

## DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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## INDIA'S MECHANISM FOR GOVERNING DRUG PRICES

### In News

The Supreme Court heard petitions on medicine, medical equipment and generic pharmaceutical pricing

### Observations of SC

- It expressed concern over the sharp disparity between the Price to Retailer (PTR) and consumer price, notably in the case of cancer drugs.
- It asked whether the 16% retailer margin under the DPCO, 2013 could not be extended to other essential medicines also.
- It flagged the practice of hospitals asking patients to buy drugs from their pharmacies.
  - ♦ It pointed out that higher rates in government schemes like Ayushman Bharat are ultimately a drain on taxpayers' money.

### Legislation governing drug prices in India

- **The Essential Commodities Act, 1955:** It gives the Centre power over essential goods, including medicines.
  - ♦ Section 3(1) allows it to regulate production, supply, and distribution "for maintaining or increasing supplies of any essential commodity or for securing their equitable distribution and availability at fair price".
  - ♦ Section 3(2)(c) allows for issuing orders controlling commodity prices.
- **Drugs (Prices Control) Order 2013 (DPCO, 2013):** Prices of drugs are regulated as per the provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order 2013 (DPCO, 2013).
  - ♦ DPCO separates pharmaceuticals into scheduled and non-scheduled preparations.
    - Scheduled drugs are those found in Schedule I of the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM), which are under government price limits, while non-scheduled drugs are not under the usual price ceiling system.
  - ♦ As per extant provisions of DPCO, 2013, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) fixes the ceiling prices of the drugs included in Schedule I of DPCO, 2013, which is based on the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) published by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW).

- The current Schedule I includes 384 drugs, which make up about 20% of the total turnover of the drug market

### Do you know?

- The **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** computes the ceiling price of a scheduled drug for all brands/generic versions containing the same active ingredient and excludes those with less than 1% market share, based on moving annual turnover (MAT).
- It computes the average Price to Retailer (PTR) of the qualified products and adds a 16% retailer margin to arrive at the ceiling price. Average PTRs of Rs 8, Rs 10 and Rs 12 come to Rs 10, while the ceiling price is Rs 11.60. (excluding relevant taxes) shall not be more than this amount.
  - ♦ The ceiling prices are amended every year on 1st April in accordance with the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).
  - ♦ The manufacturers are allowed to increase the prices by the allowable WPI rate and, in case of negative WPI, the prices have to be reduced accordingly within the stipulated period.

### Issues and Concerns

- **Coverage issues:** Drugs not covered in the NLEM are generally classed as non-scheduled formulations and are not covered by fixed price ceilings under the DPCO.
  - ♦ Manufacturers may establish the initial MRP with a provision that the MRP cannot be raised by more than 10% in 12 months.
  - ♦ But the first launch price is not regulated; the manufacturers can have an excessively high MRP from day one, which makes the subsequent 10% price-hike cap meaningless.
- **Fundamental Rights violations:** The PILs argue that the unregulated first setting of MRP is violative of the right to health under Article 21 as it offers undue discretion to the makers to fix the pricing of the pharmaceuticals without any relation to the real cost of manufacture.
- **Price disparity:** There are exorbitant mark-ups charged by shops and hospitals, with profits going up to 10-16 times the allowed 16% margin.
- **Corporate intersset:** The plea has claimed that pharmacy charges contribute for 30 to 40 per cent of hospital bills of critically ill patients and that the medicines are priced by corporate hospitals.

- ♦ It also points to the huge gap in prices of generic and branded drugs, quoting from Lok Sabha testimony that generic medicines might be 50-90% cheaper than the branded ones.

### Conclusion

- India's medicine-pricing framework aims to combine affordability, availability and incentives for pharmaceutical innovation.
- However, the complaints submitted before the Supreme Court point to the loopholes relating to initial pricing of non-scheduled medicines, exorbitant trade margins, hospital pharmacy mark-ups and the price disparity between branded and generic drugs.
- So there is a need for greater transparency in the pharmaceutical supply chain, monitoring of MRPs and trade margins, wider availability of affordable generics, stronger enforcement of existing price controls, and evidence-based regulation of non-scheduled medicines

Source :TH

## INDIA AND NETHERLANDS DEEPENING COOPERATION

### In News

India and the Netherlands held bilateral talks on strengthening the agricultural sector by exploring new areas of cooperation

### Historical Linkages

- India and the Netherlands established diplomatic relations in 1947.
  - ♦ The year 2022 marked 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations.
- India and the Netherlands enjoy strong political, economic & commercial relations. High-level mutual exchanges have provided impetus to the multifaceted partnership between the two countries.
  - ♦ Water, Agriculture and Health (WAH) are three priority sectors of cooperation besides technology and innovation

### Cooperation Areas

- **Renewable Energy:** India and the Netherlands have strong cooperation in Renewable Energy.
  - ♦ The Netherlands signed the Framework Agreement of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in May 2018. India is one of the

convening countries of the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA), headquartered in the Netherlands.

