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INDIA'S LITERACY LEAP: JOURNEY TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT

Context

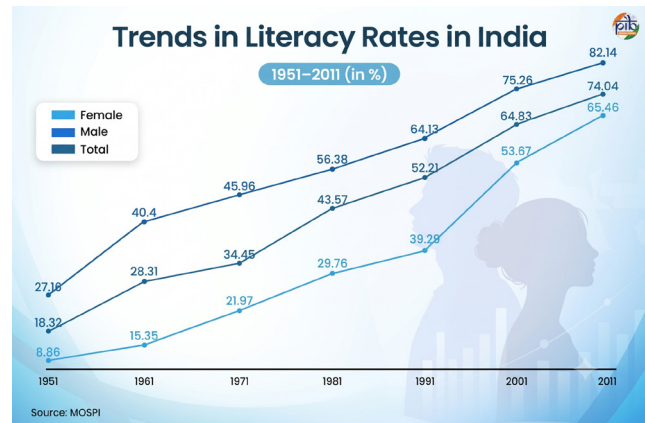
- India's progress in literacy, with the **PLFS 2025** reporting an overall literacy rate of **81.1%**, while stressing persistent rural, gender and educational-stage gaps.

About Literacy

- The **Department of School Education and Literacy** defines literacy as the ability to **read, write and compute with comprehension**, including the ability to identify, understand, interpret and create, along with **digital and financial literacy**.
 - A State/UT attaining **95% literacy** is considered fully literate.
- According to Census 2011, literacy is an ability to **read and write with understanding** in any language for individuals **aged 7 years and above**.
- According to UNESCO**, literacy is the ability to read, write, use numbers and digital materials to solve problems and participate in **work, learning and everyday life**.
 - Thus, literacy is increasingly a foundation for inclusion, equality and human development.

India's Literacy Progress

- India has witnessed a major transformation:
 - Overall literacy increased from **18.32% in 1951 to 74.04% in 2011**.
 - Male literacy rose from **27.15% to 82.14%**, while female literacy increased from **8.86% to 65.46%**.
 - Urban literacy increased from **34.59% to 84.1%**, while rural literacy rose from **12.10% to 67.8%**.
 - Between 2001–11, **rural female literacy grew by 26%**, compared with 10% among rural males.
 - PLFS 2025** places overall literacy at **81.1%**. Among persons aged 7 years and above, urban literacy was **89%** and rural literacy **77.4%**; rural female literacy stood at only **70.3%**.



School Education: Access, Retention and Learning

- Literacy gains depend upon children entering, staying within and progressing through school.
- According to **UDISE+ 2025-26**:
 - 24.72 crore** students were enrolled in schools.
 - GER**: 42.8% Foundational, 91.7% Preparatory, 89.6% Middle and 71.7% Secondary.
 - Dropout rates rise** across stages, from 1.8% at Preparatory to 7% at Secondary.
 - Retention falls** from 98.5% at Foundational to 51.9% at Secondary.
 - Transition rates** are 99.2% Foundational–Preparatory, 93.8% Preparatory–Middle and 88.3% Middle–Secondary.
- Thus, **secondary-level retention and learning continuity** remain important concerns.

Higher Education and Human Capital

- Higher education participation has expanded:
 - Enrolment increased from 3.42 crore in 2014-15 to **4.50 crore** in 2023-24.
 - GER increased from 23.7% to **30%** over the same period.
 - Higher education out-turn increased from 88.28 lakh in 2014-15 to over **1.09 crore** in 2023-24.
- This expansion, including greater participation of women and disadvantaged groups, supports human-capital formation and the **NEP 2020 target of 50% higher-education GER by 2035**.

