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LADAKH TO GET AUTONOMOUS HILL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS (AHDCs) IN ALL SEVEN DISTRICTS

Context

- The Ladakh Administration has decided to constitute Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs) in all seven districts following an in-principle agreement between the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Ladakh leaders to extend constitutional safeguards under Article 371 to the Union Territory.

Background

- Ladakh became a **Union Territory in 2019** without a Legislative Assembly.
- It currently has seven districts after the creation of five new districts: **Leh, Kargil, Sham, Nubra, Zaskar, Drass, Changthang.**
- Until now, elected Autonomous Hill Development Councils existed only in **Leh and Kargil.**

About Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs)

- AHDCs are elected **local self-government institutions** established to ensure decentralized administration in the geographically remote and strategically important region of Ladakh.
- The councils function under the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act.**
 - Section 3(1) of the LAHDC Act** provides for the constitution of a council in every district through a government notification published in the Official Gazette.
- The new councils would enjoy the powers** including authority over land ownership and allotment, recruitment and promotion of district cadre employees, preparation of district development plans, and the administration of sectors such as health, education, tourism, local infrastructure and social welfare.
- Each council would also have a dedicated Council Fund and the authority to levy taxes, fees and other charges in accordance with the law.

Difference Between AHDCs and Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils

Autonomous Hill Development Councils	Sixth Schedule Autonomous District Councils
Created through an Act of Parliament/UT law	Constitutional status under Articles 244(2) & 275(1)
Applicable only in Ladakh	Applicable in notified tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura
Primarily exercise administrative and developmental functions	Exercise legislative, judicial, executive and financial powers
No judicial authority	Can establish village courts to resolve local disputes using traditional tribal laws.

Article 371 and Special Constitutional Safeguards

- Article 371** of the Constitution provides special safeguards and autonomy to certain states and regions to protect indigenous culture, tribal identity, customary laws, land ownership, local employment and administrative autonomy.
- Part XXI** of the Constitution contains these special provisions, with clauses ranging from Articles **371A to 371J.**

Significance

- Border Area Governance:** Many districts are strategically located along the borders of India with **China (Tibet Autonomous Region) and Pakistan held regions.**
 - Better local government would help improve border infrastructure, service delivery and administration in strategically important areas.
- Region specific Planning:** There are different ecological regions in Ladakh like; frigid deserts, high altitude pastoral pastures, glacier fed river valleys, border villages etc.
 - District level planning helps to base policies on local geographical facts.
- Grassroots Governance:** The decision making power would go to the local community enabling better identification of development priorities and faster execution of government projects.

Challenges

- **Demands for Constitutional Safeguards:** The proposal does not completely address demands for Sixth Schedule status, statehood, and a Legislative Assembly, which continue to be raised by sections of Ladakh's population.
- **Overlapping Institutional Jurisdiction:** The proposed Union Territory-level elected body, Autonomous Hill Development Councils (AHDCs), and Panchayati Raj Institutions may have overlapping functions unless their respective powers are clearly defined.

Source: HT, IE

INDIA-UK TRADE DEAL

Context

- The **India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** and the **Double Contribution Convention (DCC)** entered into force on 15 July 2026.

About India-UK CETA

- It is a landmark **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** between India and the United Kingdom covering goods, services, digital trade, government procurement, labour, environment, innovation, SMEs and regulatory cooperation.
 - ♦ It is different from traditional FTAs, which mainly focus on tariff reduction.
- It aims to promote bilateral trade, investment and economic cooperation through the lowering of trade barriers and better market access for goods and services.

Why is India-UK CETA important?

- This agreement seeks to enhance bilateral trade and investment, improve market access for businesses, increase services exports, strengthen supply chain resilience, reduce non-tariff barriers, and increase labour mobility through the **Double Contribution Convention (DCC)**.
- It is expected to deepen the **India-UK strategic partnership** under the umbrella of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- It is **complementary** to India's recent trade pacts with partners including **UAE, Australia and EFTA nations**, and reflects a shift towards comprehensive next-generation FTAs.
- It is in line with India's aim to conclude high quality trade agreements with major economies and also support the vision of **Viksit Bharat 2047**.