- ♦ The Netherlands joined the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in 2021.
- **S&T and Space:** The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) collaborates with major national funders of research in India such as the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).
  - ♦ India and the Netherlands held the 9th Meeting of the JWG on Science & Technology in New Delhi in February 2025
- **Strategic:** India and the Netherlands agreed to elevate their ties to a "Strategic Partnership" for 2026–2030, focusing on regular high-level dialogue and stronger cooperation in key sectors.
  - ♦ The Netherlands issued its guidelines on the Indo-Pacific in 2020, which identify India as a key partner. India welcomed the guidelines.
    - Both sides recognize the close convergence between each other's vision for a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific
- **Trade and Commercial Relations:** Trade and Commercial relations form the backbone of our vibrant relationship.
  - ♦ The Netherlands is India's 11th largest trading partner in the world.
  - ♦ It is also India's 3rd largest export destination for goods globally and the largest in Europe.
  - ♦ During the F.Y. 2024-2025, the total merchandise trade with the Netherlands stood at USD 27.8 billion.
  - ♦ The total merchandise trade with the Netherlands accounts for 2.40% of India's total merchandise trade.
  - ♦ The Netherlands is the fourth largest investor in India.
- **Ports/Shipping/Inland Waterways:** India and the Netherlands had signed an MoU in the fields of Ports and Maritime Transport and Logistics in 2008, which was again most recently extended in October 2025.
  - ♦ It has a special focus on research and development, shipbuilding, innovation, and sustainability

- **Agriculture and Food Processing:** Agriculture is one of the core sectors identified by the two sides for enhancing bilateral cooperation. India and the Netherlands cooperate on agriculture through a Joint Working Group.
  - ♦ Recently, both sides discussed progress on the establishment of 25 Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in the agriculture and horticulture sectors.
  - ♦ Further, both sides agreed to explore cooperation in the seed sector through a work plan outlining key areas of cooperation for a clear framework for effective implementation.
- **Healthcare Cooperation:** India and the Netherlands work through a JWG under the MoU for Cooperation in the Field of Healthcare and Public Health to promote global research collaboration in emerging health challenges associated with communicable diseases and antimicrobial resistance.
  - ♦ The MoU was most recently extended in 2025.
- **Indian Community and Students:** The Netherlands has the largest population of people of Indian origin in mainland Europe.
  - ♦ It is home to approx. 300,000 members of the Indian diaspora, including around 200,000 members of the Surinamese Hindustani community, now completely integrated into Dutch society

#### Upgradation of Ties

- India and the Netherlands upgraded their bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership for 2026-2030 with a time-bound strategy.
- The collaboration concentrates on political discourse, commerce and investment, key minerals, agriculture, water management, health, medicines, new technologies, semiconductors, AI, cybersecurity, education and research.
- Both sides will deepen collaboration on green hydrogen, renewable energy, circular economy, sustainable urban development and a Green & Digital Sea Corridor.
- They will also expand defence, maritime and security cooperation, including counterterrorism and cybersecurity.
- The strategy also encourages the fair migration and mobility of students, researchers and skilled professionals, as well as increased cultural, tourist, heritage and people-to-people exchanges, supporting resilient supply chains, innovation, investment and sustainable development.

#### Importance of the Partnership

- **Economic Gateway and Trade Facilitation:** The Netherlands is India's economic and logistical gateway to the EU market, and Dutch enterprises have access to India's vast consumer base and a pool of brilliant workers.
- **Energy Transition and Climate Resilience Accelerator:** Dutch water/renewable technology expertise with India's massive green energy scale accelerates decarbonisation and climate adaptation for both sides.
- **Critical Supply Chain Resilience:** Strategic technology linkages in semiconductors, smart manufacturing, and digital infrastructure de-risk global supply chains from single-country dependency.
- **Indo-Pacific Alignment and Strategic Convergence:** A common dedication to a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific order links European maritime policy with India's regional leadership.