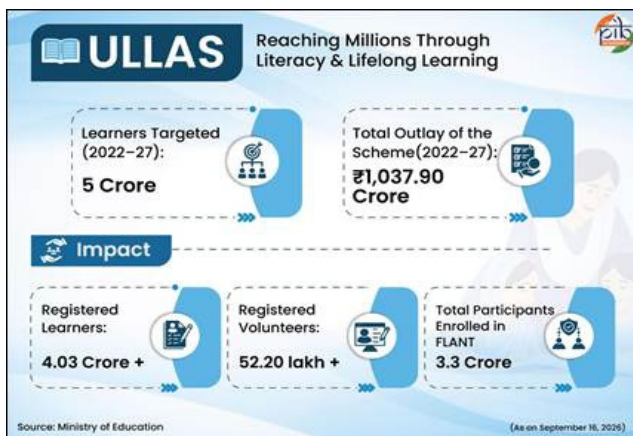
Key Issues & Concerns in India's Literacy

- Rural–urban Divide**: PLFS 2025 shows a 11.6 percentage-point gap in literacy between rural and urban populations aged 7+.

- **Gender Disparity:** Rural female literacy remains significantly below male literacy.
- **Secondary-stage Attrition:** Dropout and declining retention become pronounced at higher school stages.
- **Beyond Basic Literacy:** Digital, financial, numeracy and critical life skills are increasingly essential.
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Regional and social disparities require sustained attention.
- **Learning Quality:** Enrolment alone needs to translate into foundational competencies and meaningful learning.

Government Initiatives

- **ULLAS (New India Literacy Programme):** It targets adults aged 15+ who missed formal schooling.
 - ♦ It combines functional literacy, numeracy, critical life skills and lifelong learning through a **hybrid model**.
 - ♦ It aims to cover **5 crore learners (2022–27)** with an outlay of **₹1,037.90 crore**.
 - ♦ About **4.03 crore learners** and **52.20 lakh volunteers** have registered, while over **3.3 crore** have participated in FLNAT so far.
 - ♦ **Ten (10) States/UTs** have declared themselves **fully literate** between 2024 and 2026. These include Ladakh, Mizoram, Goa, Tripura, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir.



- **NIPUN Bharat (2021):** It seeks **universal foundational literacy and numeracy by 2026-27**, ensuring foundational skills by Grade 2 for **children aged 3–8 years**.

Other Supporting Schemes:

- ♦ **Samagra Shiksha:** Inclusive schooling, foundational learning, teacher development and vocational integration.
- ♦ **PM SHRI:** Strengthening **14,500+ exemplar schools**.
- ♦ **PM e-VIDYA:** Multimodal digital, online and on-air learning, expected to benefit nearly **25 crore children**.
- ♦ **PM POSHAN:** Hot cooked meals for **11.20 crore students** in 10.36 lakh schools, supporting nutrition and school participation.

Literacy and Viksit Bharat

- Literacy contributes to **women's empowerment, social inclusion, employability, productivity, innovation and economic participation**.
- It is central to **UN SDG 4**, which seeks inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning.

Way Forward

- India's challenge is shifting from **literacy access to literacy quality**. Priorities should include:
 - ♦ Bridging **rural-urban and gender disparities**;
 - ♦ Strengthening foundational learning;
 - ♦ Reducing secondary-stage dropouts;
 - ♦ Expanding digital and financial literacy;
 - ♦ Improving teacher capacity and learning outcomes;
 - ♦ Linking education with employable and future-ready skills;
 - ♦ Sustaining community participation in adult literacy;

Source: PIB

RISE IN CYBERCRIMES IN INDIA

Context

- As per the **NCRB Crime in India 2024 Report**, the overall crime rate in India **declined by 6% in 2024** compared with 2023 but there was an increase of over **17% in cybercrime cases**.

About Cybercrime

- Cybercrime refers to criminal activities that involve the **use of computers, networks, and digital technologies**.
 - ♦ It encompasses a **wide range of illicit activities** conducted in the virtual space, often with the intent to compromise, damage,

or gain unauthorized access to computer systems, networks, and data.