Trade Benefits to India

- **Better Access to Markets for Goods:** The UK will immediately scrap tariffs on 96.8% of tariff lines, which account for 97.7% of India's export value.
 - ♦ The quota-based tariff concessions will be extended to an additional 2% of tariff lines, representing 1.8% of trade value.
 - ♦ **Overall, 98.8% of tariff lines and 99.5% of India's trade value** will enjoy preferential access to the UK market.
- **Major Beneficiary Sectors:** Textiles and garments; leather products; gems and jewellery; engineering goods; marine products; chemicals; agricultural products; and processed food.
 - ♦ It is expected to improve India's export competitiveness in one of its largest developed markets.
- **Reduction in Non-Tariff Barriers:** The agreement contains dedicated chapters on **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures**; and **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)**.
 - ♦ These provisions are intended to ensure that regulatory standards are transparent, science-based, and do not become unnecessary barriers to trade.
- **Boosting India's Service Sector:** The UK has improved access to markets under CETA in areas like computer and IT enabled services, consultancy and environmental services.
 - ♦ Indian companies can establish branch offices, subsidiaries and representative offices in the UK to help them establish long-term commercial presence.

Double Contribution Convention (DCC)

- **Earlier**, Indian professionals working temporarily in the UK had to contribute to India's social security system, and UK's National Insurance (social security).
 - ♦ However, most Indian professionals remain in the UK for **less than five years**, whereas UK social security benefits generally require around **10 years of contributions**.
 - ♦ It resulted in double payments without corresponding benefits.
- Now Indian workers and their employers **will not have to pay UK social security contributions for up to five years**, as long as they continue to pay into the social security system in India.

- **Expected Benefits:**

- ♦ Around 90% of Indian professionals in UK to benefit
- ♦ Approximately **75,000 Indian workers**.
- ♦ More than **900 employers**.
- ♦ Savings of nearly **23% of salary** that would otherwise go towards UK social security contributions.
- The DCC reduces the cost of overseas employment significantly and improves the competitiveness of Indian service providers.

What Does the UK Gain?

- **Better Access to the Indian market:** India will immediately remove tariffs on 30.3% of the value of trade, phase out tariffs on another 47% and provide quota-based tariff concessions on 12.1%.
 - ♦ Overall, 89.5% of tariff lines and 89.4% of trade value will benefit from preferential treatment.
- **Consumer Benefits:** In India, products likely to be cheaper include scotch whisky, premium British cars, engineering products and industrial machinery.
- **Services Liberalisation:** India has opened selected service sectors to UK firms, including accounting, auditing, financial services, telecommunications and environmental services.
 - ♦ Subject to the commitments in the agreement, eligible companies from the UK can provide services without the need to establish a commercial presence in India.
- India has agreed to facilitate recognition of certain UK professional qualifications in areas such as law and accounting through applicable regulatory processes.

Unique Features of the Agreement

- **Automobile Tariff Liberalisation:** For the first time in an Indian FTA, automobile imports receive tariff concessions.
 - ♦ During the first year, **20,000 completely built units (CBUs)** from the U.K. can be imported under concessional tariffs.
 - ♦ Tariffs reduce from the normal **66–110%** to approximately **30–50%**, depending on vehicle category.
 - ♦ Over time, quota increases to **37,000 vehicles by Year 5**, tariff falls to **10% by Year 5**, and separate quotas exist for electric/alternative fuel vehicles and commercial vehicles.

- ♦ India has protected domestic industry through the use of **tariff-rate quotas (TRQs)** rather than through the total elimination of tariffs.

- **Government Procurement:**

- ♦ **Access for UK Companies:** UK companies eligible to participate in Central Government procurement as Class-II local suppliers under India's procurement rules;
- ♦ **Access to Indian Firms:** The UK's relevant procurement markets of the UK Central Government for Indian suppliers is worth **around £90 billion (US\$ 122 billion approx.)** and India's reciprocal opportunities are estimated to be in the region of **US\$ 114 billion**.
- ♦ Sensitive sectors like **Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)**, State Governments and local bodies are excluded.

Key Challenges Ahead

- **Concerns of the Domestic Industry:** UK imports could mean more competition for sectors such as cars and alcoholic drinks.
- **Effective Implementation:** It will be essential to the smooth implementation of tariff concessions, customs procedures and regulatory commitments.
- **Non Tariff Barriers:** Differences in standards, SPS and TBT regulations may still impact market access even after the agreement.
- **MSME Readiness:** Small and medium enterprises need support in meeting UK quality standards and leveraging FTA advantages.
- **Recognition of Services and Skills:** Timely recognition of professional qualifications and facilitated mobility of skilled professionals continues to be important.
- **Risk of trade deficit:** India will have to ensure that higher imports are matched by higher exports to gain maximum benefits from the agreement.
- **Awareness and Utilisation:** Exporters in particular and businesses in general need to be more aware of CETA provisions to be able to claim preferential benefits effectively.

