bottleneck**.
- The policy mandates a **60% share for affordable housing**.

Gaps in Policy:

- **Uniform Application of FAR:** The policy fixes the floor area ratio (FAR) mix and applies this formula uniformly across 207 square kilometres.
 - ◆ There is no clarity on whether this particular mix is what these corridors actually need at the level of individual stations or neighbourhoods.
 - ◆ A more apt approach would **set a minimum residential obligation** and allow the **remaining mix to be determined** through local planning for each station catchment.
- **Design:** TOD essentially focuses on a **walking-friendly commuter district**, but the policy says project proponents "**may, at their option, provide a pedestrian walkway**" connecting the site to the transit station.
 - ◆ TOD neighbourhoods need to be cooler, greener, and more pleasant, to encourage people to choose walking over driving.
- The policy is **meticulous about FAR, charge structures, and approval timelines**, but almost silent on the **quality of the streets, the comfort of the pedestrians/commuters, and the liveability of the neighbourhoods**.

Conclusion

- It marks a progressive step towards creating compact, efficient, and sustainable urban spaces aligned with modern mobility needs.
- By integrating land use with mass transit corridors like the Delhi Metro and Regional Rapid Transit System, the policy has the potential to enhance accessibility, reduce congestion, and improve overall quality of life.
- However, its success will depend on moving beyond regulatory ease and density targets to prioritizing context-specific planning, pedestrian-friendly design, and liveability.

Source: HT

"MOVING TOWARDS EFFECTIVE CITY GOVERNMENT – A FRAMEWORK FOR MILLION-PLUS CITIES" REPORT

Context

- The Union Minister of Housing & Urban Affairs, released the report "**Moving Towards Effective City Government – A Framework for Million-plus Cities**" by NITI Aayog.

About

- India's urbanisation is central to achieving the **vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047** and progressing towards a **\$30 trillion economy**.
 - Cities are central** to driving economic growth, fostering innovation, and generating employment.
- The report identifies **persistent governance issues**, including weak and fragmented leadership structures, constrained fiscal capacity, and capacity gaps that **limit service delivery and urban performance**.
- It calls for a **shift towards empowered city governments** through a clear realignment of authority, responsibility, and resources at the city level.

Key recommendations of the report include:

- Strengthening city leadership** through the introduction of a **directly elected Mayor** with a fixed tenure, supported by an empowered Mayor-in-Council system to ensure continuity, clarity, and accountability in decision-making.
- Integrating urban service delivery** by bringing key functions such as water supply, sanitation, and public transport under the **purview of city governments** to improve coordination and accountability.
- Enhancing municipal finances** by strengthening own-source revenues, ensuring more predictable and timely fiscal transfers through robust State Finance Commissions, and enabling access to market-based financing mechanisms such as municipal bonds.
- Undertaking institutional restructuring** by bringing multiple parastatal agencies involved in service delivery under city government oversight, with clearly defined roles and stronger coordination frameworks.
- For effective implementation**, the report recommends that states amend their **Municipal Acts** to reflect these governance reforms.
 - It also calls on the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to update the **Model Municipal Law** and provide guidance and **incentives to support reform adoption**.

Conclusion

- The report offers a comprehensive roadmap for strengthening urban governance in India, recognising that the country's next phase of growth will be driven by economically vibrant, well-governed, and liveable cities.

- Strengthening city governments is not only an administrative priority but a strategic imperative for achieving national development goals.

Source: PIB

NEWS IN SHORT

US SANCTION WAIVER EXPIRES ON CHAHBAHAR PORT

Context

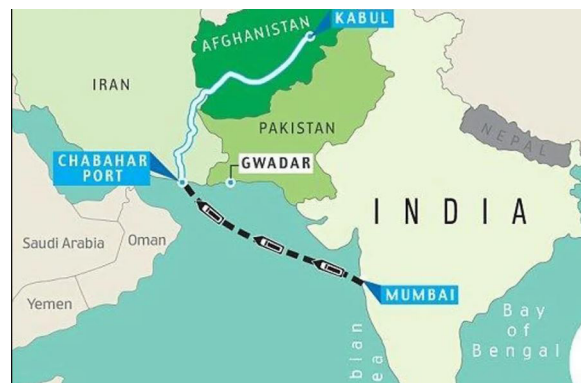
- As US sanctions waiver expires, India is recalibrating its strategy at **Iran's Chabahar port**, weighing options that could include a temporary exit without abandoning its long-term ambitions.

