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PACS ENSURE EFFICIENT USE OF PUBLIC MONEY: LOK SABHA SPEAKER

Context

- Lok Sabha Speaker urged **Public Accounts Committees (PACs)** for time-bound action on pending audit observations and greater scrutiny of the outcomes of government spending.

Recommendations by LS Speaker

- **For infrastructure projects,** committees should, wherever appropriate, visit sites to examine construction quality, timely completion and compliance with prescribed standards.
- **Scrutiny of welfare schemes** should assess their actual impact on beneficiaries rather than focus solely on the amount spent, he said.
- **Artificial intelligence, data analytics and other technologies** could help committees analyse large volumes of expenditure data, identify trends, detect potential irregularities and monitor pending audit observations.
- **Parliamentary Discussion:** At least one PAC report, along with the government's action taken on it, be discussed during every session of Parliament.

About Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

- The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is a **parliamentary committee** that **examines the government's expenditure** and ensures that public money is spent in accordance with the approval granted by Parliament.
- It is **one of the three Financial Committees of Parliament,** along with:
  - Estimates Committee.
  - Committee on Public Undertakings.
- It was established in **1921,** following the Government of India Act, 1919.
  - It is a **Standing Parliamentary Committee,** a standing committee is a specific type of parliamentary committee that is permanent and continuous, reconstituted periodically.
- **Constitutional Status:** Not a constitutional body; formed under **Rule 308** of the **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business** in **Lok Sabha**.
- **Composition:** 22 members (15 from **Lok Sabha**, 7 from **Rajya Sabha**)
  - Members are elected by **Parliament every year** through the system of **proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote.**
- The term of office of members is **one year.**
- **A minister cannot be elected as a member of the PAC.**
- The Chairperson is appointed by the **Speaker of the Lok Sabha.**
  - **Since 1967,** by convention, the **Chairperson of the PAC is appointed from the Opposition.**
- **Functions:**
  - Examines **audit reports of the CAG of India,**
  - Scrutinises **public expenditure** to ensure it is not extravagant or irregular.
  - Ensures accountability of the **Executive to the Legislature.**
  - Works in tandem with **CAG** to maintain **fiscal discipline and transparency.**

What are Parliamentary Standing Committees?

- Parliamentary Standing Committees (PSCs) are **permanent committees of Parliament** constituted to examine, scrutinise, and oversee the functioning of the executive.
- These committees **continue to function throughout the year,** unlike ad hoc committees which are temporary.
- **Types of Parliamentary Standing Committees:**
  - **Department-Related Standing Committees (DRSCs):** It examines demands for Grants of ministries, bills referred to them and policy issues. Example: Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance.
  - **Financial Committees:** Public Accounts Committee (PAC), Estimates Committee and Committee on Public Undertakings.
  - **Other Standing Committees:** Business Advisory Committee, Committee on Privileges and Rules Committee.

Role of Parliamentary Standing Committees

- **Detailed Financial Scrutiny Beyond Parliament:** Parliamentary debates often lack time for detailed examination of budgetary provisions.
  - Standing Committees undertake **granular scrutiny of Demands for Grants,** expenditure trends, and utilisation patterns.
- **Evidence-Based and Non-Partisan Oversight:** Committees function in a non-partisan manner, relying on **expert inputs and data-driven**

analysis. Their reports provide **objective evaluation of policy implementation and fiscal discipline.**

- **Monitoring of Executive Functioning:** Committees operate throughout the year and ensure continuous oversight over ministries and departments. This enhances transparency and accountability in governance.

Challenges in India's Budgetary Forecasting and Utilisation

- **Unrealistic and Inflated Budgetary Forecasting:** Ministries often project expenditure requirements without realistic assessment of implementation capacity. The continuous rise in allocations despite poor utilisation reflects weak forecasting mechanisms.
- **Underutilisation of Allocated Funds:** There exists a significant gap between Budget Estimates (BE) and Actual Expenditure (AE). Underutilisation leads to idle public resources and delayed developmental outcomes.
- **Incremental Budgeting without Outcome Orientation:** Budget allocations continue to rise annually without linking them to past performance or outcomes.
  - This reflects the dominance of input-based budgeting rather than outcome-based budgeting.
- **Fiscal Indiscipline:** Ministries resort to excessive spending in the final quarter to exhaust allocated funds. Such spending **violates Quarterly Expenditure Plan (QEP)** norms and fiscal prudence principles.

Way Ahead

- The observations of the Parliamentary Committee reaffirm its critical role in **ensuring executive accountability** and fiscal prudence.
- Strengthening outcome-based budgeting and integration of policy with finance is essential for improving **governance outcomes and restoring credibility** to India's fiscal framework.