Strengthening Measures

- **Boost Export Competitiveness:** Improve product quality, innovation and compliance with UK standards to maximise market access.
- **Support MSMEs:** Provide financial assistance, technology upgradation and awareness programmes to enable MSMEs to take advantage of CETA opportunities.

- **Improve Trade Facilitation:** Reduce trade transaction costs through streamlined customs procedures, promotion of digital trade, and effective implementation of FTA provisions.
- **Diversify Exports:** Promote value added exports in the areas of pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, electronics, textiles and services.
- **Skills Development:** Training professionals to world standards and enabling mutual recognition of qualifications.
- **Monitor Sensitive Sectors:** Periodically assess the effect on domestic industries, and apply safeguard measures when allowed under the agreement.
- **Promote Investment and Innovation:** Call for bilateral investment, technology transfer and joint R&D to deepen long-term economic cooperation.

Source: TH

DRAFT NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH POLICY 2026

In News

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has released a **draft National Health Research Policy 2026**.

Background

- India's research and development (R&D) ecosystem is witnessing rapid transformation, fuelled by a **strong national focus on innovation-led growth**.
- The Government has placed **R&D at the heart of its journey towards Viksit Bharat@2047**.
- But India's Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) remains **below 0.7% of GDP**, far behind countries such as the United States, China, and South Korea.

Draft National Health Research Policy (NHRP), 2026

- It seeks to align the country's scientific research more closely with its disease burden and public health priorities.
- It replaces the National Health Research Policy, 2011 and provides a road map for research planning, funding, governance and innovation up to 2047.
- It is prepared by the Department of Health Research and is the first attempt at a unified national framework spanning biomedical science, clinical medicine, public health, epidemiology, digital health, health systems, behavioural sciences and emerging technologies.

Key Features

- **Governance mechanism:** The Draft National Health Research Policy, 2026 proposes a three-tier governance mechanism to strengthen health research coordination and implementation.
 - ♦ The **National Health Research Stewardship Committee** will provide strategic oversight and policy coordination and the Department of Health Research (DHR) will be the nodal agency for implementation and monitoring.
 - ♦ Scientific and Technical guidance will be provided by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).
 - ♦ States will also be instrumental in mainstreaming health research into local health programmes and service delivery according to regional health priorities.
- **Health research framework:** It seeks to establish India's first comprehensive health research framework that aligns scientific research with the country's disease burden, public health needs and national priorities.
 - ♦ It seeks to promote indigenous innovation, evidence-based policy making and measurable improvements in health outcomes.
 - ♦ It provides a consolidated framework on biomedical and clinical research, public health, epidemiology, digital health, health systems, behavioural sciences and emerging technologies within a national strategy.
- **More public investment in health research:** Government spending on health research will increase from its current level of 0.024% of GDP to 0.072% in 2037 & 0.15% in 2047 (approximately six-times today's level).
 - ♦ This, although substantial, is still below the average of 0.27% of GDP spent by high income countries as reported by the WHO.
- **Research Topics:** It gives priority to research on India's major health challenges including Tuberculosis (TB), Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), vector borne diseases, cancer, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), mental health, anaemia, childhood malnutrition, women's health, maternal and infant mortality and strengthening of general healthcare and emergency care systems.
 - ♦ Its role is to ensure that research is aligned with the disease burden and the public health priorities of the country.

- **Transition from Quantity to Impact-Oriented Research:** It proposes a shift from measuring research outcomes by academic outputs such as number of publications, grants and completed studies to measure real-world impact.
 - ♦ Researchers will be assessed on their contributions to public health policy, clinical guidelines, indigenous innovations, capacity building, health system strengthening and improvements in health outcomes.
- **National Health Research Agenda:** It proposes the development of a National Health Research Agenda to determine priority research areas based on the disease burden, emerging health threats, health system needs, and national development priorities.
 - ♦ It will guide decisions on research funding and will be revised periodically to address changing public health challenges.
- **Adoption of ICMR- IRIS Framework:** It calls for wider use of the ICMR Impact of Research and Innovation Scale (ICMR-IRIS), which was launched in 2025, to assess research based on its impact on policy, clinical use, innovation, public health and societal benefits, and not just publications.
- **Improving Research Governance:** It aims to strengthen research governance by expediting ethics approvals for multi-centre studies, creating a National Research Integrity Office (NRIO) to foster ethical research and deter misconduct.
 - ♦ It aims at promoting the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in health research, and encouraging the shared use of laboratories, biobanks and publicly funded research infrastructure.
- **Expanded role of states and the private sector :** It aims to decentralise health research by building capacity in medical colleges, increasing the participation of industry, philanthropy organisations, private hospitals and start-ups.
 - ♦ It will incentivise states to formulate research agenda based on local health needs and encourage higher investment through CSR initiatives.
- It will Improve coordination among research organisations and Make sure that policy decisions are based on evidence.
- It will broaden the research horizon beyond the leading players. And Foster community engagement, accountability and scientific integrity.