#### Issues and Concerns

- **Impact of EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):** The EU's carbon tax policies represent a danger to Indian exports of steel, aluminium, and manufactured goods to the EU market.
- **Export Controls and Regulatory Barriers:** Tight Western export controls on critical technologies could impede smooth transfers to non-NATO countries.
- **Delays :** Large urban water and infrastructure projects in India may suffer from bureaucratic delays and difficulties in local implementation due to multi-level administrative frameworks.
- **Conflicting foreign policy goals:** The mix of geopolitical interests- the Netherlands focusing on NATO and the European security situation and India on strategic independence in the Indo-Pacific- might generate diplomatic challenges.

#### Conclusion

- The India-Netherlands connection has evolved from a traditional economic relationship to a holistic technology-based partnership.
- Both countries are ideally placed to further remove obstacles to trade and align trade mechanisms with climate objectives to help drive sustainable economic growth across Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

**Source: PIB**

## SUPREME COURT ON ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION.

### In News

The Supreme Court declined the proposed October 6 interaction between the Chief Justice of India, other judges and the Parliamentary Joint Committee examining the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, on 'One Nation, One Election'.

### One Nation, One Election(Simultaneous Elections)

- Simultaneous elections propose aligning the election cycles of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- This would allow voters to cast their ballots for both tiers of government on the same day in their constituencies, though voting could still occur in phases across the country.
- By synchronising these electoral timelines, the approach aims to address logistical challenges, reduce costs, and minimise disruptions caused by frequent elections

### Global Scenario

- Parliamentary democracies like South Africa, Sweden and Germany have fixed tenures for their legislatures.
- The elections to the National Assembly and provincial legislatures happen simultaneously in South Africa every five years, with the President of the country being elected by the National Assembly.
- The Prime Minister of Sweden and the Chancellor of Germany are elected by their respective legislatures every four years.
- A lack of confidence against the German Chancellor can be moved only by electing a successor.

### Status in India

- India held Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections simultaneously in the first four general election cycles — 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967.
- This synchronisation was disrupted due to the premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha and several State Assemblies, resulting in elections being conducted at different times.
- By 2019, only four States held Assembly elections alongside the Lok Sabha election.
- The idea of restoring simultaneous elections has been proposed earlier by the Election Commission of India in 1982 and the Law Commission in 1999.

- The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, seek to enable simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- They were referred to a joint committee in December 2024. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla constituted the 39-member panel.

### Arguments Supporting

- **Cost Reduction: Simultaneous** elections could significantly reduce election-related expenditure.
  - The Central government spends an estimated ₹4,000 crore on Lok Sabha elections, while each State Assembly election involves additional expenditure depending on the State's size.
  - Moreover, political parties and candidates incur expenses many times higher than official government spending.
  - Holding elections simultaneously could therefore help reduce the overall financial burden on the government, political parties and candidates.
- **Policy continuity and stability:** Frequent State elections (around 5-6 each year) put political parties and ministers in a "permanent campaign" mindset, which might impede efficient policymaking and governing.
  - The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) comes into place for around 45-60 days during elections and restricts the launch of new initiatives and projects by the Center and the respective State governments.
  - Thus, simultaneous elections can offer more policy continuity and government stability.
- **Administrative efficiency:** Frequent elections also impact the efficiency of government on the administrative front, as machinery at the district level is largely engaged in election-related work.
  - Paramilitary soldiers are also regularly moved from their usual stations to states going to elections to ensure free and fair polling.
  - Frequent elections are a recurring load on administrative resources and can diminish administrative efficiency.
- **Social Cohesion:** High-stakes elections repeated over time could incentivise more polarising campaigns as political parties seek electoral support.
  - The development of social media has further amplified such political propaganda, thereby

increasing social differences in India's multi-religious, multi-lingual country.

- ♦ It is suggested that simultaneous elections will minimise the incidence of election-driven polarisation and will foster better social cohesion.