Source: DD

WORLD DAY AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

Context

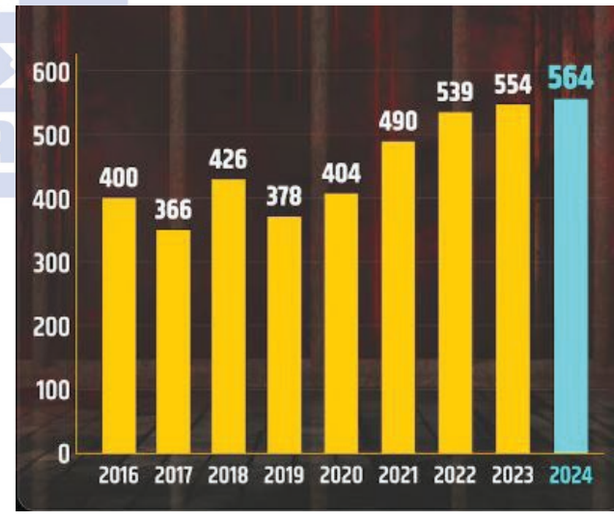
- The World Day Against the Death Penalty is **observed annually on October 10** to advocate for the **abolition of capital punishment.**
  - It was designated and first organized by the **World Coalition Against the Death Penalty in 2003.**

About

- **In Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980),** the Constitution Bench **upheld the death penalty,** but **imposed specific conditions** in the shape of guidelines for the exercise of judicial discretion.
- **Now in Section 393(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023,** life imprisonment was to be the norm, and **death sentence could be imposed only for "special reasons".**
  - Courts were to **weigh the circumstances of the crime** alongside those of the accused, and impose death only where life imprisonment was **"unquestionably foreclosed".**

Death Sentence in India

- **In 2024, for the second consecutive year**, the Supreme Court of India **didn't confirm any death sentence,** revealed a report from **Project 39A of the National Law University Delhi.**
- **Prisoners on Death Row in India**



- In India, capital punishment, also known as the death penalty, is carried out by **"hanging by the neck until death".**
- **Several countries like Portugal, the Netherlands, France and Australia** have moved towards **abolishing executions**, countries like the **US, Iran, China and India** have retained a **legal framework** to enable the death penalty.
- Capital punishment, which the Supreme Court has repeatedly stated should be used only in the **rarest of rare cases, was last carried out in 2020 in the Nirbhaya case.**

- **In 2025, trial courts sentenced 128 people to death.** In 95.18% of the cases where compliance could be assessed, the **procedure prescribed in Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022) was not followed.**

'Rarest of rare' Doctrine in India:

- **1972 - Jagmohan Singh vs. State of U.P.:** The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the death penalty.
- **1980 - Bachan Singh vs. State of Punjab:** The Court introduced the **'rarest of rare' doctrine,** stating the death penalty should be imposed only in exceptional cases.
- **1983 - Machhi Singh vs. State of Punjab:** The Supreme Court clarified the 'rarest of rare' doctrine and identified **five categories of crimes where the death penalty may be justified:**
  - **Manner of committing the murder:** Extremely brutal and dastardly murders.
  - **Motive of the murder:** Committed for a motive showing total depravity.
  - **Socially abhorrent nature of the crime:** When a murder targets a minority community and raises social wrath.
  - **Magnitude of the crime**.
  - **Victim:** When the victim is particularly vulnerable, such as a child, woman, or elderly person.
- **In Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022),** it prescribed **'practical guidelines'** to operationalise the collection of information on the accused, requiring the state to produce mental health evaluations, reports on conduct in custody, and a probation officer's report.
- **In Vasanta Sampat Dupare v. Union of India (2025),** it held that a sentencing hearing which is compliant to Manoj flows from **Articles 14 and 21.**
  - A death sentence imposed without one is **unconstitutional and can be reopened under Article 32 even after it has attained finality.**

Concerns Related to Death Penalty

- **Risk of wrongful convictions:** There is a possibility of executing innocent individuals due to faulty investigations, unreliable evidence, false testimonies or judicial errors.
- **Lack of conclusive deterrence:** There is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than life imprisonment.
- **Irreversibility of punishment:** Unlike other punishments, a death sentence cannot be reversed once carried out, even if new evidence later establishes the person's innocence.
- **Psychological suffering:** Prolonged uncertainty, repeated appeals and years spent on death row can cause severe psychological distress to prisoners.