Challenges Identified

- India has built up **strong health research capabilities** in ICMR, universities, medical colleges and other institutions, but research capacity is still unevenly distributed with most expertise concentrated in a few institutions and states.
- Research priorities **do not always track the country's real disease burden**, health-system gaps, equity concerns or its preparedness for future public health emergencies.
- Low health research investment by the general public.
- Administrative and regulatory delays continue to **slow down research** even when funding is not the constraint.

Experts Views

- Experts have welcomed the Draft National Health Research Policy 2026 for its comprehensive approach, emphasis on ethical and impactful research, and greater role for states in setting research priorities.
- However, they note that its success will depend on adequate funding, robust implementation, improved research infrastructure, timely support for researchers, and effective translation of research into better healthcare outcomes.

Conclusion

- India's growing focus on research, development, and innovation reflects its resolve to become a global hub of knowledge and technology. Through bold policy measures, strategic funding, and strong institutional support, the nation is laying a solid foundation for Viksit Bharat@2047.
- Draft National Health Research Policy (NHRP), 2026 could give a big boost to India's health research ecosystem by making it more responsive to national healthcare needs, while also promoting innovation and evidence-based public policy.

Source :TH

Importance of the policy

- It aims to create a research environment which addresses the public health needs of India.
- It will encourage indigenous innovation in vaccines, diagnostics, medicines and medical technologies.

STUDY FINDS EFFICIENT WAY TO FILTER NUCLEAR WASTEWATER

Context

- A new study published in Environmental Science & Technology may finally offer a way to **efficiently clean tritiated water**.
 - The research team, from across China, achieved this using a **metal-organic framework**, work on which won the **Nobel Prize for chemistry last year**.

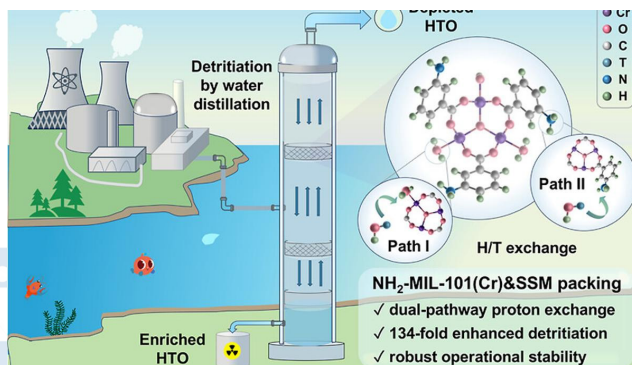
About

- In 2023, Japan began releasing **treated wastewater from the ruined Fukushima nuclear power plant** into the **Pacific Ocean**.
 - The water had been **filtered to remove most heavy radioactive elements**, yet one particular contaminant remained: **tritium**.
 - Tritium is **easily absorbed by the bodies of living creatures** and rapidly **distributed via blood**.
- Tritium** is a **radioactive isotope of hydrogen**. When it bonds with oxygen, it forms **tritiated water, or HTO**.
 - Because tritiated water is chemically almost identical to regular water, it is **extremely difficult to separate the two**.
 - For many decades, officials in the global nuclear industry have opted to **dilute tritiated water**, i.e. mixing it in large quantities of regular water.

Current Methods of Removing Tritium

- The current most practical way to remove tritium from tritiated water is **water distillation**, i.e. boiling water and separating the components based on their slightly different boiling points.
 - But the difference is so feeble that operators need a **distillation tower hundreds of metres tall**, which is expensive, uses large amounts of energy, and impractical for the millions of tonnes of water stored at Fukushima.
- Current distillation towers use systems called packings**, these are the materials inside the tower that **provide surfaces where steam and liquid can interact**.

