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I. Cabinet Approval for PMKSY Expansion: Key Highlights

• Total Outlay and Period:

The Union Cabinet has approved a **total outlay of ₹6520 crore**, including an **additional ₹1920 crore**, for the **Central Sector Scheme "Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana" (PMKSY)** during the **15th Finance Commission Cycle (2021–22 to 2025–26)**.

• Component-wise Allocation:

Out of the total approved outlay:

- **₹1000 crore** is allocated for establishing **50 Multi-Product Food Irradiation Units** under **Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure (ICCVAI)** and **100 NABL-accredited Food Testing Laboratories (FTLs)** under **Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure (FSQAI)**.
- **₹920 crore** is for sanctioning projects under various components of PMKSY during the current Finance Commission Cycle.

• About PMKSY (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana):

- **Launched in 2017**, PMKSY is a **Central Sector Scheme** implemented by the **Ministry of Food Processing Industries**.
- Its objective is to **modernize infrastructure**, **reduce food wastage**, and **enhance the processing level** of agricultural produce.
- Key components include: **Mega Food Parks**, **Cold Chain Infrastructure**, **Agro-Processing Clusters**, **Food Safety and Quality Assurance**, etc.



• Expected Benefits:

- **Preservation Capacity:** The irradiation units are expected to **enhance preservation capacity by 20–30 Lakh Metric Tonnes per annum**, minimizing post-harvest losses.
- **Food Safety:** The 100 new **NABL-accredited food labs** will boost **scientific testing infrastructure**, ensuring adherence to food safety standards.
- Encourages **private sector participation** through **Expression of Interest (EOI)** route in both ICCVAI and FSQAI components.

• Key Definitions and Institutional Role:

- **NABL (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories):** An autonomous body under **Quality Council of India**, responsible for accreditation of labs.
- **Irradiation Units:** Facilities that use ionizing radiation to extend the shelf life of food and eliminate pathogens.
- **Cold Chain Infrastructure:** A temperature-controlled supply chain critical for preserving perishables like fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat.

• Constitutional & Legal Provisions:

- **Article 47** of the Constitution emphasizes the **State's duty to raise the level of nutrition** and standard of living of its people.



- The scheme aligns with the **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**, which mandates quality and safety standards for food articles.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance:

The expanded funding and infrastructure initiatives under PMKSY reflect the government's focus on **agri-value chain development**, **reducing food loss**, and **ensuring food safety**. These measures also align with **Doubling Farmers' Income**, **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, and **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2: Zero Hunger, SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)**.

UPSC Relevance:

Important for **GS Paper 2 (Government Policies & Interventions)** and **GS Paper 3 (Agriculture, Food Processing, Infrastructure)**. Also relevant for **Essay, Prelims (Schemes & Budget Allocation)**, and **Economic Survey/PIB-based questions**.

2. India Amidst U.S. Criticism and Global Realignment: Key Points

• Trump's Harsh Remarks Against India:

U.S. President Donald Trump criticized India on multiple grounds—its **strategic ties with Russia**, **membership in BRICS**, **high tariffs**, and **non-tariff trade barriers**. He also mocked the Indian economy, saying **India and Russia could "take their dead economies down together"**, signaling a potential geopolitical realignment narrative emerging from Washington.

• Sanctions on Indian Entities for Iran Trade:

The U.S. State Department imposed sanctions on **6 Indian companies and 5 individuals** for alleged involvement in energy trade with **Iran**, violating U.S. secondary sanctions under the **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**. This puts pressure on India's sovereign energy policy and its historical ties with Iran.

• New U.S.-Pakistan Energy Deal:

President Trump announced an **infrastructure and energy development deal with Pakistan**, aimed at exploiting Pakistan's **"massive oil reserves"**. This comes soon after the **Pahalgam terror attack** and **India's Operation Sindoor**, hinting at the U.S. recalibrating its South Asia strategy.



• India's Response and Economic Standing:

India, through **Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal**, countered the narrative by asserting that **India is seen globally as a "bright spot"**, signifying strong macroeconomic fundamentals, resilient trade architecture, and investor confidence. India refrained from direct confrontation and redirected focus on diplomacy and institutional trade mechanisms.