Global Framework on Death Penalities

- **Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):** Allows the death penalty in limited circumstances but stresses that nothing in this article should delay or prevent the abolition of capital punishment by any State Party.
- **1984 - UN Safeguards:** The UN Economic and Social Council adopted Safeguards guaranteeing the rights of individuals facing the death penalty.
- **1989 - Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR:** The UN General Assembly adopted this protocol, urging member states to abolish the death penalty.
  - States that ratified agreed not to execute anyone within their jurisdiction.
- **UN General Assembly Resolutions (2007-2018):** It urged countries to:
  - Respect international standards protecting the rights of those facing the death penalty.
  - Progressively restrict its use.
  - Reduce the number of crimes punishable by death.
- **For the first time, more than two thirds of all UN member states** voted in favour of the tenth General Assembly resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty.

Conclusion

- Over the past decade, **nearly a third of the death sentences** decided by the High Courts and the Supreme Court have **ended in acquittals.**
  - **In 2025 alone**, the Supreme Court acquitted the **accused in 10 of the 19 death penalty cases it decided,** repeatedly noting seriously flawed investigations and prosecution.
- **The Law Commission of India, in its 262nd Report (2015),** highlighted concerns regarding arbitrariness, discrimination, wrongful convictions and the absence of conclusive evidence of deterrence.
  - It recommended abolishing the death penalty for all crimes except terrorism-related offences and waging war against the State.

- The safeguards developed from Bachan Singh to Dupare are not obstacles to justice; they are the **conditions on which the constitutionality of the death penalty rests.**

Source: TH

NEED FOR A NATIONAL URBANISATION POLICY IN INDIA

Context

- The Union Budget, Economic Survey 2026 and 16th Finance Commission have emphasised the need for a National Urbanisation Policy to address gaps in urban planning and governance.

Status of Urbanisation in India

- **Urban population:** India had **377 million urban residents** across approximately 8,000 cities and towns in 2011.
  - **The United Nations** estimates that **44%** of India's population currently lives in urban areas, which is projected to exceed **720 million by 2050.**
- **Changing settlement patterns:** Around **94%** of urban settlements are small towns, while nearly **60%** of the urban population lives in **Class I cities.**
- **Growth of peri-urban areas:** Peri-urban areas are expanding at approximately **4.15% annually**, compared to **2.9% growth** within existing city boundaries.
- **Functional urbanisation:** The Economic Survey 2026 highlighted that India is more urban in functional terms than official definitions suggest, citing satellite-based estimates that placed **India's urbanisation at 63% in 2015.**

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 243Q:** Provides for the constitution of Nagar Panchayats, Municipal Councils and Municipal Corporations.
- **Article 243W:** Empowers state legislatures to devolve powers and responsibilities to municipalities.
- **Twelfth Schedule:** Lists 18 functions that may be entrusted to urban local bodies.
- **Article 243ZD:** Provides for District Planning Committees.
- **Article 243ZE:** Provides for Metropolitan Planning Committees.

Limitations of the Existing Urban Classification

- **Outdated Census criteria:** Census 2027 will retain the 2011 criteria for identifying census towns:
  - Population of at least 5,000.
  - Population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km.
  - At least 75% of male main workers engaged in non-agricultural activities.
- **Administrative limitations:** Article 243Q gives states discretion in notifying areas as urban without prescribing uniform criteria or mandatory periodic reviews.
- **Mismatch between economic activity and governance:** Several settlements with predominantly non-agricultural employment continue to be governed as rural areas.
- **Inadequate spatial planning:** Around 52% of statutory towns and 76% of census towns lack master plans, resulting in unplanned expansion and infrastructure gaps.

Why is a National Urbanisation Policy Needed?

- **Recognising emerging urban settlements:** It will establish uniform criteria and conduct periodic reviews to identify settlements undergoing urban transformation.
- **Integrated regional planning:** It will promote planning beyond municipal boundaries, covering peri-urban areas and interconnected economic regions.
- **Strengthening urban governance:** It will improve coordination among Union, State and local governments and clarify institutional responsibilities.
- **Improving municipal finances:** India's municipal revenue is approximately **1%** of GDP, compared to 7.4% in Brazil and 6% in South Africa.
  - A coherent policy can strengthen municipal revenue mobilisation and ensure predictable fiscal transfers.

Recommendations for a National Urbanisation Policy

- **WRI (World Resources Institute)** India's report 'Equitable, Productive, Low-carbon and Resilient System of Cities in India – Recommendations for a National Urbanisation Policy' proposes seven systems transformations:
  - **Standardise the definition and classification** of statutory urban settlements;
  - Modernise spatial and regional planning;

- Reorient public and private finance flows into urbanisation;
- Embed a tiered coordination architecture, anchored by a **National Urbanisation Council;**
- Build sectoral reforms on functional foundations;
- Align urban politics with reform incentives; and
- Support knowledge exchange and local innovation.