- ♦ Cybercriminals employ **various techniques and tools** to exploit vulnerabilities in networks, and they may target individuals, organizations, or even governments.
- **Nature of Cybercrimes:**
 - ♦ Frequently receiving **calls about deliveries** they never ordered, **high-return investment scam calls**, **bank officials** asking for personal account details, and calls about their **phones being linked to illegal activities** or an unknown number claiming to be their friend urgently in need of money.
 - ♦ **Calls from police or someone in authority** claiming that their friend or relative is in danger or has committed some type of crime.
- **Modus Operandi:**
 - ♦ Instead of relying solely on technical expertise, fraudsters target **social relationships and institutional credibility**.
 - ♦ Investment scams appeal to the **aspiration of getting rich quickly**, delivery scams draw on **trust in e-commerce**, bank impersonation uses **institutional credibility**, and fake police calls **exploit fear of authority**.

Impact of Cyber Crimes

- **National Security Threats:** Cyber crimes pose a threat to national security when state-sponsored actors or criminal organizations target critical infrastructure, government institutions, or military systems.
- **Data Breaches:** Data breaches lead to the exposure of personal information, trade secrets, intellectual property, and other confidential data, causing severe damage to the affected entities.
- **Financial Losses:** Cyber fraud, ransomware, phishing and online scams can cause substantial financial losses to individuals, banks, businesses and governments.
- **Disruption of Services:** Cyber attacks disrupt essential services such as power grids, communication networks, and transportation systems.
- **Erosion of Trust:** Repeated cyber fraud and data breaches reduce public confidence in digital payments, e-governance, online banking and other digital services.

Main Challenges in Tackling the Scams

- **High-Tech Tools:** Use of deepfakes, number spoofing, encrypted messaging, and dark web data leaks makes attribution difficult.
- **Psychological Pressure:** Fraudsters exploit fear, urgency, and authority figures, especially targeting senior citizens.
- **Instant Payment Rails:** Rapid money transfers via UPI and online banking allow scammers to siphon funds before accounts can be frozen.
- **Enforcement & Reporting Barriers:** Delayed victim reporting due to fear or embarrassment, combined with cross-border legal challenges.

Initiatives by Government of India to Prevent Cybercrimes

- **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In):** CERT-In is the **national nodal agency** for responding to cybersecurity incidents.
 - ♦ It provides proactive and reactive cybersecurity support and plays a crucial role in ensuring the security and resilience of the country's cyber infrastructure.
- **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC):** NCIIPC is responsible for protecting critical information infrastructure from cyber threats.
 - ♦ It identifies and designates critical sectors and advises organizations in these sectors on enhancing their cybersecurity measures.
- **Cyber Crime Prevention against Women & Children (CCPWC) scheme:** The Ministry of Home Affairs has provided financial assistance to all the States & UTs under the scheme to support their efforts for setting up of cyber forensic-cum-training laboratories, training, and hiring of junior cyber consultants.
- **Public Awareness:** Regular alerts distributed through SMS, railway/airport displays, and the CyberDost initiative.
- **Anti-Spoofing Systems:** DoT measures to identify and block incoming international calls disguised as domestic Indian numbers.
- **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** It provides a framework and ecosystem for Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) to deal with cyber crimes in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.
 - ♦ 'Joint Cyber Coordination Teams' have been constituted for seven regions at

Mewat, Jamtara, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Visakhapatnam and Guwahati under the I4C.

- **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal:** It is launched to enable the public to report incidents pertaining to all types of cyber crimes.
 - ♦ **A toll-free number 1930** has been operationalized to get assistance in lodging online cyber complaints.
 - ♦ The **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System** module has also been launched for immediate reporting of financial frauds and to stop siphoning off funds by the fraudsters.
- **Cyber Swachhta Kendra (Botnet Cleaning and Malware Analysis Centre):** This initiative is aimed at creating awareness about **botnet and malware infections** and providing **tools for detection and cleaning**.
 - ♦ It also provides cyber security tips and best practices for citizens and organisations

Source: TH

ASSISTED DYING

Context

- Pope Leo XIV has termed assisted dying “**false compassion**”, reinforcing the Catholic Church’s view that life is sacred from **conception to natural death**.

Key Concepts

- **Passive euthanasia:** Withholding or withdrawing life support.
- **Active euthanasia:** Deliberate administration of a lethal agent by a doctor.
- **Assisted suicide:** The patient self administers a lethal substance provided by a doctor.