• Trade Tensions Escalate:

The U.S. is set to impose **25% tariffs on Indian goods** as part of the **'Liberation Day' tariff plan**, affecting India's exports and possibly violating **WTO's Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** clause if not universally applied. The U.S. accuses India of a **massive trade deficit** and creating trade frictions through **non-monetary barriers**.

• Key Definitions & Legal/Constitutional Provisions:

- **BRICS**: An intergovernmental organization of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa focusing on economic cooperation.



- **CAATSA:** A U.S. law that seeks to deter strategic trade with adversarial nations like Iran, Russia, and North Korea.
- **Non-tariff barriers:** Regulatory or policy measures (e.g., licensing, safety standards) that restrict imports but aren't taxes.
- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution:** Advocates **promotion of international peace and cooperation**, which supports India's sovereign multilateral engagements.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance:

The episode underscores **emerging geopolitical shifts, strained Indo-U.S. trade relations**, and **India's tightrope diplomacy** between major powers (U.S., Russia, Iran). It also reflects **India's global economic positioning** and its challenges in balancing **strategic autonomy** with **economic integration**.

UPSC Relevance:

Crucial for **GS Paper 2 (International Relations – India-U.S. Relations, India-Iran, India-Russia, BRICS)** and **GS Paper 3 (Trade Policies, Economic Diplomacy)**. Also important for **Essay (India's strategic autonomy)**, **Prelims (International groupings, sanctions laws)**, and **IR case study in GS 4**.

3. Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) Outbreak in India: Key Notes

• What is Bird Flu (Avian Influenza)?

Bird flu is a **highly contagious viral disease** caused by **influenza A viruses** that naturally occur in **wild aquatic birds**, but can spread to **domestic poultry** and other **mammals**, including humans.

- **Transmission:** Through direct contact with infected birds, their secretions, or contaminated surfaces.
- **Symptoms in birds:** Sudden death, lethargy, reduced egg production, respiratory issues, swelling.
- **Symptoms in humans:** From mild fever and cough to severe respiratory illness.
- **Cross-species concern:** Virus has recently been found in atypical hosts like **tigers, leopards, and domestic cats**, raising fears of viral adaptation.

• Current Situation in India

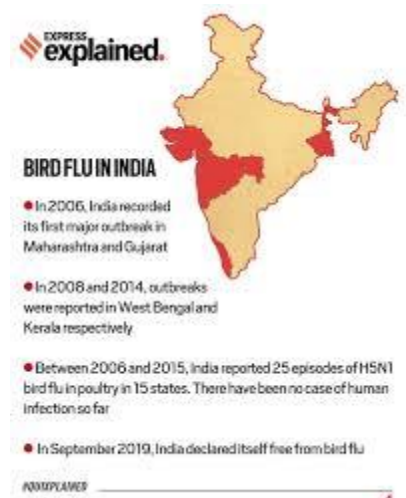
As of **24 July 2025**, **41 cases** of bird flu have been reported in **domestic poultry across 10 states** including Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha.

- Recent surge in infections is worrying due to **infections in wild and non-avian species**.
- **Human infections remain rare**, with **only 2 cases reported since 2019**, but continuous surveillance is necessary.

• Availability of Vaccine in India

India has developed and approved a **low-pathogenic avian influenza (H9N2) vaccine**, developed by **ICAR-National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (Bhopal)**.

- **Technology transferred** to private firms in 2022.
- **Commercial rollout** started in 2025.
- This vaccine is a preventive step to reduce the viral spread among poultry.





• National & Global Responses

- India has implemented the **National Action Plan for Prevention, Control, and Containment of Avian Influenza (2021)** and **Poultry Disease Action Plan (2024)**.
- **Financial assistance** is provided to affected poultry owners.
- **AI-based surveillance system NADRES_v2** has been launched to provide early warning signals.
- Globally, the virus has spread across **Europe, Americas, and Southeast Asia**, with **human cases in the U.S. (41)** and **Cambodia (14)** as of July 2025.

• Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 47**: Duty of the State to raise nutrition and improve public health.
- **Livestock Health Rules & Disease Control Orders** are framed under the **Livestock Health and Disease Control Act, 2001**.
- India is a signatory to the **World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)** guidelines and regularly notifies the **World Health Organization (WHO)** of zoonotic cases.

• Key Terms & Definitions

- **Zoonosis**: Diseases that spread from animals to humans.
- **NADRES (National Animal Disease Reporting System)**: An early warning tool used to monitor and predict livestock disease outbreaks.
- **H5N1, H9N2**: Subtypes of the influenza A virus that cause bird flu, with varying degrees of pathogenicity.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The rising cases of bird flu in India and globally indicate a **serious public health and biosecurity concern**. The virus's ability to **mutate and cross species** demands **vigilant surveillance, rapid containment, and strategic vaccination programs**. India's proactive rollout of action plans and AI-based surveillance systems reflects its growing preparedness, but **global cooperation and transparency** remain essential.

UPSC Relevance:

Important for **GS Paper 2 (Governance & Public Health)**, **GS Paper 3 (Science and Technology – Disease Surveillance, Biosecurity)**, and **GS Paper 4 (Ethics in Crisis Management)**. Also relevant for **Prelims (Recent Government Schemes, Virus Types)** and **Essay topics on Public Health, Pandemic Management**.

4. Recognition of the State of Palestine: Key Points

• Current Global Recognition Status

As of 2025, **147 out of 193 United Nations member states** have formally recognized the **State of Palestine** as a sovereign entity.

- This includes major Global South nations and several developing countries.
- Recently, **France, the United Kingdom, and Canada** have expressed intent to recognize Palestine by **September 2025**, marking a shift in the stance of Western democracies.



• India's Position on Palestine

India recognized the **State of Palestine in 1988**, reaffirming its long-standing support for the **two-state solution** based on peaceful coexistence between **Israel and Palestine**.

- India maintains **diplomatic relations** with both Israel and Palestine, advocating a **balanced foreign policy** approach.
- India supports Palestine's membership in the **United Nations** and other multilateral forums.

• Historical Background and Political Context

The **State of Palestine was declared in 1988** by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and since then, a majority of **Asia, Africa, and Latin America** have extended formal recognition.

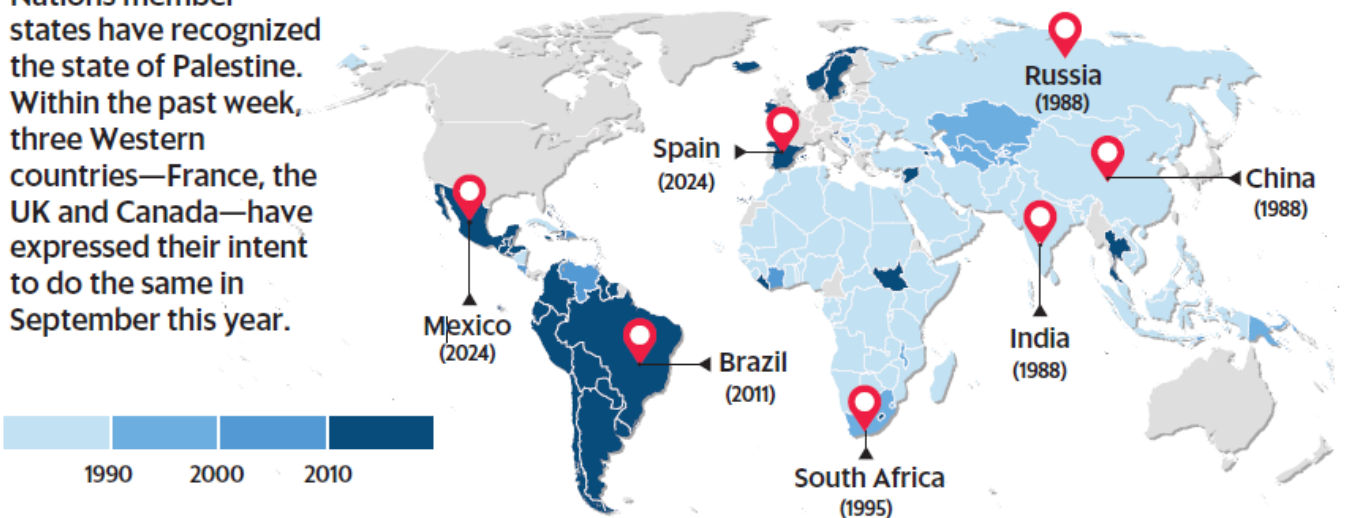
- Despite widespread recognition, **Palestine is not yet a full member of the UN** due to opposition from some permanent members of the Security Council.
- The recognition trend reflects ongoing global concerns about **human rights, sovereignty, and the status of East Jerusalem**.

