DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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MONEY BILL PASSED TO INCREASE JUDGES' NUMBER: WHY THIS ROUTE FACES LEGAL CHALLENGE?

Context

- The Rajya Sabha has passed the **Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026.**
    - The Bill **was passed as a money Bill,** a route it had also taken in 2019 when the Supreme Court strength was raised to 34.

About

- The issue of **whether a Bill can be certified as a money Bill** is a key question pending for consideration by a seven-judge Constitution Bench.
- **In 2023,** the then Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud had said that the case would be listed for hearing soon. However, the issue is yet to be taken up.

Types of Bills

- **There are four types of Bills:** Constitution Amendment Bills; Money Bills; Financial Bills; and Ordinary Bills.
    - **Constitution Amendment Bills:** These are Bills which seek to amend the Constitution.
    - **Money Bills:** A Bill is said to be a Money Bill if it only contains provisions related to taxation, borrowing of money by the government, expenditure from or receipt to the Consolidated Fund of India.
        - Bills that only contain provisions that are incidental to these matters would also be regarded as Money Bills.
    - **Financial Bills:** A Bill that contains some provisions related to taxation and expenditure, and additionally contains provisions related to any other matter is called a Financial Bill.
        - Therefore, if a Bill merely involves expenditure by the government, and addresses other issues, it will be a financial bill.
    - **Ordinary Bills:** All other Bills are called ordinary bills.

MONEY BILL vs OTHER BILLS

MONEY BILL	OTHER BILLS (ORDINARY BILLS)
Deals only with taxation, government borrowing, the Consolidated Fund, etc. (Article 110)	Covers all other legislative matters
Can be introduced only in Lok Sabha	Can be introduced in either House
Requires President's recommendation before introduction	President's recommendation needed only in specific cases
Rajya Sabha can only recommend changes within 14 days	Rajya Sabha can amend, reject, or delay the Bill
Lok Sabha may accept or reject Rajya Sabha's recommendations	Both Houses must agree on the final text
No Joint Sitting if there is disagreement	Joint Sitting possible to resolve a deadlock (except for Constitutional Amendment Bills)
Speaker's certification as a Money Bill is final	No such certification applies

Key Point: Money Bills give primacy to Lok Sabha in financial matters of the State, while other bills require equal participation of both Houses.

Article 110(1) (g)

- **Article 110(1) (g)** adds that **"any matter incidental to any of the matters specified in Articles 110(1)(a)-(f)"** can also be a money Bill.
    - This additional clause has been the **basis for the government to pass key legislations as money Bills in its previous terms.**
    - The Opposition had argued then that this was done only because the **government did not have the numbers to get these legislations cleared in the Rajya Sabha.**
- The **Speaker** certifies a Bill as a Money Bill, and the **Speaker's decision is final.**
    - Also, the Constitution states that parliamentary proceedings as well as officers responsible for the conduct of business (such as the Speaker) may not be questioned by any Court.

Supreme Court's Take

- **The constitutionality of three major laws**, including the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, are yet to be examined by the larger bench in the light of **whether these laws qualify to be passed as a money Bill.**
    - The other two are the Aadhaar Act and the 2017 amendments altering service conditions of Tribunals.
- While the PMLA and Aadhaar Act were substantially upheld by the Court, the **Supreme Court struck down the tribunal amendments as unconstitutional.**
    - However, in **both rulings the issue of money Bill** was left to a larger bench to decide.

Source: IE

SC SEEKS GOVT'S REPLY ON PLEAS AGAINST RTI CHANGES THROUGH DPDP ACT

Context

- The Supreme Court granted the Centre two weeks to respond to petitions **challenging amendments to the Right to Information (RTI) Act made through the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act.**

About

- **Background: Section 44(3) of DPDP Act had amended the RTI Act** to facilitate **public authorities to refuse information** on the ground that the **details sought was of a "personal" nature.**
    - **Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act** deals with exemption from disclosure of personal information.
    - The **earlier provision exempted only limited categories** of personal information and incorporated a public interest test.
    - The amended provision broadly **exempts all personal information from disclosure,** thereby restricting access to information protected under Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution.
- **Question Before SC:** The court said **both the DPDP Act and the RTI Act were central legislations.** There was a **need to actually harmonise them.**
    - The court would examine if this **restrictive or "cautionary approach" to sharing data under the DPDP Act worked to repeal earlier transparency legislations.**

About Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023

- **Background:** In 2017, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) established the **Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee** to develop a data protection framework for India.
- **Scope:** It applies to the processing of digital personal data within India where such data is collected online, or collected offline and is digitised.
    - It also applies to such processing outside India, if it is for offering goods or services in India.
- **Consent:** Personal data may be processed only for a lawful purpose upon consent of an individual.
    - Consent may not be required for specified legitimate uses such as voluntary sharing of data by the individual or processing by the State for permits, licenses, benefits, and services.
- **Obligations for Data fiduciaries:** To maintain the accuracy of data, keep data secure, and delete data once its purpose has been met.
- **Rights to Individuals:** The right to obtain information, seek correction and erasure, and grievance redressal.
- **Exemptions:** Government agencies can be exempted in the interest of specified grounds such as security of the state, public order, and prevention of offences.

- **Data Protection Board:** To adjudicate on non-compliance with the provisions of the Act. The Data Protection Board (DPB) has **civil court powers for personal data breach complaints.**
    - Board members will be appointed for two years and will be eligible for re-appointment.
    - The central government will prescribe details such as the number of members of the Board and the selection process.

Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005

- **Aim:** It was designed to promote transparency in the functioning of the government by giving citizens the right to access information from public authorities.
- **Scope:** The Act applies to public authorities, which include government departments, ministries, and organizations that are substantially funded by the government.
- **Information Accessible to the Public:** Citizens have the right to request information from public authorities. This includes the right to access records, documents, and other information.
- **Exclusions:** Information that may compromise national security, breach confidentiality, or harm the integrity of ongoing investigations.
- **Timeframe for Response:** Public authorities are required to respond to information requests within 30 days. In certain cases, this period can be extended to 45 days.
- **Penalties:** The Act provides for penalties against officials who withhold information without reasonable cause or provide false information.

Significance of the Act

- **Empowers Citizens:** By accessing information from public authorities, promoting transparency and accountability in government.
- **Holds Government Accountable:** Helps in holding public authorities accountable for their actions, preventing corruption.
    - RTI helped uncover misuse of funds in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).
- **Promotes Good Governance:** It strengthens democratic processes by ensuring that the government operates transparently, fostering public trust.
- **Enables Social Audits:** Activists and NGOs use RTI to perform social audits of government schemes and services.
    - RTI was used to check if food rations were correctly distributed under the Public Distribution System (PDS).
- **Access to Public Records:** RTI requests have been used to obtain details of government contracts, exposing corruption or inefficiencies.
- **Strengthens Democracy:** Provides a tool for citizens to actively participate in the decision-making process, enhancing democracy.

Conclusion

- The RTI Act has played a **significant role in promoting transparency, reducing corruption, and empowering citizens** to actively participate in the democratic process by holding government institutions accountable.
- It is a powerful tool for promoting good governance and ensuring that citizens have access to information that affects their lives.

Source: TH

MECCA JOINT DEFENCE AGREEMENT: PAKISTAN, SAUDI ARABIA, TURKIYE

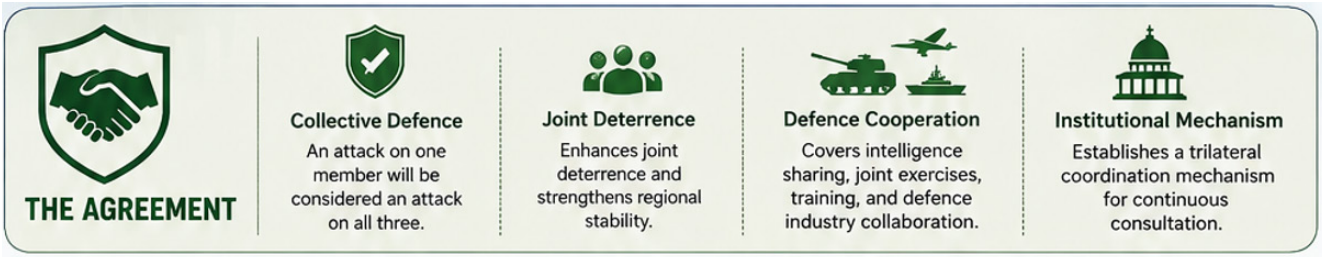
Context

- Recently, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye signed the **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** in Mecca, pledging to pursue **'collective defense'** and **'collective deterrence'.**
- This is against a backdrop of growing instability in **West Asia**, including the ongoing conflict involving Iran and attacks involving Yemen's Houthis.