### Challenges involved

- **Federalism issues:** India is a federal country, and each State has its own regional challenges and objectives.
  - ♦ Holding simultaneous elections might lead to State-specific issues being overshadowed by national issues.
    - This could be an advantage for national parties over regional parties. This could affect the federal spirit of the Constitution.
- **Impact of democratic accountability:** Elections are a crucial feedback loop where people can evaluate governments.
  - ♦ Elections are frequent and have at times forced governments to change or add policies in response to electoral feedback.
  - ♦ Elections only once every 5 years may restrict opportunities for voters to submit periodic electoral feedback.
- **Constitutional amendments:** Simultaneous elections would require constitutional amendments because India follows a parliamentary system in which the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies may be dissolved before completing their normal five-year term if the government loses its majority, no alternative government can be formed, or an early election is sought.
  - ♦ State Assemblies may also be affected by President's Rule under Article 356.
  - ♦ Therefore, establishing a fixed and synchronised five-year tenure would require amendments to Articles 83 and 85 concerning Parliament and Articles 172 and 174 concerning State Legislatures, along with changes to Article 356.

### Recommendations of the Law Commission and Committee

- The Law Commission (1999, 2018 draft) and the Parliamentary Standing Committee (2015) examined ways to implement simultaneous elections.
- Their recommendations included holding Lok Sabha and about half of the State Assembly elections in one cycle and the remaining

Assemblies two-and-a-half years later, which would require adjustments to existing tenures and amendments to the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

- They also proposed that a no-confidence motion should be accompanied by a confidence motion to facilitate an alternative government, while any House formed after premature dissolution should serve only the remaining term of the original House.
- By-elections could also be clubbed and held once a year.

### SC on One Nation, One Election

- The Supreme Court declined the proposed interaction between the Chief Justice of India, other judges and the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the One Nation, One Election Bills
- It stated that since the proposed constitutional amendments could later face judicial review, discussing the issue with sitting judges would not be "expedient or desirable."
- The JPC is examining the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which seek to enable simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections. While the committee chairman said the visit was intended only to familiarise members with the Court, the episode highlights the importance of maintaining the separation of powers and judicial independence.

### Conclusion

- The concept of "One Nation, One Election" is a structural reform aimed at optimising India's administrative resources, reducing expenditure on elections, and eliminating the pauses in government that occur due to the unending cycles of campaigning.
- But its success would depend on resolving profound constitutional issues, protecting federalism, and creating mechanisms for the resignation of government prematurely.

Source :IE

## TRADE CONCERNS OVER FORCED LABOUR AND EXCESS CAPACITY

### Context

- India has defended its trade policies at the G20 Trade Ministers' Meeting against U.S. concerns about forced-labour-linked imports and structural excess capacity.

### About forced-labour import

- **A forced-labour import** refers to a good imported into a country that has been **manufactured, wholly or partly, using forced labour** at some stage of its production.
- **Structural excess capacity** refers to a situation where production capacity in a sector persistently exceeds domestic and global demand, potentially resulting in overproduction, falling prices and trade distortions.

### India's Stand on Forced-Labour Trade Measures

- **WTO-Based Approach:** India has emphasised that concerns regarding unfair trade practices should be addressed through existing WTO-compatible instruments, including:
  - ♦ **Anti-dumping duties:** These are additional import duties imposed when a foreign company **exports a product at a price lower than its normal value**, causing or threatening injury to the domestic industry.
  - ♦ **Countervailing duties:** These are additional import duties imposed to offset the **advantage enjoyed by foreign producers because of subsidies** provided by their governments.
- **Evidence-based approach:** India has argued that trade restrictions should be based on specific and verifiable evidence concerning particular goods, companies or supply chains rather than assumptions about an entire country or sector.

### Legal Framework in India

- **The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976**, prohibits systems of labour where people, including children, work under conditions of servitude to pay off debt, and also provides a framework for rehabilitating released labourers.
- **Constitutional Provisions: Article 23** prohibits traffic in human beings, begar (forced labor) and other similar forms of forced labor.
- India has ratified **ILO Convention No. 29** (Forced Labour Convention, 1930) and **ILO Convention No. 105** (Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957).
- **Import prohibition:** In July 2026, India amended its Foreign Trade Policy to prohibit the import of goods produced using forced labour.
- **The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (amended in 2016)** completely bans the employment of children under 14 years in all occupations and processes, while regulating the work of adolescents aged 14 to 18 years.

### What are the challenges?

- **Establishing forced labour in global supply chains** is difficult because imported products may involve multiple layers of producers, subcontractors, intermediaries and suppliers spread across different countries.
- **Small and medium-sized enterprises** will face higher compliance costs because supply-chain audits, certification, documentation and due-diligence mechanisms can be expensive and technically demanding.
- **Different countries adopt different definitions** and enforcement standards for forced labour, creating regulatory fragmentation and increasing compliance burdens for Indian businesses engaged in international trade.
- **Forced-labour-related import restrictions** can raise concerns about protectionism if trade measures are imposed without specific evidence linking particular goods or producers to forced labour.