Concluding remarks

- India needs to move beyond the traditional rural-urban classification towards a functional approach to urbanisation.
- A National Urbanisation Policy can provide a common institutional and fiscal framework for managing this transition while promoting equitable, productive, low-carbon and resilient cities.

Source: TH

PUMPED STORAGE HYDROPOWER

Context

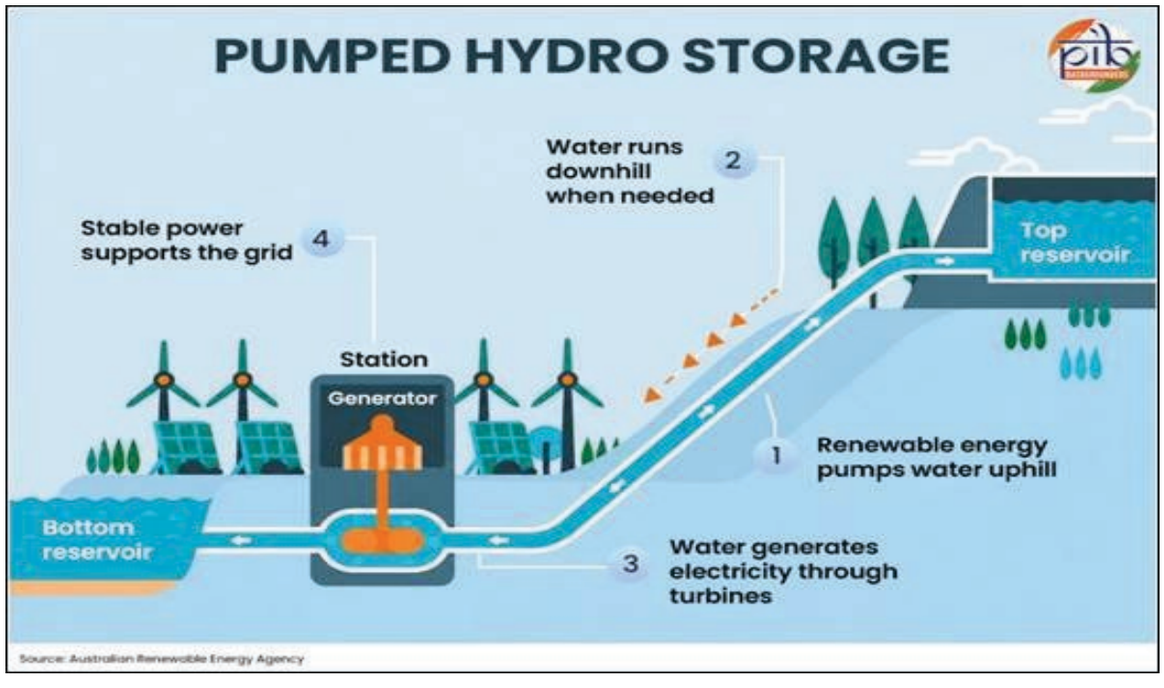
- India is expanding its pumped storage hydropower capacity to support renewable energy integration, grid stability, and energy security.

Need for Pumped Storage Hydropower

- As of September 2026, India has **308.027 GW** of installed non-fossil fuel-based electricity generation capacity.
- **During FY 2025–26,** India added around 55.29 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity. It has also set a target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.
- However, renewable energy generation varies, and this **variability creates a growing need to store electricity** when renewable generation exceeds demand.
- The Central Electricity Authority (CEA) projects **73.93 GW** of storage capacity by 2031–32.
  - This includes **26.69 GW from Pumped Storage Projects (PSPs)** and **47.24 GW from Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).**