Arguments Against

- **Sanctity of life:** Life is a gift and not a personal possession. Ending it undermines human dignity.
- **Compassion redefined:** True compassion means accompanying the sick through palliative care, not eliminating the sufferer.
- **Vulnerability:** Elderly, disabled and poor patients may feel like a burden on family or the health system.
- **Medical ethics:** It conflicts with the Hippocratic principle of “do no harm” and erodes trust in doctors.

Arguments For

- **Autonomy:** Individuals should decide the manner of their death, especially in irreversible suffering.
- **Dignity:** Article 21 covers dignity in living and, by extension, in dying. For ex: the Supreme Court in **Common Cause (2018)** recognised the right to die with dignity.
- **Relief from suffering:** Terminal illness often brings pain that palliation cannot fully control.
- **Resource use:** Prolonged futile treatment burdens families and scarce ICU capacity.

India’s Position

- **Aruna Shanbaug (2011):** The Supreme Court permitted passive euthanasia with High Court oversight.
- **Common Cause v Union of India (2018):** Passive euthanasia and advance medical directives (living wills) were legalised.
- **2023 modification:** Procedures were simplified. Medical boards now decide within set timelines, and living wills need only notary or gazetted officer attestation.
- **Active euthanasia:** It remains illegal and can attract culpable homicide provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.
- **Mental Healthcare Act 2017:** It presumes severe stress in suicide attempts and decriminalises them in practice.
- **Palliative care:** The National Programme for Palliative Care (2012) exists, but access remains very limited. Kerala’s community model is the notable exception.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Weak palliative infrastructure:** Choosing death is not a free choice when good care is unavailable.
- **Implementation gaps:** Few living wills are executed, and hospitals lack clarity on medical board procedures.
- **Risk of misuse:** Property disputes and family pressure can distort consent, especially with low health literacy and high out of pocket health spending.
- **Determining capacity:** Depression can mimic a wish to die, so mental health screening is essential.
- **Ethical pluralism:** Religious diversity in India makes a uniform position on end of life care contentious.

- **Doctor's dilemma:** Fear of legal liability leads to defensive medicine and either overtreatment or undertreatment.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen palliative care first:** Integrate it into Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres and train doctors and nurses.
- **Clear legislation:** A dedicated law on end of life decisions, as recommended by the Law Commission's 241st Report (2012) and 196th Report (2006), would end reliance on judicial guidelines alone.
- **Safeguards:** These should include multiple independent medical opinions, psychiatric evaluation, cooling off periods and judicial or board oversight.
- **Awareness:** Promote living wills through digital registries, such as linking them to health records under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission.
- **Ethics committees:** Hospitals should set up standing bioethics committees for transparent decisions.
- **International learning:** Study Belgian and Dutch experience with expansion of eligibility, and Swiss and Oregon models of tight regulation.

Source: HT

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Context

- Recent disaster response initiatives in Nepal have highlighted the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and crowdsourced information to enhance the speed and accuracy of disaster management.

Role of AI in Managing Disaster

- **Early warning and prediction:** AI is able to process huge datasets of historical weather records and current meteorological observations to provide forecasts that are quicker and more specific to a particular location.
 - ♦ **Google Flood Hub** utilises weather and hydrological information to provide advance information on flood hazards.
- **Hazard Mapping:** AI is able to integrate satellite imagery, geographic data, meteorological information, maps and administrative databases to identify areas at risk from certain hazards.

- **Response, Relief and Rescue:** Disasters create an overwhelming amount of information from smartphones, social media, emergency calls, drones and government databases.

- ♦ AI is able to **manage this unstructured data** and discover useful patterns far quicker than manual systems.
- ♦ In the Nepal disaster, an AI-powered webpage helped link **crowdsourced information on missing persons** with official records of people killed or injured.
- ♦ **Thermal imaging drones** can locate human heat signatures under rubble and guide rescue crews to probable victims.
- **Post-Disaster Recovery:** AI and satellite-based techniques can help detect isolated villages, destroyed infrastructure, blocked highways and suitable areas for emergency helicopter operations.
 - ♦ Authorities can use this information to prioritise the distribution of food, medicines, shelter and other relief goods.