- Until now, **these packings were passive**: they just sat there and let gravity do the work.
- In the new study, **the researchers made the packing material 'active'**.
 - They **coated a stainless-steel mesh** with a **metal-organic framework** called **NH₂-MIL-101(Cr)**. A metal-organic framework is like a **microscopic sponge**.
 - Adding NH₂-MIL-101(Cr) **increased the available area of the packing by 32-fold**.
 - The chromium-oxygen clusters inside the framework **'grabbed' tritium atoms from the liquid and swapped them with regular hydrogen atoms**, with nitrogen and hydrogen attachments also facilitating this swapping.

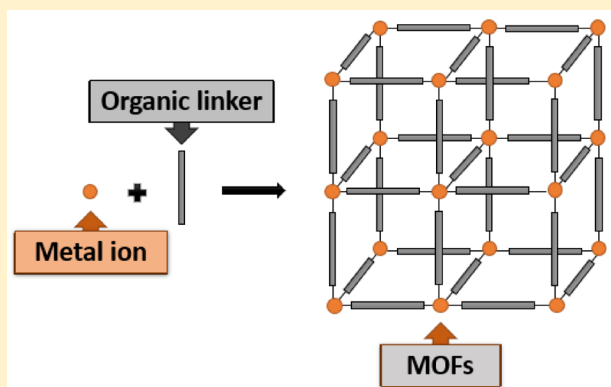


- Outcome:** The modified packing achieved a **separation efficiency of 42.5 theoretical plates per meter**, a record-setting figure in the world of chemical engineering.
 - At an industrial height of 10 m, the new material would be **134-times more effective** than the current best-reported material.
 - It is also **one-million-times more effective** than the standard commercial packings in the industry today.
- Significance:**
 - This strategy provides a **new approach for improving the detritiation of tritiated water** and reducing tritium releases to natural water bodies.
 - The results highlight the **potential of programmable porous materials to address challenging isotope-contaminant separations**.

Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2025

- Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson and Omar Yaghi** were awarded the **Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2025**.

- It was awarded for discovering and creating a class of materials, called **metal-organic frameworks (MOF)**.
- Metal Organic Frameworks:** MOFs are **crystalline structures** in which metal ions serve as **nodes and organic molecules as connectors**.
 - The resulting structure can have **enormous internal surface areas** — thousands of square metres per gram — and their pores can be **customised to attract or hold specific molecules**.



- MOFs form a three-dimensional network with large, porous cavities;** this design allows gases and liquids to flow through, making MOFs highly adaptable for various applications.
 - By carefully choosing the building blocks, researchers can control the **size and shape of the cavities and the chemical environment within**.
 - As a result, MOFs are among the **most versatile materials ever created**.

The unique properties of MOFs have led to their application in various fields:

- Water harvesting:** MOFs can extract water from dry air, offering a potential solution for water-scarce regions.
- Pollutant Removal:** They can filter out harmful substances like PFAS from water, addressing environmental contamination.
- Carbon capture:** MOFs are effective in capturing carbon dioxide, aiding in efforts to mitigate climate change.
- Hydrogen storage:** Their porous nature allows for the safe storage of hydrogen, crucial for clean energy applications.

Source: TH

ISRO CLEARSTHREEKEY GAGANYAAN CREW MODULE SAFETY TESTS

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully completed three major qualification tests for the Gaganyaan mission's Crew Module systems.

About the Tests

- The tests covered the **Crew Module Up-righting System (CMUS)**, the **Crew Module Service Module Connect Disconnect System (CSCDS)**, and the **Crew Module structure's ability to withstand Apex Cover separation loads**.
- The first test** ensures that the crew module returns to an upright position after splashdown in the sea.
 - The system, based on **stored cold-gas technology**, is a critical safety feature for astronauts.
- The second test** involved the separation of the umbilical mechanism that connects the crew module, where the astronauts are housed, with the service module, which provides power and propulsion.
 - The mechanism consists of two units**—CSU-1 on the crew module side and CSU-2 on the service module side.
 - During the crew module's re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere, the service module separates from the crew module after CSU-1 disconnects. Subsequently, just before re-entry, CSU-2 also separates.
- The third test** validated the structural integrity of the crew module during the separation of the apex cover.
 - The apex cover protects the parachutes and associated systems during the mission and is jettisoned before parachute deployment to enable the safe descent of the crew module.

Gaganyaan Mission

- Purpose:** To demonstrate the capability to **launch human beings** (three crew members) to **low earth orbit** and bring them back safely to earth by landing.