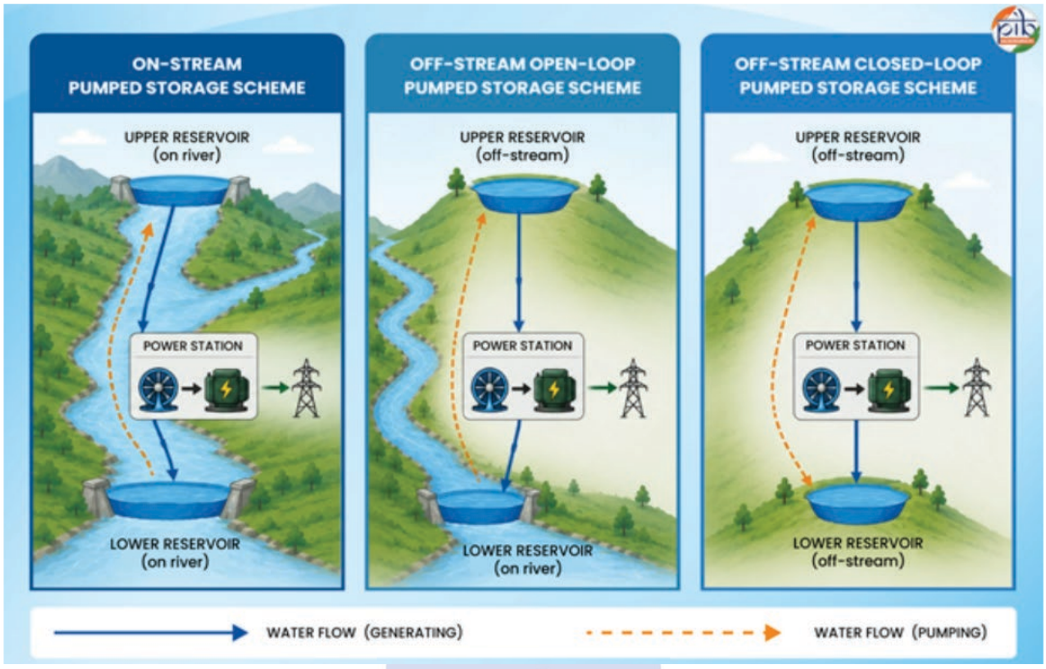
What is Pumped Storage Hydropower (PSH)?

- Pumped Storage Projects (PSPs) are large-scale energy storage systems that use water and gravity to store electricity. They are often described as **"water batteries".**
- **A typical PSP consists of two reservoirs** at different elevations.
  - During periods of surplus electricity, water is pumped from the lower reservoir to the upper reservoir.
  - When demand rises, the stored water is released through turbines to generate electricity.
- PSPs help **balance fluctuations** in solar and wind power generation, meet peak electricity demand, and improve grid reliability.



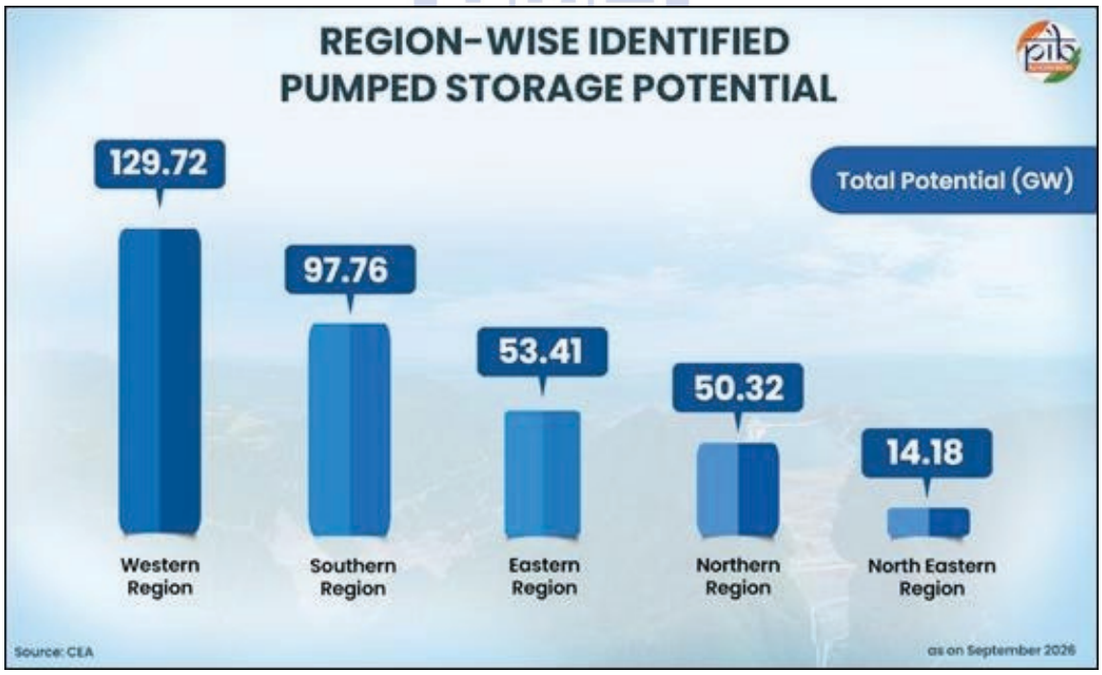
Classification of Pumped Storage Power Plants

- PSPs are classified according to how their reservoirs are connected to, or in relation to, natural watercourses.
- **They are grouped into three types:** on-stream, off-stream open-loop and off-stream closed-loop schemes.