Key Artificial Intelligence (AI) Applications

- **GraphCast:** An AI-driven weather prediction system that can quickly produce worldwide weather forecasts.
- **Google Flood Hub:** AI-powered flood forecasting and early-warning information.
- **DisasterAWARE:** Uses geographic and disaster information to enable hazard monitoring and risk assessment.
- **SKAI:** Uses satellite photography and artificial intelligence to help rapidly analyse disaster damage.

What are the Challenges?

- AI models depend on **large enough datasets that are accurate and dependable**, which may not be available during disasters.
- Communities with **limited access to smartphones, internet connectivity or digital services** may be under-represented in AI-generated assessments.
- Social media and crowd-sourced platforms can generate significant amounts of erroneous, duplicate or **misleading information**.
- Artificial intelligence systems taught on one geographical area may not function similarly well in another area with **varied terrain, climate and settlement trends**.

- Information concerning missing persons, locations and groups affected by the incident raises questions about **data protection**.
- **Mistakes made by AI** may be serious if the results are utilised to make evacuation, rescue or relief decisions.

Way Ahead

- Integrate AI with **existing disaster-management institutions** rather than treating it as a substitute for **human decision-making**.
- **Build India-centric hyperlocal datasets** on weather, terrain, infrastructure, vulnerability and past disasters.
- **Create automated systems** in regional and local languages to facilitate accessibility during emergencies.
- Strengthen interoperability among **IMD, ISRO, NDMA, state disaster-management authorities**, telecom providers and local administrations.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

GRASSLANDS

Context

- A new study has found that **grasslands that evolved over millennia rarely return to their original state**, even when they recover, the regenerated grasslands are different species.

Grasslands

- Grasslands exist **on every continent except for Antarctica**, **One-fourth** of the planet is covered by grasslands.
- In Africa, they're called **savannas and veldts**; **pampas** in South America; **steppes** in Europe and Asia; **prairies or grasslands** in North America; and **rangelands** in Australia.
- **The two most fundamental characteristics of grasslands are** the presence of grass species as the dominant type of plant in the area and the general lack of taller vegetation.
 - ♦ They receive **more rain than deserts but less precipitation than forests**.
 - ♦ They are usually found in the **dry interior of continents**, between the mountains and deserts.

- **Two subgroups: tropical and temperate.**

- ♦ **Tropical grasslands:** The climate is generally hot and wet, and though the primary vegetation is grass, some scattered trees may still grow here.
- ♦ **Temperate grasslands:** They are located between the equator and the poles. These grasslands endure greater temperature variation and include both prairies with longer grasses and steppes with shorter grasses.

Ecological Significance

- **Carbon storage:** A significant proportion of carbon is stored below ground in grassland root systems and soils.
- **Biodiversity:** Provide habitat for species such as blackbuck, Indian wolf, Great Indian Bustard and floricans.
- **Livelihoods:** Support pastoralism and livestock grazing.
- **Soil conservation:** Dense root networks help reduce soil erosion.

Grasslands of India

- **Himalayan and Terai grasslands**, the **Thar desert and Banni grasslands** of Gujarat, **Deccan savannas, Aravalli scrublands**, the **Yamuna-Chambal ravines, rocky plateaus of the Western Ghats**, grasslands of the **central Nicobar Islands** and **Tamil Nadu's Theri Kaadu scrub landscapes**.

Source: TH

INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION (IWC)

Context

- India underlined the need for conservation of whales and other cetaceans at the 70th meeting of the **International Whaling Commission (IWC-70)**, being held in **Hobart, Australia**.

About

- The **International Whaling Commission (IWC)** was set up under the **International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling**, signed in **1946**, as the global body responsible for the management of whaling and conservation of whales.
 - ♦ A commercial whaling moratorium was **adopted in 1982** and came into full force in **1986**.