### Way Ahead

- India and the U.S. should **strengthen bilateral dialogue and evidence-sharing mechanisms** on forced labour and trade distortions.
- Trade-related investigations should maintain transparency, due process and sector-specific evidence.
- India should strengthen domestic enforcement against forced labour and improve the traceability of its supply chains.
- WTO-consistent trade-remedy mechanisms should remain the preferred route for addressing dumping and subsidy-related distortions.

Source: TH

## POST-FACTO ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE

### Context

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has directed environmental appraisal authorities to resume processing pending post-facto environmental clearance cases following the Supreme Court's judgement in Vanashakti v. Union of India.

### What is Post-Facto Environmental Clearance?

- Environmental clearance is generally required before a project is established, expanded or modernised if it falls within the ambit of the **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2006**.

- ♦ Post-facto clearance refers to a mechanism through which projects that had already commenced operations or undertaken expansion without obtaining prior EC could subsequently seek environmental approval.
- The mechanism was introduced as a one-time amnesty window in **2017** and was subsequently operationalised through a **2021 Office Memorandum (OM)**.

#### Existing Legal Framework

- **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** It empowers Central Government to take steps for protection & betterment of environment.
- **The EIA Notification, 2006** provides for previous environmental clearance for certain types of projects and activities.
  - ♦ The framework includes procedures such as screening, scoping, public participation and appraisal, and requires an environmental assessment to be undertaken prior to the commencement of the specified activities.
- **2017 Notification:** The Union government has in 2017 framed a one-time, time-bound procedure to assess projects that had commenced or even grown without the requisite prior environmental clearance.
- **OFFICE MEMORANDUM 2021:** It gives a framework for dealing with cases of non-compliance and applications for post-facto environmental clearance.

#### Ruling in Vanashakti v. Union of India

- **In July 2026**, the Supreme Court quashed the **2021 Office Memorandum** governing the post-facto clearance mechanism.
  - ♦ However, it held that projects that had **already received post-facto approval would remain valid**.
  - ♦ Applications that were pending under the mechanism **were to be processed in accordance with the law**.
- The Court said that **prior environmental clearance is mandatory**, unless the legal framework itself is amended.
- It also upheld the **2017 notification**, considering it a narrowly tailored and time-bound legislative measure.

#### Benefits of Post-Facto Clearance

- **Addressing Existing violations:** A regulatory tool can bring projects that have already started without prior clearance into the formal environmental compliance process.
- **Avoiding regulatory uncertainty :** Projects that operate over lengthy periods of time without a defined environmental status can create confusion for workers, investors, regulators and impacted communities.
  - ♦ A legislative definition of such a procedure may bring clarity as to the future regulatory status of such initiatives.
- **Corrective rather than purely punitive regulation:** This approach is relevant where environmental impacts still have the opportunity to be mitigated or remedied.

#### What are the Concerns?

- **Undermining precautionary principle:** By the time operations begin, the environmental harm may have already been done, making prior assessment ineffective in retrospect.
- **Incentives for non-compliance:** For project proponents, compliance might be less of a concern if a project can get approved after it has begun operating.
  - ♦ This can create a **moral hazard**, where violating the requirement becomes a calculated regulatory risk.
- **Undermining public participation:** Public consultation under the EIA framework is meant to provide an avenue for impacted people to voice concerns before key decisions are enacted.
  - ♦ If the procedure is carried out after significant construction or operation, public participation may be less meaningful in practice.

#### Way Ahead

- Prior environmental clearance should remain the norm, with **retrospective mechanisms treated as exceptional** rather than routine.
- Any special mechanism should have a **clear statutory basis and a limited time window**.
- Projects involving serious or irreversible ecological damage should not be treated in the same manner as minor procedural violations.

Source: IE

## NEWS IN SHORT

### GOBARDHAN SCHEME

#### In News

Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas launched the GOBARDhan Scheme for development of the Compressed Biogas (CBG) sector.

#### GOBARDhan Scheme

- Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBARDhan) was launched in 2018 as an integral part of Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SWM) under Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen).
  - It aimed to convert bio-waste - animal waste, kitchen leftovers, crop residue, and market waste- into biogas and bio-slurry, thereby ensuring cleanliness in villages and enhancing rural lives.
- In August 2026, the Union Cabinet approved the National Circular Bioenergy Scheme- GOBARDhan with a total budget of ₹23,731 crore.
- It is a Central Sector Scheme that provides a ten-year framework from FY 2026-27 to FY 2035-36 to fast-track CBG development in India.