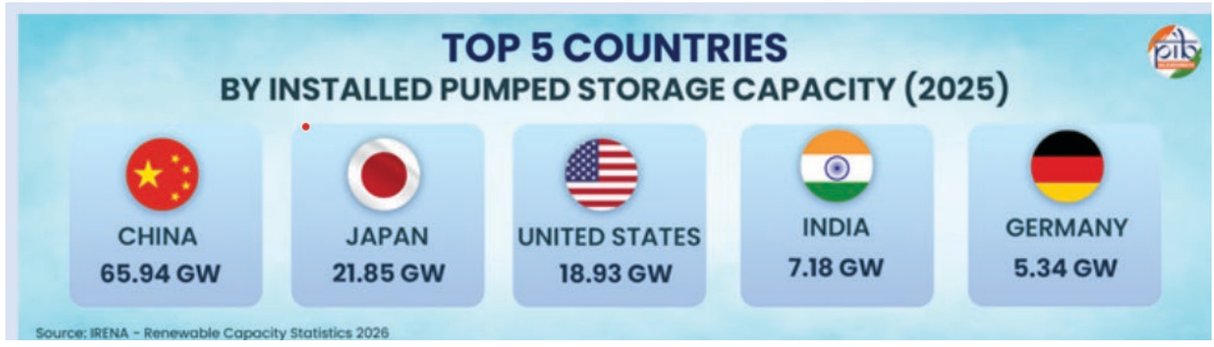
India's Pumped Storage Momentum

- **Operational Capacity:** As of August 2026, India has 7.43 GW of operational PSP capacity across 10 projects. The projects have installed capacity above 25 MW.
- India has identified **320 pumped storage** projects with a combined potential of 345.38 GW.
  - This includes 62 on-stream projects with 56.67 GW and 258 off-stream projects with 288.71 GW.



Global Installed Capacity PSPs

- Global installed pumped hydro capacity stood at **159.8 Gigawatts** at the end of 2025, according to the **International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).**



Initiatives taken by India

- **Dedicated PSP Development Guidelines:** The Ministry of Power notified the Guidelines to Promote Development of Pumped Storage Projects in India in April 2023.
- **Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding:** Guidelines notified in 2025 provide a framework for procuring storage capacity and stored energy.
- **Transmission charge waiver:** Eligible PSPs awarded for construction by 30 June 2028 can receive a 100% Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) charge waiver for 25 years from commercial operation.
- **Faster approvals:** The CEA's timeline for Detailed Project Report concurrence has been reduced from 90 days to 50 days.
- **Integrated planning:** The government is integrating energy storage and transmission planning to improve grid flexibility and accommodate greater renewable energy capacity.

What are the challenges?

- High initial capital costs and long construction periods.
- Geographical constraints, including suitable elevation differences, geology and water availability.
- Potential environmental impacts on forests, aquatic ecosystems and local communities.
- The need for transmission connectivity, clearances and coordinated project execution.

Concluding remarks

- Pumped storage hydropower can play an important role in India's clean energy transition by providing long-duration storage, improving grid flexibility and enabling greater integration of renewable energy.
- Its successful expansion will depend on balancing infrastructure development with environmental safeguards and efficient project implementation.

Source: PIB

NEWS IN BRIEF

JOINT WATER COMMISSION BETWEEN INDIA AND BANGLADESH

Context

- The Ministry of External Affairs reiterated that India and Bangladesh have a **"structured mechanism"** to deal with the **Ganga Water Treaty requirements.**

About

- The bilateral Ganga Water Treaty is **set to expire on December 12.**
- The treaty was signed in **1996 between India and Bangladesh.**
- The three-decade old agreement for river water sharing requires **expert-level and political consultations for renewing the pact.**

Water Treaty Mechanism

- India and Bangladesh share about **54 rivers**, of which three — **the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Teesta** — are major rivers that are vital to Bangladesh's agriculture and flood-preparation mechanism.
- **A Joint River Commission** came into existence following the **signing of a statute on November 24, 1972.**
- The India-Bangladesh Joint River Commission is created by **each partner country appointing a Chairman and three members** who will hold office for a period of **three years.**

- The Commission's meetings are held **annually,** in turn, in Bangladesh and India.

- **Functions:**
  - Maintaining liaison between the two sides on important river-related issues to help obtain the maximum benefit from river waters on both sides.
  - The commission is expected to maintain close coordination to address flood control requirements, cyclone warnings, and irrigation projects.
  - The Commission may also be assigned tasks that the two governments may wish to entrust to it.