Key Features of the Agreement

- The agreement seeks to:
    - Strengthen **collective deterrence** against aggression.
    - Enhance **defence cooperation** among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye.
    - Promote greater **military coordination and security cooperation**.
    - Treat an armed attack on one member as an attack on all.
    - Contribute to **regional peace, security and stability**.

- Türkiye has described the arrangement as a **defence-oriented partnership rather than an alliance directed against any particular country**.
- It has indicated that the agreement is intended to complement, rather than replace, existing security arrangements.



Strategic Significance

- **Rise of a New Regional Security Arrangement:** The accord underscores the rising relevance of **regional as opposed to solely external security relationships i**n West Asia.
  - Saudi Arabia has relied historically on security arrangements with the United States and other Western powers.
  - The new deal adds another layer of collaboration between two big Muslim-majority states outside the Gulf.
- **Strategic Convergence between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia:** Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have had long-standing tight defence links.
  - Their bilateral foundation for mutual security had previously been defined in their **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (2025).**
  - The Mecca agreement adds Türkiye to a trilateral framework, extending this cooperation.
- **Türkiye's Growing Regional Role:** A **NATO Ally** with Significant Military Strength and an **Increasingly Assertive West Asia Foreign Policy**.
  - Its involvement broadens the geographical and strategic scope of the arrangement.
  - It reflects a broader effort on the part of Türkiye to present itself as a significant **regional security player.**
- **Saudi Arabia's Quest for Strategic Diversification:** Saudi Arabia's security situation is defined by drone and missile threats, tensions with Iran and instability in Yemen and the Red Sea.
  - **Saudi Arabia's** policy is progressively to **diversify strategic alliances** rather than depend on one external security supplier.

How Effective Will Collective Defence Be?

- Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had already agreed in 2025 to treat aggression against one as aggression against the other.
- Yet subsequent security crises did not necessarily result in direct military intervention by one state on behalf of the other.
- Therefore, the effectiveness of the Mecca agreement will depend upon:
  - **Clarity of obligations** in case of an attack.
  - **Command and coordination mechanisms**.
  - Intelligence and early-warning cooperation.
  - Interoperability and joint military training
  - Availability of rapid response capacity.
- The importance of the agreement should therefore be seen in light of the **potential for improved security cooperation** and not on the assumption of automatic joint military action.

Implications for India

- **Need For Strategic Vigilance:** India has massive economic, energy and diaspora stakes in the Gulf.
    - Any serious deterioration in West Asian security might impact crude oil and gas supply, shipping and maritime trade, remittances, Indian expatriates and vital connectivity projects.
- **Balancing Relations:** India has major contacts with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Israel and other regional actors, while also maintaining developing ties with Türkiye.
    - The rise of new security groupings underscores the necessity of India's policies of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.
- **Maritime Security:** Instability in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf can have a direct impact on India's trade routes.
    - India has hence a continual interest in maritime domain awareness, protection of commercial shipping and cooperation with regional partners.
- **Pakistan's Growing Role in West Asia:** Greater Pakistani involvement in West Asian security might boost Islamabad's diplomatic and strategic standing in the area.
    - For India, this makes it important to monitor the evolving **Pakistan–Saudi Arabia–Türkiye security relationship**, while avoiding unnecessary securitisation of India's own relations with Gulf states.

Broader Geopolitical Significance

- The Mecca agreement reflects a wider transformation in the international system:
    - **From** heavy dependence on external security providers **towards** regional partnerships, strategic diversification and collective deterrence
- This trend is consistent with the emergence of a more **multipolar West Asian security environment**, in which Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Iran, Israel, the UAE and other regional actors increasingly pursue overlapping partnerships.
    - However, the region remains characterised by **competing interests and fluid alignments**.
    - The new agreement should therefore be viewed as one component of a larger and evolving security architecture.

Challenges

- **Divergent Strategic Interests:** Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye do not have identical foreign-policy priorities.
- **Iran Factor:** Although the agreement is officially not directed against any country, its implementation will inevitably be assessed in the context of Saudi-Iranian strategic competition.
- **NATO Dimension**: Türkiye's NATO membership adds a further layer of complication to its external security duties.
- **Ambiguity of Action:** The statement 'attack on one is an attack on all' needs precise guidelines to determine the kind and scale of collective action.
- **Risk of Regional Bloc Politics:** The multiplication of competing military organisations could result in increased fragmentation of West Asian security.