#### Components

- Assured CBG Offtake:** GOBARDhan establishes a dedicated CBG Offtake Assurance framework to provide a reliable and predictable market for producers. Procurement by City Gas Distribution entities will support achievement of the notified CBG Obligation trajectory of 3% in FY 2026-27, 4% in FY 2027-28 and 5% from FY 2028-29 onwards in the CNG (Transport) and PNG (Domestic) segments.
- Stable CBG Pricing Framework:** GOBARDhan introduces a stable administered CBG price of Rs.2,110 per Metric Million British Thermal Unit (MMBTU), supported through a government-backed pricing framework.
- Capital Assistance:** Eligible greenfield CBG projects will receive capital assistance of up to Rs.2 crore per ton per day (TPD) of installed CBG capacity.
  - The support extends beyond core plant machinery to critical value-chain assets for feedstock aggregation, organic manure processing and value addition.
  - Brownfield projects expanding their production capacity will also be eligible.

- Development of Pipeline Infrastructure:** The Scheme supports both cluster-based and standalone pipeline infrastructure connecting CBG plants with trunk pipelines and City Gas Distribution networks.
- Credit Guarantee Support:** A dedicated Credit Guarantee mechanism will strengthen lender confidence and expand the flow of institutional credit to eligible MSME-based CBG projects.
- CBG Ecosystem Challenge Fund:** GOBARDhan establishes a dedicated CBG Ecosystem Challenge Fund to accelerate district-level implementation and strengthen local value chains across the CBG ecosystem.

#### Objectives

- It intends to expand domestic CBG output by around 10 times (to around 5 MMSCMD) using a long-term framework that provides better assurance to investors and lenders.
- It aims to drive a 10-fold increase in compressed biogas (CBG) production, save more than ₹40,000 crore in fuel imports, add over ₹75,000 crore to GDP and create more than 1.5 lakh jobs, as the government seeks to turn agricultural and organic waste into a new source of domestic energy.

Source :TH

### GREAT INDIAN BUSTARDS

#### In News

Ten captive-bred Great Indian Bustards (GIBs) are set to be released into their natural habitat in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer as part of an effort to rebuild the species' wild population.

#### The Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

- The GIBs are large birds standing about one metre tall and weighing about 15 to 18 kgs.
- It is a keystone species of arid and semi-arid open natural ecosystems, has been on the brink of extinction with its wild population hovering in the range of 120-150 for many years.
- According to latest population estimates, the largest population, 130 (+/-20) is in Rajasthan with about 5-6 individuals across Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- It is the State bird of Rajasthan.
- Conservation**
  - Listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in the CMS Convention

and in Appendix I of CITES, as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List

- **Threat:** They have faced threats ranging from habitat loss, poaching, and depredation of individuals and GIB eggs by predators.
  - ♦ More recently, mortality due to collisions with power lines erected to evacuate power from renewable energy projects have posed a threat.
    - The Supreme Court has ordered that renewable energy project power lines situated in areas outside the DNP have to be buried underground by December 2027.

Source :IE

## EXERCISE 'VARUNA'

### In News

Indian Naval Ship Trishul arrived at Toulon, France, to participate in the 24th edition of Exercise 'Varuna'

### Exercise 'Varuna'

- It is the annual bilateral maritime exercise between the Indian Navy and the French Navy.
- It began in 2001, and it has evolved into a cornerstone of cooperation, showcasing the two nations' commitment to enhancing naval interoperability and operational synergy.
- It will witness professional engagements in harbour and at sea, including cross-deck visits, operational interactions and sporting engagements.

### Importance

- It will provide opportunities for both Navies to share experiences and Best Practices, enhance interoperability, and foster greater mutual understanding.

Source: PIB

## INDIA-SPECIFIC TOOL TO PREDICT SICKLE CELL ANAEMIA SEVERITY

### In News

Scientists at the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) have developed an India-specific disease severity score for sickle cell anaemia (SCA).