• Geopolitical and Diplomatic Implications

WHICH COUNTRIES RECOGNIZE THE STATE OF PALESTINE?

So far, 147 United Nations member states have recognized the state of Palestine. Within the past week, three Western countries—France, the UK and Canada—have expressed their intent to do the same in September this year.

UN members that formally recognize the state of Palestine, by year of recognition



Data: Shuja Asrar, design: Gopakumar Warrior

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, State of Palestine, Mint research

- The increasing recognition of Palestine is seen as a response to prolonged conflict, settlement expansion by Israel, and humanitarian issues in **Gaza and the West Bank**.
- Western nations recognizing Palestine may put **diplomatic pressure on Israel** and influence negotiations for a two-state resolution.
- This also impacts the **UN General Assembly votes**, enhancing Palestine's international legitimacy and voice.



• Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Under **international law**, recognition of statehood is based on the **Montevideo Convention (1933)** which outlines four criteria: a permanent population, defined territory, government, and capacity to enter into relations with other states.
- **Article 51 of the Indian Constitution** guides Indian foreign policy to promote **international peace and security** and respect for international law and treaty obligations.
- India is a member of the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**, which strongly supports Palestine's right to statehood.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The expanding recognition of the State of Palestine signals a major shift in **global diplomatic alignments** and strengthens the **Palestinian claim to sovereign statehood**. India's consistent support for a **peaceful, negotiated two-state solution** reflects its commitment to **international norms and multilateralism**. Understanding the nuances of this issue is critical for future diplomats and civil servants.

UPSC Relevance:

Relevant for **GS Paper 2 (International Relations – India's Foreign Policy, West Asia)**, **GS Paper 1 (World Geography – Middle East)**, and **Prelims (International Organizations, Foreign Policy Statements)**. Important for **Essay** on peace, sovereignty, and India's global role.

5. Supreme Court Rebukes Telangana Speaker Over Anti-Defection Delay: Key Notes

• Background and Core Issue

The Supreme Court has strongly criticized the **Telangana Assembly Speaker** for **undue delay in deciding anti-defection petitions** against **10 BRS MLAs** who defected to the **Congress Party in 2024**. The court highlighted the tendency of Speakers to **stall disqualification proceedings**, causing the petitions to die a "natural death" as Assembly tenures end.

• Court's Directions and Observations

A **Bench headed by CJI B.R. Gavai** directed the Speaker to **decide the matter within 3 months**.

- The Speaker must act **expeditiously and impartially**, failing which **adverse inference** will be drawn against delaying MLAs.
- The SC noted that the **original purpose of entrusting this role to Speakers** was to **ensure swift adjudication**, avoiding prolonged court or EC litigation.

• Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Tenth Schedule (Anti-Defection Law)** was added by the **52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985** to curb political defections.
- **Paragraph 6(1)** of the Tenth Schedule states that the **Speaker/Chairman acts as a tribunal** in disqualification matters.
- However, the **Supreme Court in *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu* (1992)** ruled that such decisions are **subject to judicial review** despite Paragraph 6(2), which attempts to bar court interference.





• Concerns About Partisanship and Delay

- The SC questioned whether **Parliament's trust** in the neutrality of the **Speaker's Office** has been justified.
- CJI Gavai invoked the late Rajesh Pilot's remarks, underlining that the Speaker's role was meant to **ensure expediency, not encourage delay or partisanship**.
- The Speaker in this case issued notices **only after the MLAs approached the Supreme Court**, over seven months after the defection.