Way Forward

- The agreement can have a favourable impact on regional stability if it concentrates on:
    - **Cooperation in defence, rather than bloc confrontation**
    - Intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism
    - Air and maritime security
    - Shared procedures for humanitarian and disaster response
    - Regional powers confidence building measures
    - Respect for international law and sovereignty
    - Diplomacy tools for conflict avoidance
- Regional security arrangements should complement broader diplomatic efforts to decrease tensions, not undermine them.

Conclusion

- The **Mecca Joint Defence Agreement** is a key development in the changing security architecture of West Asia.
- Its immediate significance lies less in the creation of a new military bloc and more in the **institutionalisation of defence cooperation among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye**.

Source: TH

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE INDIAN JUDICIARY

In News

- The e-Courts Mission Mode Project has transformed India's paper-based judiciary into a digitally enabled and trackable justice delivery system.

Background

- India's judiciary, which serves over a billion people, has long relied on paper records and brick-and-mortar infrastructure. Many citizens incurred excessive travel and other expenses visiting courts and other establishments for their matters and documents.
- This archaic system made the delivery of justice slow, cumbersome and expensive for the people it served.

Digitisation of Indian Judiciary

- It means the infusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in all levels of the judicial system from the Supreme Court to the district and subordinate courts.

Various Initiatives

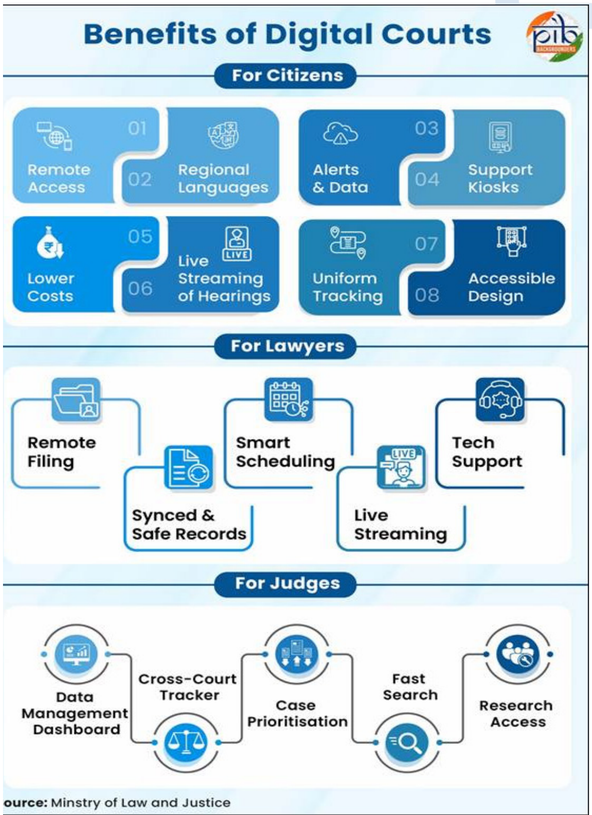
- **e-Courts Mission Mode Project :** The e-Courts Mission Mode Project was launched in 2007 with a vision to make Indian judiciary faster, affordable, accessible and transparent through technology.
    - Phase I (2011-15) was to computerise courts
    - Phase II (2015-23) introduced services such as NJDG, e-Filing, eSewaKendras and expanded video conferencing.
    - Phase III (2023-27) aims to create paperless and intelligent courts through digitisation, virtual hearings, interoperability, AI, analytics and OCR.
- **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):** An online public dashboard that provides real time information on court cases, orders and judgements of the Supreme Court, High Courts and District Courts.
- **ICJS (Interoperable Criminal Justice System):** Platform letting police, courts, prisons, forensics and prosecution exchange FIRs, charge-sheets, orders and reports electronically.
- **CCTNS (Crime & Criminal Tracking Network and System)**: Computerises police processes from FIR to charge-sheet, with Nyaya Sanhita-linked deadline alerts for investigating officers.
- **ITSSO (Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences)**: dashboard tracking investigations in women/child sexual-offence cases against charge-sheet deadlines.
- **e-Sakshya:** Secure app for capturing and managing digital evidence, preserving its integrity from collection to court.
- **MedLEaPR (Medico Legal Examination and Postmortem Reporting):** Hospitals' online system for medico-legal exams and postmortem reports.
- **Nyaya Shruti:** Video-conferencing platform for virtual testimony by the accused, witnesses, police, prosecutors and forensic experts.
- **e-Forensic:** End-to-end digital case handling across forensic labs.
- **e-Prison**: Cloud-based national network for prison and prisoner management.
- **e-Prosecution**: Digital workflow linking police and prosecution for timely legal opinions.
- **NAFIS (National Automated Fingerprint Identification System):** Centralised biometric database for real-time fingerprint matching against criminal records.
- **e-SEWA Kendras:** Citizen-friendly help centres in court complexes that assist with case-status tracking, e-filing, certified copies, e-payments, digital signatures, virtual hearings, traffic challans and access to free legal aid.