### Sickle Cell Anaemia

1. It is an inherited blood disorder caused by a mutation in the beta globin gene, which produces abnormal haemoglobin causing red blood cells to assume a sickle shape, leading to anaemia, severe pain episodes, organ damage and other complications.
2. It is most common in individuals of African, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Indian descent.
3. **Causes and Symptoms:** It is a single-gene mutation illness with a wide range of severity. It is caused by a mutation in the HBB gene, which provides instructions for making haemoglobin.
  - ♦ Indians seem to have a more benign profile of disease, partly attributable to higher levels of foetal haemoglobin, with certain catastrophic repercussions less common than in African people.
  - ♦ However, nutritional deficiencies, infections and environmental stressors can aggravate anaemia and disease outcomes.
4. **Diagnosis :** Sickle-cell anemia is typically diagnosed through a blood test. These tests look for the abnormal hemoglobin (HbS) that characterizes the disease.
5. **Treatment:** The management of sickle cell disease (SCD) is aimed at symptomatic relief and prevention of consequences.
  - ♦ Bone marrow/stem-cell transplantation is possibly curative but is costly, has substantial risks and needs a compatible donor.
  - ♦ Hydroxyurea, pain medications, blood transfusions and antibiotics are common therapies. More recently, gene-editing medicines have been developed.
  - ♦ In December 2023, the US FDA approved Casgevy and Lyfgenia, the former being the first FDA-approved therapy using genome-editing technology for SCD.
6. **India's Steps:** In 2023, the Centre launched the National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission to eliminate sickle cell disease as a public health problem by 2047.
  - ♦ The overall aim of the mission is to enable access to affordable and quality health care to all SCD patients, and to lower the prevalence through awareness, change of practices and screening interventions

### Latest Developments

- Scientists at CSIR-CCMB developed an India-specific Severity Score (ISS) for sickle cell anaemia (SCA) utilising clinical data of 171 Indian children.
- The International Paediatric Severity Score had a concordance of just 67% with expert assessment, and researchers have now incorporated clinical criteria often found in Indian infants, such as recurring blood transfusions, severe anaemia and recurrent febrile infections.
- The revised ISS1 improved accuracy to around 83%, and ISS2, based mostly on visible clinical signs, reached almost 85% concordance and reduced reliance on laboratory tests.
- The tool has the potential to support clinicians in making timely treatment decisions, including the management of hydroxyurea, but validation needs to be performed on larger and more diverse cohorts.

Source :TH

## BUXA TIGER RESERVE

### Context

- A three-year-old tigress, T138, has been released into West Bengal's Buxa Tiger Reserve, marking the beginning of a phased tiger reintroduction programme to establish a self-sustaining tiger population.

### About Buxa Tiger Reserve

- Location:** It is in the Alipurduar district of northern **West Bengal**, along the **India–Bhutan border**.
  - Buxa was declared a tiger reserve in **1983** under **Project Tiger**.
- Ecological significance:** It forms part of the Eastern Himalayan foothills and has ecological linkages with the forests of Assam and Bhutan.
- Fauna:** Mammals present include the Asian elephant, gaur, Sambar deer, clouded leopard, Indian leopard, and Asian golden cat.
- Tiger population:** The reserve has experienced a prolonged absence of a stable resident tiger population due to habitat degradation, fragmentation and declining prey availability.
- Rivers:** Sankosh River forms part of the eastern boundary of the reserve along the Assam border.
  - Jayanti River: A prominent seasonal river flowing through the Buxa landscape.

Source: TH

## ANTELOPE REEF IN THE PARACEL ISLANDS

### Context

- China is constructing a runway on Antelope Reef in the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, potentially expanding its military reach in the region.

### About Antelope Reef

- Location:** Antelope Reef is part of the **Paracel Islands (Xisha Islands in Chinese)**, located in the northern **South China Sea**, near China's Hainan Island.
- Territorial claims:** The Paracel Islands are claimed by **China, Vietnam and Taiwan**. However, China has exercised effective control over the archipelago since 1974.

### South China Sea

- It is a marginal sea of the **Western Pacific Ocean**.
- It is located between **southern China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia**.
- It is a crucial maritime gateway and junction for shipping between the **Pacific and Indian Oceans**.



### Dispute in South China Sea

- Southeast Asian countries like **China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan** have had disputes over the contentious South China Sea region for centuries.
- The two primary points of contention are: The **Spratly Islands** and the **Paracel Islands** in the sea.
- Nine-dash line:** China stakes claim to most of the region and at the heart of this claim is the U-shaped '**nine-dash line**' that includes as much as **90 percent** of these waters.
  - This dotted line was adopted from Chinese maps in the 1940s, and represents Beijing's claim over the sea and all the land features that are contained within the line.