- The Commission continues to **regulate Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling**, which is conducted by indigenous communities, often in remote parts of the world.
- The Convention recognises **three different types of whaling**: commercial, aboriginal subsistence and special permit (also known as scientific) whaling.
- Its membership includes **89 governments** from all over the world.
 - ♦ India has been a member of the International Whaling Commission since **1981**.

Source: PIB

INDIA'S FIRST PRAMAAN CERTIFICATES

Context

- The Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister handed over **India's first PRAMAAN certificates** under the **Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS)**.

About

- **PRAMAAN**: Programme for Recognition and Accreditation of sustainable Management practices for Agroforestry And Natural forestry resources.
- **The certificates were presented to**:
 - ♦ the Andhra Pradesh Forest Development Corporation (APFDC) for its plantations spread over 33,000 hectares,
 - ♦ and to Govind Mohapatra, a bamboo farmer associated with the Odisha Bamboo Development Agency (OBDA).

About India's First PRAMAAN Certificates

- PRAMAAN is a **nationally accepted framework** for certification of **forests, wood and non-timber forest products**.
- The initiative seeks to strengthen **linkages between certified forests and agroforestry products** and **domestic and international markets**.
- Under the framework, Forest Management certification is assessed against Indian Forest Management Standards derived from the **National Working Plan Code 2023**.
- **Independent audits** by accredited certification bodies form the basis of certification.

Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme

- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change launched the Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme in **2023**.
- It is the **national forest certification scheme** which offers **voluntary third-party certification** designed to promote **sustainable forest management and agroforestry in the country**.
 - ♦ The scheme includes **forest management certification, tree outside forest management certification, and chain of custody certification**.
- The scheme is overseen by the **Indian Forest and Wood Certification Council**, which acts as a multistakeholder advisory body.
- **Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal** acts as the scheme operating agency.
- **The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies** accredit the certification bodies which carry out **independent audits and assess adherence** of various entities on the standards prescribed under the scheme.

Source: DD

INDIA AND JAPAN UNICORN NAVAL RADAR AGREEMENT

Context

- Japan called on India to fast-track internal official processing of the agreement on the **UNICORN (Unified Complex Radio Antenna) naval radar system**.

About

- The **UNICORN agreement** between India and Japan is the **first-ever joint defence co-development project** formalised during the **16th India– Japan Annual Summit**.
- It is classified militarily as a **cutting-edge, weapon-grade naval stealth antenna system**.
- It is developed originally for the **Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force** and is the primary stealth feature of Japan's advanced Mogami-class stealth frigates.
 - ♦ It is enclosed inside a smooth, unified horn-shaped dome, therefore, a **warship appears much smaller or even completely invisible on hostile radar screens**.
 - ♦ On the other hand, traditional warships have exposed and "cluttered" antenna arrays that produce large radar returns.

- Under the UNICORN agreement, **state-run Bharat Electronics Limited** of India will collaborate with Japanese defence majors to **co-produce the advanced stealth mast for future warships**.
- The UNICORN mast is slated to **replace the Indian Navy's legacy Advanced Composite Communication System (ACCS)**
 - ♦ It is planned for integration onto **future surface combatants, next generation frigates and guided-missile destroyers**.
- This Indo-Japan pact makes India only the **second Asian nation** after the **Philippines** to receive sensitive Japanese defence technology following its **relaxation of strict post-WWII defence export restrictions**.

Source: TH

PASHUDHAN BIMA PORTAL

In News

- The Government launched the **Pashudhan Bima Portal** in New Delhi.

Pashudhan Bima Portal

- It is a **comprehensive digital platform** aimed at transforming livestock insurance delivery across the country under the Livestock Insurance activity of the **National Livestock Mission (NLM)**.
- It is developed and administered by the **Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD)**.
- It will enable streamlined policy issuance, claim processing, monitoring, and reporting in case of animals insured under the Livestock Insurance Scheme of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying.
- It will be **available in 13 languages**, including 11 regional languages plus Hindi and English, making livestock insurance more accessible to pastoralists and rural livestock owners.
 - ♦ Farmers will now be able to submit their insurance applications online, while the entire process will be monitored digitally.