Source: TH

US MIDTERM ELECTIONS

In News

- President Donald Trump has suffered a huge blow in the US midterm elections, with the Republican Party on track to lose control of the House of Representatives and possibly the Senate.

What are US Midterm Elections?

- They are held e**very four years**, halfway through a President's term.
- They serve as a **referendum on the administration's performance and policies.**
- Although the President is not directly elected, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives, 35 Senate seats and several state governorships are contested.
- The elections are conducted through a decentralised system, with individual state and local authorities responsible for voting, ballot printing and counting.
- The results are also seen as a measure of **how happy people in the US** are with the president's performance so far.



Source: TH

SIKKIM'S SORENG BECOMES INDIA'S 1ST NOTIFIED ORGANIC FISHERIES CLUSTER

Context

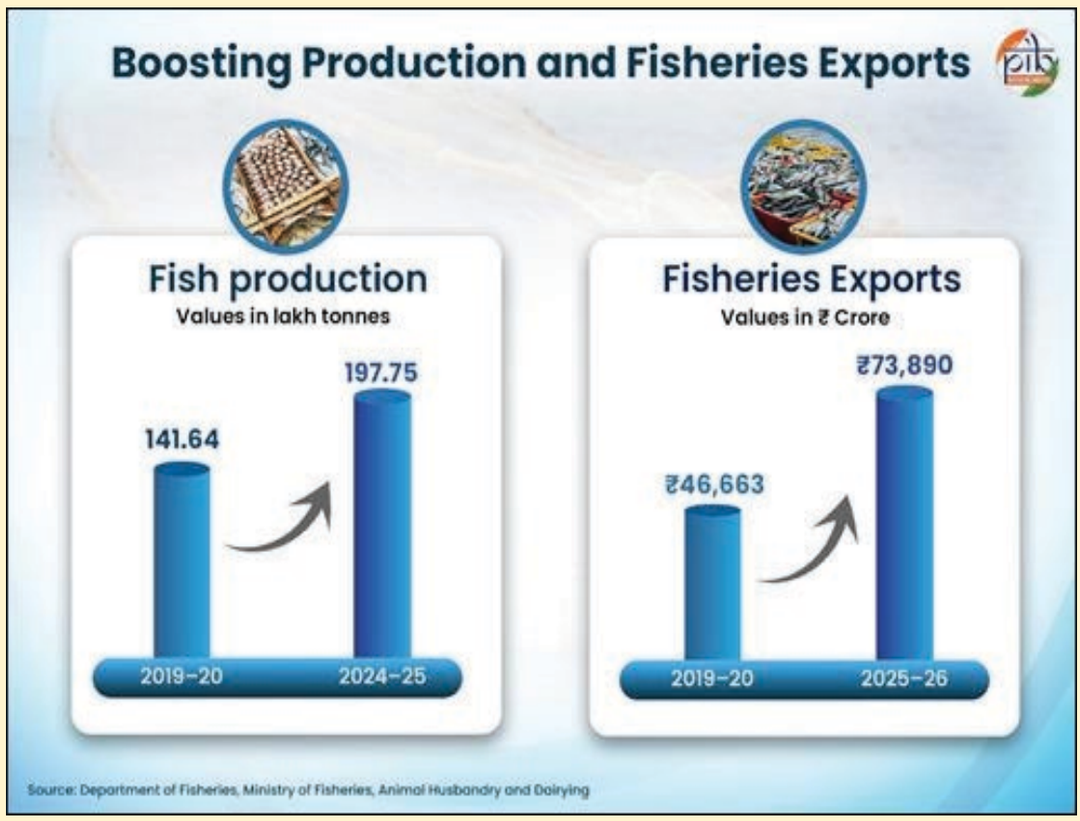
- **Sikkim's Soreng district** has become **India's first notified Organic Fisheries Cluster** under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).

About

- This cluster has prioritised **environmentally healthy and sustainable fish farming** without using harmful chemicals, antibiotics and pesticides.
  - This specifically emphasises **Amur carp, Indian major carp species (IMC) and trout fish farming.**
- Under its cluster-based approach, the government has notified **34 fisheries production and processing clusters across the country,** including organic fisheries clusters in Sikkim and Meghalaya.
  - **The organic fisheries cluster** focuses on an ecologically healthy fish farming system avoiding chemicals, antibiotics, and pesticides.
  - This also ensures **minimal environmental pollution** and **prevents damage to aquatic ecosystems,** contributing to sustainable fish production practices.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)

- It is the flagship scheme of the Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, and **was launched in 2020.**
- **Aim:** To give momentum to the 'sunrise' fisheries sector through **consolidated efforts from various schemes and initiatives.**
- The PMMSY is an umbrella scheme with **two separate components** namely **Central Sector Scheme (CS)** and **Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS).**
- The Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) Component is further segregated into **Non-beneficiary oriented and beneficiary orientated subcomponents/activities**:
  - Enhancement of Production and Productivity
  - Infrastructure and Post-harvest Management
  - Fisheries Management and Regulatory Framework.