Benefits of Digitising India's Judiciary

- **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Litigants can check case status, download judgements, and attend hearings remotely, without having to travel large distances.
    - Video conferencing has improved access to the courts, enabling litigants, lawyers, witnesses and others to participate remotely, saving travel costs and delays.
- **Speeding up of processes:** Automated listing, e-service of summons with GPS tracking and speedier document retrieval assist cut down administrative delays.
    - The e-Filing system enables citizens and lawyers to file court documents on-line from anywhere without the need to physically visit and thereby speeding up judicial proceedings.

- It is available across District Courts, High Courts and the Supreme Court and supports English and regional languages

- **Transparency and Trust:** Public portals for real-time case tracking and live streaming of court sessions reduce systemic opacity.
- **Cost Efficiency and Eco-Friendliness** – No more storage of millions of paper records, which drastically reduces storage footprints and administrative overheads.
- **Data-Driven Judicial Management** Real-time dashboards like the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) help judges to identify bottlenecks and proactively manage pendency.
    - Lawyers, litigants and judges can track case status, cause lists and updates thru digital platforms like e-Courts Services Portal, mobile apps, SMS and email, thus decreasing physical visits and increasing transparency.
- **Preservation** : Under e-Courts Mission, crores of old court records are being digitised to preserve them from physical deterioration and enable faster, easier retrieval, access and legal research, thereby improving judicial efficiency.
- **Integration** : Police, courts, prisons, prosecution and forensic institutions are now connected through digital platforms, thus enabling a smooth electronic exchange of criminal justice information.



Challenges and Issues

- **Digital Divide :** Millions of citizens in rural and semi-urban areas lack access to high-speed internet, functional devices, and basic digital literacy skills.
- **Cybersecurity and Data Privacy Risks:** Centralising judicial records and sensitive evidence brings risks of data breaches, cyberattacks, and unauthorised tampering, especially in the absence of a dedicated legal framework for legal tech standards.
- **Behavioural Barriers:** A significant part of the legal fraternity especially senior advocates and employees in the rural district courts, reluctant to move away from the traditional paper briefs.
- **Infrastructural Shortcomings** : The Supreme Court and the High Courts are well equipped with technology but many subordinate courts still face problems such as inconsistent power supply, outdated hardware and low internet bandwidth.
- **Algorithmic Bias and Reliability**: The application of AI tools for legal research or case management carries the risk of inherent algorithmic bias and inaccuracy errors, requiring strict oversight by humans before AI outputs are incorporated into formal judgements.

Conclusion

- Digitisation of Indian judiciary is a paradigm shift from being a location bound institution to a citizen centric legal service.
- It is a step toward a speedier, transparent and citizen-centric justice system. The strengthening of e-Sewa Kendras, constant digital training, robust cyber security, data protection and hybrid court model can enable inclusive access.
- Meanwhile, ethical AI must aid, not supplant, human judicial judgement. Technology, in this sense, should be a force multiplier to the rule of law and the constitutional guarantee of equal justice.

Source :PIB

INDIA'S MODEL BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY

Context

- The GoI is evaluating its Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) to make the investment treaty environment more investor-friendly and conducive, while safeguarding India's sovereign regulatory space.

What is a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)?

- A Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) is an **agreement between two countries to facilitate and protect investments** by investors from one country into the other.
- **The BIT provides legal safeguards,** for example protection from expropriation, fair treatment and dispute settlement procedures.
- BITs are designed to promote investor trust and **encourage foreign direct investment (FDI).**

Features of Bilateral Investment Treaties

- **National Treatment:** Foreign investors are not treated less favourably than those of the domestic country.
- **Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET):** The host State shall not treat investors arbitrarily or discriminatorily.
- **Free Movement of Capital Investment:** The rules state that gains, dividends and capital may be freely moved across national borders.
- **Dispute settlement mechanism:** It provides for settlement of issues between investors and host states or between states.