Background

- India and Iran signed an MoU in 2015** to jointly develop the **Shahid Beheshti Port at Chabahar**.
- Aim:** To develop a major commercial hub helping India access the markets of Afghanistan, the Central Asian states, and Russia.
- Sanctions:** The port's prospects came under a cloud due to Western sanctions against Iran but in 2018, the US administration gave a waiver to Indian operations.

Chabahar Port

- Iran's Chabahar port is located on the **Gulf of Oman** and is the **only oceanic port of the country**.
- It is situated in the **city of Chabahar in Sistan and Baluchestan Province**.
- The port gives access to the **energy-rich Persian Gulf nations'** southern coast and bypasses Pakistan.
- Kandla port in Gujarat** is the closest port at 550 nautical miles, while the distance between Chabahar and Mumbai is 786 nautical miles.



Significance of Chabahar Port for India

- **Geopolitical Significance:** It is strategically located at the **crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East**. It provides India with direct sea access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.
 - ♦ The port also offers an **alternative route from the Strait of Hormuz** for cargo traffic between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. This diversification strengthens India's strategic position in the region.
- **Gateway to INSTC:** Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- **Countering China:** Chabahar port is beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port.
- **Trade Benefit:** With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India.
 - ♦ The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline.

Source: TH

SAHYOG PORTAL

Context

- India has joined a limited group of nations where platforms like Meta (Facebook and Instagram) automatically restrict flagged online content at scale.

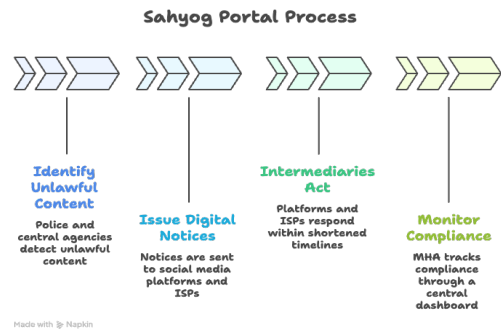
What is the Sahyog Portal?

- It is a **centralized digital interface launched in 2024** by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and operated by the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)**.
- The Portal serves as a single-window platform for authorized law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to issue speedy, coordinated notices for the removal or blocking of unlawful online content.
- Originally, it was conceived as an emergency tool during the pandemic. Later, it was repurposed in late 2024 into a primary mechanism for content regulation.

Legal Basis

- **Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000:** The portal operates under this provision, which dictates that an intermediary loses its **"safe harbour"** (immunity

from user-generated content liability) if it fails to **"expeditiously"** remove unlawful information upon being notified by the government.



- **Section 69A vs. Section 79:** While Section 69A provides a formal blocking process with procedural safeguards (like written reasons), the government utilizes Section 79(3)(b) through Sahyog as a faster, parallel route for content takedowns.

Source: TH

PROJECT AI4WATERPOLICY

Context

- **Project AI4WaterPolicy** helped community-led development in **Rajasthan**.

About

- The AI4WaterPolicy pilot project was designed in the **water-stressed Sirohi and Pali districts of Rajasthan**.
- Working with a field partner, an **AI model conducted 352 interviews across 50 villages in six months**.
 - ♦ AI enabled real-time thematic analysis revealed **issues like** gender burden, funding delays, and lack of awareness of Panchayat processes.
- **Significance:** Insights led to **mid-course policy correction** (training redesign, govt interface), improving community engagement and demonstrating that AI can enable participatory, responsive governance rather than just automate services.
 - ♦ The approach strengthened and complemented existing government efforts by enhancing feedback loops and improving last-mile responsiveness.

Source: TH

SMALL HYDRO POWER DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

In News

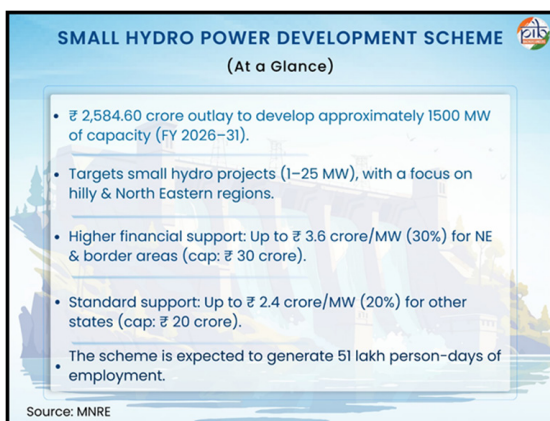
- Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the **Small Hydro Power (SHP) Development Scheme**.

Did You Know?

- Hydropower is a well-established renewable energy source that uses flowing water to generate electricity.
- In India, the primary distinction between large and small hydropower projects lies in their installed capacity and the respective ministerial jurisdiction.
 - Small Hydropower Projects (SHP)** are defined as those with an installed **capacity of up to 25 MW** and are administered by the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**.
 - Large hydropower projects**, with capacity **exceeding 25 MW**, fall under the purview of the **Ministry of Power**.