- ♦ This manned mission will be the **first of ISRO's human spaceflight missions**. The **US, Russia and China** are the only three countries to have conducted human spaceflights yet.
- **Launch vehicle:** The Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3) is the launch vehicle for the Gaganyaan mission. **Crew Escape System (CES):** HLVM3 consists of CES powered by a set of quick acting, high burn rate solid motors which ensures that Crew Module along with the crew is taken to a safe distance in case of any emergency either at launch pad or during ascent phase.
- **Orbital Module:** The Orbiter Module will orbit the Earth, and it consists of Crew Module (CM) and Service Module (SM) connected by a joint. It is designed to keep the crew safe during ascent, orbital phase, and re-entry.
 - ♦ **The Crew Module (CM)** is the habitable space with the Earth-like environment in space for the crew.
 - ♦ **Service Module (SM):** It will be used to provide the necessary support to CM while in orbit. It is an unpressurized structure containing thermal system, propulsion system, power systems, avionics systems and deployment mechanisms.

Crew Module Re-entry and Recovery Process

- After the orbital phase, the propulsion system in the service module will fire its thrusters to **de-orbit the Orbital Module (OM)**, then the service module will separate from the crew module by severing the joint with a redundant mechanism.
- While both modules descend to the earth, the **crew module**, which is designed to survive the intense thermo-structural loads of re-entry, **will decelerate by aero-braking and safely splash down in sea**. Meanwhile, the **service module will burn up**.

Which Configuration is Best for Re-entry?

- The crew module design must balance several critical objectives, including **maximise the internal volume**, manage the **aerodynamic lift and drag generated** during atmospheric flight, maintain aerodynamic and hydrodynamic stability, and stabilise the module dynamically at low speeds.
- **A spherical configuration** offers the **highest possible internal volume** with the lowest structural mass.

- ♦ However, because a perfect sphere creates no aerodynamic lift, it falls straight down through the atmosphere, like a dropped stone. This subjects the crew to painfully high g-forces.
- **A sphere-cone combination** is the preferred configuration for a re-entering body.
 - ♦ Its blunt base generates a detached shockwave that pushes intense frictional heat away from the spacecraft, while its **conical body provides the aerodynamic stability** and lift necessary for a controlled, survivable descent.
 - ♦ **The Gaganyaan crew module** has a sphere-cone configuration.

What is Dynamic Instability During Re-entry?

- Dynamic instability refers to a critical condition in which the **Crew Module develops rapidly increasing and uncontrolled oscillations** while slowing down through Earth's atmosphere.
- The problem becomes acute as the spacecraft approaches the **speed of sound, where shifting shock waves and turbulent airflow** generate highly fluctuating aerodynamic forces.
- To prevent these oscillations from growing beyond safe limits, the spacecraft continuously uses small control thrusters to maintain the correct attitude.

Way Ahead

- The Gaganyaan Crew Module represents a **major technological achievement** in India's human spaceflight programme.
- By successfully overcoming the challenges of atmospheric re-entry, the Crew Module forms the foundation of India's ambition to undertake sustained human space exploration in the future.

Source: AIR, TH

NEWS IN SHORT

TRIAL IN ABSENTIA

Context

- The proposed invocation of trial in absentia under **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023** has gained attention after a Special NIA Court in Jammu issued a **non-bailable warrant** against Hafiz Saeed in connection with the Pahalgam terror attack case.

What is trial in absentia?

- A trial in absentia refers to a criminal trial conducted in the **absence of the accused**.
- **Section 356 of the BNSS** provides that if a person declared a **proclaimed offender** has absconded to evade trial and there is no immediate prospect of arrest, the court may treat the accused's absence as a waiver of the right to be present during the proceedings.

Whom does it apply to?

- It applies **only to a "proclaimed offender"**, as defined under **Section 84** of the BNSS.
- **Under Section 84(4)**, where a proclamation has been issued against a person accused of an offence punishable with **imprisonment of 10 years or more**, life imprisonment, or death under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, or any other law, and the person fails to appear at the specified place and time, the court may, after making such inquiry as it considers necessary, **declare the person a proclaimed offender**.

What are the procedural safeguards under Section 356?

- **Section 356** lays down several procedural safeguards before a trial can commence in the absence of the accused.
- These include the **issuance of two consecutive warrants** of arrest **within an interval of at least 30 days**.
 - A notice must also be published in a local or national newspaper, giving the accused **30 days to appear** before the court.
- In addition, the notice must be displayed at the accused's last known place of residence, and a relative or friend of the accused must be informed about the trial.
- The trial **cannot commence until 90 days** have elapsed from the date of framing of charges, giving the accused sufficient opportunity to appear before the court.