India's Progress on BITs

- **Evolution of India's BIT Framework:** India signed its first **Model BIT in 1993,** which was amended in **2003.**
    - Following several international arbitration disputes, India adopted a **new Model BIT in December 2015,** which became operational in **2016.**
- **Recent Developments:** India has signed BITs or investment agreements with countries such as; Belarus, Kyrgyz Republic, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Brazil (through an Investment Cooperation and Facilitation Treaty).
- **In Budget 2025-26,** the Government announced a review of the BIT framework to make it more investor-friendly while safeguarding national interests.

Why is India revising its Model BIT?

- **Net FDI inflows:** Net FDI dropped from an average of almost **$40 billion** in FY20-FY22 to $7.65 billion in FY26.
- **Growing outbound investment:** Indian enterprises are investing more abroad and need protection in foreign jurisdictions.
- **Improve investor confidence:** A predictable and balanced investment environment will sustain long-term capital inflows.

Key Features of the Proposed New BIT Model

- **Two-Year Local Remedies Requirement:** Foreign investors are required to pursue remedies within India's domestic legal system for **at least two years** before initiating international arbitration.
    - For certain partner countries, a shorter **one-year cooling-off period** may also be considered during negotiations.
- **No Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) Clause:** The revised model is likely to exclude the Most-Favoured Nation (MFN) clause.
    - MFN clauses **allow investors to claim more favourable treatment** available under India's treaties with other countries.
    - It is believed that removing the clause will **reduce treaty-shopping** and legal uncertainties.
- **Taxation Matters Excluded:** Tax-related disputes will remain outside the scope of investment treaties.
    - This approach is influenced by past arbitration cases involving foreign companies such as **Vodafone Group and Cairn Energy.**
    - The government maintains that **taxation is a sovereign policy matter** and should **not be subject to investor-state arbitration.**

What are the concerns?

- **Investor Concerns:** The provisions of mandatory exhaustion of local remedies before international arbitration may increase costs and delays. Also **lengthy judicial processes** can discourage foreign investors.
    - **The absence of a Most-Favoured Nation (MFN)** clause will reduce investor protections available under other treaties.
- **India's Concerns: Excessive investor rights** constrain legitimate public policy measures and also **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)** mechanisms challenge sovereign regulatory actions.
    - **International arbitration awards** may impose significant financial liabilities on governments.

Global Trends in Investment Dispute Settlement

- **Shift Away from Traditional ISDS:** Many countries are reconsidering traditional Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanisms.

- For example, the BIT between Australia and the United Arab Emirates adopts **State-to-State Dispute Settlement (SSDS)** instead of ISDS. Under SSDS, disputes are resolved between governments rather than directly between investors and host states.

Way Ahead

- A balanced BIT approach is required respecting India's regulatory sovereignty and policy space and protecting investor interests.
- Build investor confidence in domestic legal institutions, including strengthening commercial courts and contract enforcement.
- Promote the employment of procedures of mediation, conciliation and resolution of disputes between States as an alternative to expensive arbitration.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

DHANSIRI RIVER

Context

- According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the **Dhansiri River** is flowing above the danger mark, raising concerns that the **flood situation in low-lying areas could worsen.**

About

- **Origin:** It originates from the **Laisang peak in Nagaland.**
- **Course:** It is situated in **north-east India,** is a **transboundary river** running through the states of **Assam and Nagaland.**
  - It flows 352 kilometres through **Dimapur, Chümoukedima, and Assam's Golaghat district** before joining the Brahmaputra.
- **Confluence:** It joins the Brahmaputra on its south bank in Assam, near **Dhansirimukh.**
- Covering a catchment area of 1,220 square kilometres, the **river supports both ecological systems and human settlements.**
- **Being heavily rain-fed,** its water level rises sharply during the monsoon, and high flows can cause flooding in areas of Golaghat and adjoining Assam.

Source: TH

16TH BRICS TRADE MINISTERS MEETING

Context

- India concluded the 16th BRICS Trade Ministers' Meeting in Jaipur under its BRICS Chairship 2026.