Source: TH

PROTECTED AREA PERMIT RULES

In News

- The Nagaland government has urged the Centre to completely withdraw the Protected Area Permit (PAP) scheme from the state ahead of the state's flagship Hornbill Festival.

Protected Area Permit (PAP) regime

- It is issued by the Government of India and is an official document that a foreign national is required to carry while visiting states along India's international borders in areas designated centrally as protected or restricted.
- It was initially imposed under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958.
- **Coverage**: Foreigners require a PAP to visit Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Andaman and Nicobar Island and certain parts of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.
  - It was relaxed for Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland in 2011.
    - However, it was reimposed in December 2024, citing security reasons.

Source: IE

SAFFRON CULTIVATION IN LADAKH

Context

- A pilot project in Ladakh has recorded its first saffron flowering within 30 days of plantation, earlier than the usual flowering period of around two months.

About Saffron

- **Saffron (Crocus sativus)** is a spice obtained from the **dried red stigmas of the saffron flower.**
- It is commonly known as the world's **most expensive spice** because of its labour-intensive harvesting, limited production and high market value.
  - It is used as a **spice, natural colouring agent**, in traditional medicine and in the cosmetics industry.
- **Growing conditions:** Saffron generally requires:
  - **A temperate climate** with cold winters and warm, dry summers.
  - **Well-drained**, fertile soil to prevent corm rot.
  - **Adequate sunlight** and relatively dry conditions during flowering and harvesting.
- **Propagation:** It is cultivated through underground corms (bulb-like storage structures), rather than conventional seeds.



Saffron Cultivation in India

- **Major producing region:** Jammu and Kashmir is India's principal saffron-producing region, particularly:
  - **Pampore (Pulwama district)**, known as the Saffron Bowl of Kashmir.
  - **Budgam**, Srinagar and Kishtwar districts.
- **Global position: Iran** is the world's largest saffron producer, while India is a relatively small producer.
- **GI Tag:** Kashmiri Saffron received the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2020.**

Source: DTE

1ST INTERNATIONAL MAIZE CONFERENCE 2026

Context

- The 1st International Maize Conference 2026 was held in **Hyderabad.**

About

- **India aims** to increase maize production from approximately 55 million tonnes to **75 million tonnes** over the next decade.
  - This target will be supported by improved crop productivity, innovative breeding technologies, stronger seed systems and farmer-centric research.
- **Theme:** Maize Revolution for Food, Feed, Fodder, Fuel and Sustainability in the Changing World (M4FS).

About Maize

- Maize, commonly known as corn, is a cereal crop belonging to the grass family, **Poaceae.**
- **Origin:** Central America (particularly Mexico).

- **Largest producer:** The **United States** is the top producer globally, leading the market with 430.9 million metric tonnes.
- **India's rank: 5th** among individual countries, with approximately 55.09 million tonnes of production.

Geographical Conditions for Maize Cultivation

- **Soil:** Maize grows well in well-drained, fertile, sandy loam to silty loam soils. **Alluvial soils** are particularly suitable for maize cultivation.
  - **The ideal pH** for maize is between **5.5 and 7.5.**
  - **Drainage:** Waterlogging can be harmful to maize, so good drainage is essential.
- **Temperature:** Maize is a warm-weather crop that prefers temperatures between 21°C and 32°C.
- **Precipitation:** Requires 50–100 cm of well-distributed rainfall.
- **Season:** In India, maize is typically grown during the **Kharif season** (June-September).
  - However, it can also be sown in other seasons depending on the region and specific variety.
- **Major producing states:** Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar and Telangana.

Source: PIB

EXERCISE TIGER TRIUMPH 2026

Context

- The opening ceremony of the Exercise Tiger Triumph 2026 was held at the Maritime Warfare Centre (MWC), Visakhapatnam.

About

- Launched in **2019**, Tiger Triumph is a bilateral India-US Tri-Service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercise.
- The 2026 edition is being conducted as a **Tabletop Exercise (TTX)**, focusing on joint planning, coordination and interoperability between the Armed Forces of both countries during large-scale HADR operations.
- For the first time, a team from the **National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)** is participating in the exercise.

Source: PIB

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