Source: TH

India's Imports from China soar to \$80 bn in First Half of 2026

Syllabus: GS2/IR

Context

- As per the data released by the China's General Administration of Customs **India's imports from China rose 21.8%** in the first half of 2026 to a record **\$79.41 billion**.

About

- **China has overtaken the US** to emerge as **India's largest trading partner** in **2025-26**, with bilateral trade reaching **USD 151.1 billion**, while the country's trade deficit with China **widened to USD 112.16 billion during the period**.
 - The US was India's largest trading partner for four consecutive years till 2024-25.
- **India's exports to China rose 36.66%** to USD 19.47 billion during the last fiscal year, while **imports increased 16%** to USD 131.63 billion.
- There is a **high growth in merchandise imports** and a rise in the value of crude oil, electronics and gold imports.
- India imports not only **large quantities of finished electronics** and other equipment from China, but also **intermediates** that are needed for Indian manufacturing and fuel India's own exports.

Source: TH

FIRST MONTHLY SERVICES PRODUCTION INDEX

Context

- The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** released the country's first trial Index of Services Production (ISP) for 19 sub-sectors.

About

- The **Index of Services Production (ISP)** is a short-term indicator designed to **measure changes over time in the volume of output produced by the services sector** relative to a specified base period. It measures changes in the real output of service-producing industries over time.
- It serves as the services sector **counterpart to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**, which measures industrial output.
- The **base year** of the index has been fixed at **2024-25**.



Need for a Deflator

- Since service sector data are generally available in value (nominal) terms, price changes need to be removed to measure actual output.
- A price deflator converts nominal values into real (volume-based) values, thereby reflecting genuine growth in services production.
- Currently, different price deflators are used based on the **sub-sector**:
 - ♦ **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**: Applied specifically to deflate wholesale trade.
 - ♦ **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**: The relevant or closest matching CPI series is used for most other sectors.
 - ♦ **CPI-General**: Applied to banking, insurance, and repair & maintenance.
 - ♦ **CPI-Services**: Applied to sub-sectors where a specific individual CPI is unavailable.

Key Findings

- **Fourteen** out of nineteen service sub-sectors recorded **double-digit growth** during April 2026.
- Among the top performers, **Accommodation and Food Services registered the highest growth at 37.2 per cent**, followed by Retail Trade (30.8 per cent), Administrative and Support Services (28.7 per cent) and Real Estate (27.7 per cent).
 - ♦ **Telecommunications** expanded by 22.8 per cent, while **Wholesale Trade, Banking, Insurance and IT services** also recorded healthy double-digit growth.
 - ♦ However, **Air Transport contracted by 13.9 per cent**, while Railway Transport recorded a marginal decline of 0.4 per cent during the month.

Source: DD News, PIB

NIDAR 2.0

In News

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in collaboration with Drone Federation India (DFI) launched the second edition of the **National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR 2.0, 2026-27)** under the **SwaYaan initiative**.

NIDAR

- The National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research (NIDAR) empowers **India's College Graduates to build collaborative autonomous drones** for defined problem statements.

- The first edition of NIDAR 2025-26 was launched in March 2025.
- It drew 3,448 students from 22 States, 4 Union Territories and 109 cities, who built autonomous drone solutions for **Disaster Management and Precision Agriculture**.

NIDAR 2.0

- It extends the challenge from traditional drone platforms to autonomous systems, indigenous avionics and core drone components.
- **Track 1 (Drone Innovation)** will challenge teams to build autonomous swarm drones for disaster response and GPS-denied drones for indoor industrial inspection.
- **Under Track 2 (Component Innovation)**, teams are required to develop an indigenous flight controller and autopilot using VEGA processor and indigenous electronic components, top 100 teams will be provided with VEGA processor kits for further development and testing.

VEGA processor

- It is a family of indigenous microprocessors designed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) under MeitY's Microprocessor Development Programme, based on the open-standard RISC-V architecture.

SwaYaan initiative

- The SwaYaan initiative, approved by MeitY in July 2022 with an outlay of about Rs 89.87 crore over five years, builds the skilled workforce needed for India's drone sector.
- It runs through a Hub-and-Spoke model of 30 premier institutions, including IISc, IITs, IIITs, NITs, C-DAC and NIELIT, across five work themes: Aeromechanics, Drone Electronics, GNC Algorithms and Simulation, Drone Applications, and Allied UAS Technologies.
- It has trained more than 51,000 people so far. It has also supported M.Tech and minor degree programmes, retrofitting electives, online courses, research papers and patents in drone technology.
 - ♦ NIDAR is its flagship innovation platform.