Key Outcomes

- **Jaipur Consensus:** BRICS members agreed to examine the feasibility of a BRICS Invoice Discounting Mechanism to improve access to trade finance for small businesses.
- The meeting adopted **Guiding Principles for Credit Assessment Frameworks for Export-Oriented MSMEs**, encouraging financial institutions to assess enterprises on the basis of cash flows rather than conventional collateral.
- To strengthen industrial cooperation, ministers adopted the **BRICS Shared Understanding on Global Value Chains,** which includes the **Global Value Chains Action Plan 2026–2030.**
  - The plan envisages the establishment of a **BRICS Technical Council, the BRICS Connect initiative, joint studies on value chains, and the exploration of strategic supply chain** and **investment promotion platforms** in sectors such as pharmaceuticals and food security.
- **BRICS Principles to Facilitate Digitally Delivered Services Across Borders:** It aimed at promoting secure digital trade and expanding cooperation in services among member countries.

About BRICS

- **BRICS** is an acronym that refers to a group of **five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.**
  - **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates** have joined BRICS as new full members**.**
- The term was originally coined by economist **Jim O'Neill in 2001.**
- **Origin:** As a formal grouping, BRIC started after the meeting of the Leaders of Russia, India and China in St. Petersburg on the margins of the **G8 Outreach Summit in 2006.**

- The grouping was formalized during the 1st meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers on the margins of **UNGA in New York in 2006.**
- Initially, the grouping was termed BRIC as **South Africa was inducted in 2010** and from there on it has been referred to as **BRICS**.

- **Summits:** The governments of the BRICS states have met annually at formal summits **since 2009.**
- **New Development Bank:** Formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank, is a multilateral development bank established by the BRICS states.
    - The Bank shall support public or private projects through loans, guarantees, equity participation and other financial instruments.

Source: DD News

OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT, 1923

Context

- A Wing Commander of the Indian Air Force (IAF) was arrested under provisions of the Official Secrets Act for allegedly leaking sensitive defence-related information.

Official Secrets Act, 1923

- The Official Secrets Act (OSA), 1923 is a **colonial-era law** designed to protect official secrets and safeguard national security.
- The law, applicable to government servants and citizens, **provides the framework for dealing with espionage, sedition, and other potential threats** to the integrity of the nation.
- The law makes **spying, sharing 'secret' information, unauthorised use of uniforms, withholding information, interference with the armed forces in prohibited/ restricted areas,** among others, punishable offences.
    - If guilty, a person may get up to 14 years' imprisonment, a fine, or both.
- The information could be any reference to a place belonging to or occupied by the **government, documents, photographs, sketches, maps, plans, models, official codes or passwords.**

Source: IE

INDIA'S FIRST PRIVATELY-BUILT 800 KN FFSC ENGINE UNVEILED

Context

- Space-tech company Astrobase Space Technologies has unveiled **India's first privately developed 800 kN Full-Flow Staged Combustion (FFSC) rocket engine.**

About

- The engine, named **EVEREST**, has been developed by **Astrobase** making it only the **fourth commercial company to successfully develop a high thrust flow FFSC engine globally.**
    - It is targeting the **first flight of its reusable launch vehicle** for **2028**.
- The development marks a **significant shift for India's private space industry,** which is now **moving beyond small satellite launch systems** into **high-thrust propulsion technologies** that underpin reusable orbital-class rockets.
- Everest is part of a **broader push to build domestic capability in reusable rocket propulsion** and high-cadence launch systems.

Full-Flow Staged Combustion (FFSC) Rocket Engine

- **The Full-Flow Staged Combustion rocket engine** is one of the most advanced, high-performance liquid propellent cycles in aerospace engineering.
    - The technology is so efficient as it uses **every bit of its fuel and oxidiser.**
- In a rocket engine, fuel and an oxidiser, usually **liquid oxygen is pumped into the combustion chamber at extremely high pressure.**
    - The FFSC engine sends all of the fuel and the oxidiser through the turbines before they enter the main combustion chamber. This is why this type of engine is called **'full-flow'.**
    - The result is a rocket that produces **more thrust with the same amount of propellant, runs cooler, lasts longer, and can be used multiple times.**
- India currently **accounts for less than 2% of the global space economy,** and indigenous propulsion and scalable launch infrastructure are critical to increasing the country's share of the rapidly expanding satellite-launch market.