Source: AIR

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION TAG TO MANDAR

Context

- Jharkhand's traditional folk musical instrument, the **Mandar**, has received the **Geographical Indication (GI)** tag.

About Mandar

- Mandar is a traditional **double-headed percussion instrument** widely used in the folk music and dance traditions of Jharkhand.
- It is particularly associated with the **Oraon** and other tribal communities of the **Chotanagpur region**.
- The instrument plays an important role in community celebrations, religious festivals and traditional dances, including **Sarhul** and **Karma**.



Geographical Indication (GI)

- A geographical indication (GI) is a **sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin** and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
 - ♦ In order to function as a GI, a sign must identify a **product as originating in a given place**.
- Geographical indications are typically **used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products**.
- **Darjeeling Tea from West Bengal** was the first product in India to receive a GI tag.

Regulation of Geographical Indication (GI)

- As a form of intellectual property, GIs are recognised internationally under the **Paris Convention** for the Protection of Industrial Property and the **World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)**.
- **In India**, their registration and protection are overseen by the **Geographical Indications Registry under the 1999 Act**.
 - ♦ India established a legal framework for protecting products linked to specific regions through the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999** and the accompanying Rules notified in **2002**.

- ♦ The framework became operational in **2003**, and **GI registrations commenced in 2004–05**.
- ♦ The registration of a geographical indication is valid for a period of **10 years**.
- The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Rules, 2002, were amended in **2025**.

Source: AIR

CENTRE REDUCES IMPORT DUTY ON EDIBLE OILS

In News

- The Union government reduced the **Basic Customs Duty (BCD)** on major imported crude edible oils, including palm oil.
 - ♦ Oils are a high frequency household purchase, so lower prices help contain food inflation and protect real incomes of the poor.

Basic Customs Duty

- It is an **indirect tax** that is levied on imported goods, and it is usually calculated based on the assessed value of the product.
- It can vary from **zero to one hundred percent** depending on factors such as the HSN code of the product as well as the country from where it is imported.
- Goods that are imported under **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** are usually exempted from **BCD**, which is revised from time to time by the Union Ministry of Finance.

Why Crude Oils Matter?

- **Landed cost:** Duty is part of the landed cost, so cutting it on crude oils lowers input cost for the entire supply chain.
- **Value addition at home:** Crude oil is refined in India, which keeps processing jobs and margins domestic. For ex: coastal refineries at Kandla, Mangalore and Kakinada depend on crude imports.
- **Palm oil's role:** Palm is the cheapest and most imported oil, so any duty change on it moves overall edible oil prices. It is sourced mainly from Indonesia and Malaysia.

- **Substitution effect:** Edible oils compete with one another, so lower palm duty also restrains soybean and sunflower prices.

India's Response

- **National Mission on Edible Oils, Oil Palm (2021):** Promotes domestic palm cultivation, with focus on the North East and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- **National Mission on Edible Oils, Oilseeds (2024):** Aims to raise oilseed production through quality seeds and value chain support.
- **MSP and procurement:** PM AASHA and price support protect oilseed farmers.
- **Stock monitoring:** Stock limits and price tracking under the Essential Commodities Act deter hoarding.
- **Technology:** High yield varieties and the pending GM mustard debate are central to reducing dependence.

Source: TH

GRADED RESPONSE ACTION PLAN (GRAP)

In News

- The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has approved the revised **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) schedule** for the National Capital Region.

Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)

- The **GRAP framework** was approved by the **Supreme Court in 2016**, and its implementation has since been overseen by the **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)** (statutory body)
- It is a **mechanism to decide the actions that governments in Delhi-NCR must take** as the levels of air pollution rise through various stages.
- It aims to put certain steps or restrictions in place as soon as air pollution reaches a specific level, instead of waiting for the air to become worse.

Stages

- The Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) is implemented in **four stages**, depending on the level of the Air Quality Index (AQI).

Source: TH