Source: RT

## G7 NATIONS TO RELEASE 100 MILLION BARRELS OF OIL

### Context

- The Group of Seven (G7) nations have agreed to release **100 million barrels of oil** over four months to ease soaring fuel prices, with a substantial release of diesel planned in the first 20 days.

### About

- The coordinated release aims to increase the **short-term availability of petroleum**.
- The International Energy Agency (IEA)** will coordinate the release, highlighting the importance of international cooperation during major energy-market disruptions.

### Group of Seven (G7)

- It is an intergovernmental organization** of seven countries that are the world's most industrialized and developed economies.
- Member:** France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, United States of America, Canada and Japan.
- History:** It traces its origin to an informal meeting of the Finance Ministers of France, West Germany, the US, Great Britain and Japan (Group of Five) in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.
  - Canada** joined the group in **1976** and the **European Union (EU)** began attending the meetings from **1977**.
  - It was called the G8 after the original seven were joined by Russia in 1997 and it returned to being called G7 when Russia was expelled as a member in 2014 following the latter's annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine.

### International Energy Agency (IEA)

- The International Energy Agency (IEA) **was set up in the wake of the 1973-1974 oil crisis** to help industrialised countries respond to major oil shocks.
- Headquarters:** Paris, France.
- Members:** The IEA is made up of **32 Member countries** including the United States, Canada, Turkey, United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea etc.
  - Association Countries:** India, China, Indonesia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand etc.

- Criteria for membership:** A candidate country to the IEA **must be a member country of the OECD**. In addition, it must demonstrate several requirements. These are:
  - Crude oil and/or product reserves equivalent to **90 days** of the previous year's net imports,
  - A demand restraint programme to reduce national oil consumption by up to **10%**,
  - Legislation and organisation to operate the **Coordinated Emergency Response Measures (CERM)** on a national basis.

Source: Air

## SCO NATIONAL COORDINATORS' MEETING IN PAKISTAN

### In News

India sent a senior official to Pakistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) national coordinators' meeting, the first visit by an Indian official delegation since Operation Sindoor last year.

### Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- It is a ten-member multilateral organization, established on 15 June 2001 by the leaders of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
  - These countries, except Uzbekistan, had been members of the Shanghai-5 group formed in April 1996.
- Members:** the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan;
  - 2 observer states – the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Mongolia;
- Mandate :** It has since developed into a major regional organisation focused on peace, security, stability, economic cooperation and social-cultural development.
  - Its core principles, known as the "Shanghai Spirit," include mutual trust, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs and peaceful resolution of differences.

- ♦ It describes itself as open and not directed against any other state or region, and it is not a military or defence alliance.

### SCO national coordinators' meeting

- The SCO Council of National Coordinators meets under a rotational annual chair. Pakistan assumed the presidency after the Bishkek summit on August 31-September 1, so the meeting took place in Islamabad.
- For India, as an SCO member, attending was an obligation.
- It was also the first such visit since External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Pakistan for the SCO heads of government meeting in October 2024

### Key takeaways for India

- **Diplomatic tightrope:** India is walking a diplomatic tightrope to monitor developments by engaging with Pakistan and China through the SCO and BRICS, as it has strained relations with both countries, and to preserve its interests and not allow any narrative or territorial claim to go unchallenged.
- **PM Modi's possible Pakistan visit:** Pakistan likely to invite PM Modi at next SCO leaders' conference

in Pakistan. India's choice on participation will be a political one, and the existing SCO involvement can help in assessing if such a visit is viable.

- **Trump factor:** The Trump factor adds an element of unpredictability in India-Pakistan ties as the continuing Russia-Ukraine and US-Iran disputes have diverted world attention, while Trump's alleged backing for Pakistan's military leadership has reinforced its position.
  - ♦ Therefore, India has to weigh the implications of any future war with Pakistan during Trump's tenure carefully, while retaining limited diplomatic engagement to keep the channels of communication open and lower the risk of escalation.
- **Replying to Pakistan's claims:** India is likely to respond strongly to Pakistani pronouncements on Kashmir and terrorism, as it has done in international platforms like SCO and the UN.
- **China problem:** The China challenge is more relevant for India than the Pakistan front, especially because to the border dispute since 2020.
  - ♦ Hence, stability on both sides continues to be a strategic objective, and multilateral fora offer an opportunity for easing tensions.