Small Hydro Power Development Scheme

- It promotes small hydropower as a long-lasting, eco-friendly energy source with minimal environmental impact.
- It aims to support inclusive growth by generating jobs, encouraging local investment, and strengthening regional economies, contributing to India's self-reliant energy future
- It will support small hydro projects (between 1-25 MW capacity) to come up in different states.
- The scheme targets developing about 1,500 MW of small hydropower capacity, especially in hilly and North Eastern regions with untapped potential and limited energy access.

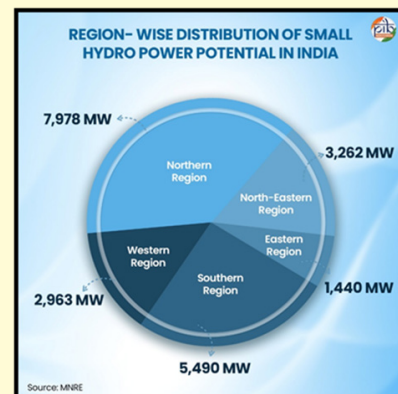
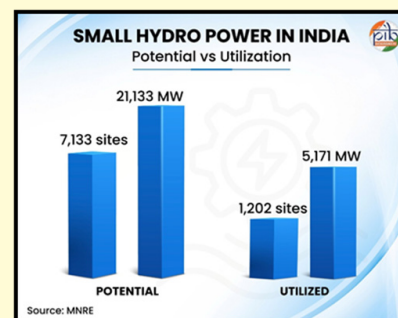


Importance

- Small hydropower (SHP) is an important source of clean, decentralised energy in India, especially suitable for remote and hilly regions.
- It generates electricity close to where it is used, reducing transmission losses and improving reliability.
- It is a clean and cost-effective energy option with no fuel use or emissions, and it supports rural development by improving electricity access and boosting local economies.

Small Hydro Power Potential and Prospects in India

- Small hydropower (SHP) is an important part of India's clean energy transition, especially useful in remote and hilly areas where it supports decentralised power, better energy access, and local development.
- India has a total SHP potential of 21,133 MW across 7,133 sites, of which about 5,171 MW (24.5%) has already been developed, leaving a large untapped capacity. This potential is spread across regions: North (38%) and North-East (15%) have major untapped resources, while the South (26%) and West (14%) have better infrastructure for faster development, and the East (7%) has scope in rural and tribal areas.



Source :PIB

NILGIRI TAHR SURVEY

In News

- Recently, The Tamil Nadu Forest Department has commenced the third synchronised survey of the **Nilgiri Tahr (TN's State Animal)** under the flagship **Project Nilgiri Tahr**.

Nilgiri Tahr

- It is the only mountain ungulate in southern India among the country's 12 such species and is the state animal of Tamil Nadu.
- Historical linkages** : There are multiple references to Nilgiri Tahr in the Sangam Tamil literature.
 - Two epics — Silappathikaram and Sivakasindamani — mention descriptions of the Nilgiri Tahr and its habitat.
- Habitat and Distribution**: The Nilgiri tahr is found at high elevations on cliffs, grass-covered hills, and open terrain.
 - Nilgiri Tahr is now largely confined to isolated patches of suitable habitat in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
 - The Eravikulam National Park in Anamalai hills, Kerala, is home to the largest population of the Nilgiri tahr
- Threats** : Its numbers have declined significantly due to habitat loss and hunting.
- Protection status** : It is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List and is protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Steps** :
 - Project Nilgiri Tahr** was launched in 2023 and focuses on comprehensive conservation strategies, including habitat management, population monitoring, and the use of advanced scientific methods with support from global experts.

Source:TH

SKYROOT'S VIKRAM-1

Context

- Skyroot Aerospace has dispatched its first orbital rocket, Vikram-1, to the Satish Dhawan Space Centre for final integration and launch preparations, marking a key step toward India's first private orbital launch.

About Vikram-1 Launcher

- Vikram-1** is a **multi-stage launch vehicle** using both solid and liquid fuel-based propulsion systems.
- It is designed to launch **satellites up to 350 kg** into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)**.
 - LEO lies between **160–2,000 km** above Earth and has seen a surge in satellite launches in recent years, with many being the Starlink communication satellites.
- The rocket is made of carbon composite instead of metals, and houses a 3D-printed indigenously made engine making its manufacturing and assembly easier, quicker and cheaper.
- The launch vehicle has been named to honour **Dr Vikram Sarabhai**, considered to be the father of the Indian space programme, and its propulsion systems honour several other scientific greats — the solid propulsion system is called Kalam, the liquid Raman, and the cryogenic Dhawan.