Source: TH

PM-YASASVI SCHEME

In News

- The Government reaffirmed its commitment to expanding educational opportunities for students belonging to the OBC, Economically Backward Classes (EBC) and Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNT) through the PM-YASASVI scheme.

Prime Minister Young Achievers Scholarship Award Scheme for Vibrant India(PM-YASASVI) Scheme

- It is being implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
- It comprises four major scholarship components designed to support students at different stages of education.
    - These include the Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme, Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme, Top Class Education in Schools Scheme, and Top Class Education in Colleges Scheme for eligible students belonging to OBC, EBC and DNT communities
- **Eligibility**: Students from OBC/EBC/DNT categories having annual family income up to ₹2.5 lakh admitted to eligible full-time courses in notified institutions are eligible to benefit from the scheme, subject to availability of allocated slots.
    - The maximum benefit is limited to two siblings per household.
- **Benefits:** Eligible students will receive full tuition fees and non-refundable charges (subject to prescribed ceilings), ₹3,000 per month for living expenses, ₹5,000 annually for books and stationery, and a one-time assistance of up to ₹45,000 for a computer/laptop with accessories.
    - The tuition fee will be paid to the institutions directly, and the other benefits will be transferred to the students through DBT.
- **Objectives:** The scheme aims to motivate OBC, EBC and DNT students to take quality higher education after Class XII. It is operational in institutions notified by the Ministry from 2021-22 onwards.
    - Scholarships are renewable annually and shall continue till completion of the course subject to satisfactory performance.

Source: PIB

SLENDER-BILLED VULTURES

In News

- Five captive-bred slender-billed vultures along with white-rumped vultures were released at Jatayu Soft Release Center in Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, Assam, the first release of its kind anywhere in the world.

Slender-Billed Vultures (Gyps tenuirostris)

- The slender-billed vulture is a dark, lean scavenger with broad wings, a long bare neck and pale underparts.
- **Habitat:** It inhabits dry open and forested regions away from human settlements.
    - It feeds almost entirely on carrion and often forms large colonies with other vultures at carcasses and communal roosts.
- **Distribution**: It is found mainly in the northern Indian subcontinent including the Gangetic plains, parts of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal, Assam, Nepal and Bangladesh.
    - The species' former range in Southeast Asia has been greatly reduced, with populations believed to be extinct in Thailand and Malaysia and existing mainly in Cambodia, southern Laos and Myanmar.
- **Ecological Role:** It is an important scavenger and a provider of ecosystem services that helps to dispose of animal remains naturally and maintain environmental hygiene.
- **Threats**: The main cause of the decline of the slender-billed vulture is diclofenac poisoning, which leads to kidney failure.
    - Other threats include food shortage, pesticide poisoning, habitat and tree loss, persecution, and electrocution or collisions.
- **Protection status :** Gyps tenuirostris is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN .
    - It is included in CITES Appendix II,

White-rumped vulture (Gyps bengalensis)

- It is mainly found in plains and open country, but also in woodland, villages and cities.
- It eats carrion. It is very social, gathering in large feeding flocks and communal roosts, and breeds colonially in tall trees.
- It occurs in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and southern Viet Nam,
- It is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Source :TH

NATIONAL GOPAL RATNA AWARDS (NGRA) 2026

Context

- The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying has invited nominations for the National Gopal Ratna Awards (NGRA) 2026.

About

- The NGRA is one of the **highest national honours** in the **livestock and dairy sector.**
- Under the **Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)**, the Department has been conferring the **National Gopal Ratna Awards (NGRA)** annually since **2021** on the occasion of **National Milk Day (26 November)**.
  - Launched in **2014**, the RGM focuses on the **scientific conservation and development of indigenous bovine breeds**.
- The awards are given in **three categories:**
  - Best Dairy farmer rearing indigenous cattle/buffalo breeds.
  - Best Dairy Cooperative Society (DCS)/Milk Producer Company (MPC)/Dairy Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO).
  - Best Artificial Insemination Technician (AIT).
- A **Special Award** for the **North Eastern Region (NER) and Himalayan States** is also provided in each category.
- For the **Best Dairy Farmer** and **Best DCS/MPC/FPO** categories, the prize money is **₹5 lakh, ₹3 lakh and ₹2 lakh** for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd ranks, respectively. The Special Award carries **₹2 lakh**.
- In the **AIT category**, awardees receive a **certificate of merit and a memento**, with **no cash prize**.

Source: PIB

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