Source :PIB

EXPANSION OF CARBON CREDIT TRADING SCHEME (CCTS)

In News

- The Union Cabinet has approved a draft notification for bringing the iron and steel sector under **India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)**.

Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) in India

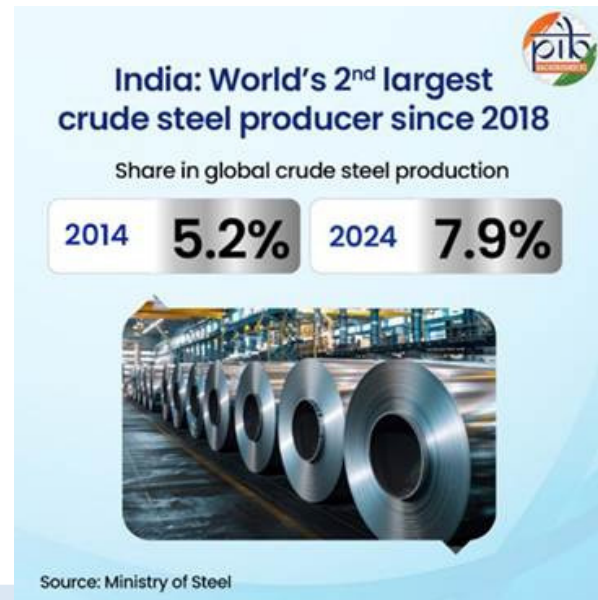
- It is a mechanism designed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through **carbon pricing**.
 - It was notified by the Government of India in 2023 and provides an overall framework for the **functioning of the Indian Carbon Market (ICM)**.
 - The emission intensity reduction targets are to be achieved in the compliance year of 2026-27, with the baseline year being 2023-24.
- Coverage:** The CCTS, which currently covers sectors like aluminium, cement, pulp and paper, petroleum refineries, petrochemicals and textiles has its coverage increased with the change.
- Mechanism:** The CCTS operates through **two mechanisms:** the **Compliance Mechanism and the Offset Mechanism**.
 - Under the Compliance Mechanism, emission-intensive industries designated as **Obligated Entities** are required to meet assigned **Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity (GEI) targets**.
 - Obligated Entities that outperform their targets are eligible to receive **Carbon Credit Certificates** which they can trade with obligated entities which are **unable to meet their targets**.
 - Each obligated industry is assigned a GEI target, expressed as emissions per unit of output.
 - If an industry achieves or exceeds its GEI targets, it is awarded Carbon Credit Certificates (CCC) which can be sold in the carbon market.
 - Industries that do not meet their targets have to buy carbon credits or pay environmental compensation. The compensation is calculated as twice the average carbon credit trading price.

Key Facts: India's Steel Sector

- India's steel sector is the **second-largest in the world** with an approximate crude steel

production of 151 million tonnes in FY 2024-25, while contributing 10-12 per cent to the country's total CO₂ emissions.

- The **National Steel Policy 2017** envisions expanding crude steel capacity to 300 MTPA and production to 255 MTPA by 2030-31.



- Major steel zones** are located in Kalinganagar, Angul, Rourkela, Jharsuguda, Nagarnar, Bhilai, Raipur, Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Durgapur, Kolkata and Vizag.
- Green steel** is the manufacturing of steel without the use of fossil fuels. So-called "green hydrogen" is one solution that could help reduce the steel industry's carbon footprint.
- AI in Steel Pavilion**, is first-of-its-kind collaborative platform which is designed as a problem-to-solution marketplace.

Source :DTE

FORWARD DEPLOYED ENGINEERING (FDE)

In Context

- Forward Deployed Engineering (FDE) is quickly becoming one of the buzziest roles in AI hiring.

About

- Forward Deployed Engineering (FDE) is a **multidisciplinary role** combining software engineering, AI implementation, solutions architecture and business consulting.
- It turns AI experiments into things people actually use like secure, working systems embedded in daily business operations.

- They embed directly with clients, learn the real business problem up close, and build AI solutions that securely plug into the client's own (often sensitive) data.
- To get different AI agents and platforms talking to each other, they lean on emerging standards like **Model Context Protocol (MCP)** and **Agent2Agent (A2A)**.

Source: TH

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