Do you know?

- Skyroot, founded by Pawan Chandana and Bharath Dhaka, was also the first private company to carry out a **single-stage sub-orbital flight** in 2022, followed by another company, Agnikul.
- A sub-orbital flight is launched at a **slower speed than the orbital velocity**, so it reaches outer space but cannot get into an orbit around Earth.

Source: IE

ASHOK KUMAR LAHIRI APPOINTED NITI AAYOG VICE CHAIRPERSON

Context

- The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has reconstituted NITI Aayog, appointing noted economist **Ashok Lahiri as Vice-Chairperson** and replacing four of its five full-time members.

About NITI Aayog

- Established**: NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog is a government think tank established in **2015**.
- Aim**: It replaced the Planning Commission, aiming to focus on more **contemporary challenges like sustainable development, policy innovation, and governance reforms**.
- Composition**: It is led by the Prime Minister as the Chairperson, with the Vice-Chairperson and CEO leading the executive functions.

- **Governing Council:** The Prime Minister of India,
 - ♦ It comprises the Chief Ministers of states and Union Territories,
 - ♦ The Lieutenant Governors of Union Territories, except Delhi and Puducherry,
 - ♦ The Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog,
 - ♦ Full-time members of NITI Aayog.

The key differences between the Planning Commission and NITI Aayog are:

Aspect	Planning Commission	NITI Aayog
Purpose	Centralized five-year planning and resource allocation.	Focus on cooperative federalism, long-term development, and policy research.
Structure	Led by the Prime Minister with a Deputy Chairman and full-time members.	Led by the Prime Minister with a Vice-Chairperson, CEO, and Governing Council.
Approach	Top-down, centralized planning.	Bottom-up, encouraging state participation and cooperation.
Role in Governance	Executive authority over policy implementation.	Advisory body, without direct enforcement power.
Five-Year Plans	Formulated and implemented Five-Year Plans.	Does not formulate Five-Year Plans, focuses on long-term policy.

Source: PIB

B'NEI MENASHE

In News

- About 250 members of the **B'nei Menashe community from Manipur and Mizoram** arrived in Tel Aviv, claiming descent from one of the **Ten Lost Tribes of Israel**.

B'nei Menashe

- The **B'nei Menashe** belong to the Mizo and Kuki tribal communities across Manipur and Mizoram.
- The B'nei Menashe believe they descend from the **biblical tribe of Tribe of Manasseh**, which is said in Jewish tradition to have been **exiled after the Assyrian conquest of Israel** around 722 BCE.
 - ♦ Their migration story traces a long journey through **Persia and Afghanistan to Northeast India**, though historical proof is uncertain.
- Their belief developed through a mix of 19th–20th century Christian missionary influence, local revival movements, and later contact with Jewish organisations such as Amishav, which encouraged identification with ancient Israel.
- From the 1980s, **many adopted Judaism**, migrated to Israel in small groups, and were later partially recognised by Israeli religious authorities, though scientific evidence remains inconclusive and their status has been debated.
- Today, thousands have moved to Israel with government support, though some face social discrimination there.
 - ♦ Other similar claims of “lost tribe” descent exist in India and nearby regions, including the B'nei Ephraim and some Pashtun groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Source :IE

RIGHT TO SAFE TRAVEL ON NATIONAL HIGHWAYS

Context

- The Supreme Court of India has held that the right to safe travel on National Highways (NHs) is part of the right to life under Article 21.

Constitutional Interpretation

- The Court clarified that Article 21 imposes a positive obligation on the State to ensure a safe environment for commuters.
- Deaths caused by avoidable hazards such as **illegal parking, potholes, or unsafe infrastructure** amount to a failure of this duty.

Key Directions by the Court

- The Court imposed an immediate ban on construction or operation of new dhabas, eateries, or commercial structures within the right-of-way of NHs.

- It **prohibited parking or stopping of heavy and commercial vehicles on highways**, carriageways, or paved shoulders, except at designated lay-bys or wayside amenities, to prevent accidents in blind spots.
- **District Magistrates** have been directed **to remove or demolish all unauthorised structures** within 60 days.
- No authority can grant licenses or approvals within highway safety zones without prior clearance from NHAI or PWD.
- A **District Highway Safety Task Force** must be established in every district to monitor and enforce safety norms.

Significance

- The ruling expands Article 21 to include road safety, making the State accountable for preventing avoidable highway deaths.

Source: TH