• Larger Democratic Implications

- Delays in adjudicating anti-defection cases undermine **democratic ethics, voter mandate, and the integrity of the legislature**.
- The court reaffirmed that the **Speaker, while acting under the Tenth Schedule, is not immune from judicial scrutiny**, upholding the principle of **constitutional accountability**.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

This case exemplifies the **challenges in the implementation of anti-defection laws**, especially the **lack of time-bound decisions** and **partisanship of presiding officers**. It revives the debate on whether **disqualification authority** should be shifted to an independent body like the Election Commission for neutrality and transparency.

UPSC Relevance:

Highly relevant for **GS Paper 2 (Polity – Anti-Defection Law, Separation of Powers, Role of Judiciary, Parliamentary Reforms)** and **GS Paper 4 (Ethics – Accountability, Office of Trust)**. Also important for **Prelims (Constitutional Amendments, Tenth Schedule)** and **Essay/Interview (Political Morality and Defections in Indian Democracy)**.

6. Cabinet Approves Central Sector Scheme for Grant-in-Aid to NCDC: Key Notes

• Scheme Overview and Financial Allocation

The Union Cabinet has approved a **Central Sector Scheme** titled “**Grant-in-Aid to National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)**” with a total **outlay of ₹2000 crore** for the period **2025–26 to 2028–29** (₹500 crore per year).

- This grant will allow NCDC to raise **₹20,000 crore** from the **open market**, which will be used to provide **loans to cooperatives** for **new projects, plant expansion, and working capital needs**.

• Implementing Agency and Loan Disbursement Mechanism

- **NCDC (National Cooperative Development Corporation)** is the **executing agency** for disbursement, monitoring, follow-up, and loan recovery.



- Loans will be provided either **through state governments** or **directly to eligible cooperatives**, based on NCDC's funding criteria.
- Financial assistance will support **modernization, technology upgradation, diversification, and working capital needs** of cooperatives across sectors.



• Target Beneficiaries and Sectoral Focus

The scheme aims to benefit **approximately 2.9 crore members of 13,288 cooperative societies** across diverse sectors like **dairy, livestock, fisheries, sugar, textile, food processing, storage & cold storage**, as well as **labour and women-led cooperatives**.

- The focus is on **capacity building, income generation, and inclusive growth** in rural and semi-urban areas.

• Expected Socio-Economic Impact and Employment Generation

- The infusion of capital will lead to **creation of income-generating assets, expansion of cooperative businesses, and employment across skill levels**.
- The scheme will **bridge socio-economic inequalities, promote women's participation, and support rural infrastructure development**.
- Long-term loans for infrastructure are expected to **generate sustainable employment** and improve **economic conditions for farmer members**.

• Background and Significance of the Cooperative Sector

- India has **over 8.25 lakh cooperatives** with more than **29 crore members**, playing a critical role in rural credit, agriculture, industry, housing, and services.
- Nearly **94% of Indian farmers are linked to cooperatives**, highlighting their **importance in the agricultural economy**.
- Cooperatives promote **democracy, equity, community involvement**, and are crucial to **inclusive development**.

• Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 43B** (Part IV, Directive Principles): Promotes **voluntary formation, autonomous functioning, democratic control, and professional management of cooperative societies** (added via the **97th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2011**).
- **National Cooperative Development Corporation Act, 1962** governs the functioning of NCDC.
- **Ministry of Cooperation**, formed in 2021, is responsible for policy, legal, and financial support to cooperatives.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The grant-in-aid to NCDC under this scheme reflects India's strategy to **strengthen cooperative-based rural infrastructure, improve credit access, and promote sustainable livelihoods**. This initiative will enhance **rural productivity, reduce poverty, and support women-led and labour-intensive cooperatives**, thereby contributing to **self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat)**.

**UPSC Relevance:**

Important for **GS Paper 2 (Governance – Cooperative Institutions, Government Schemes)**, **GS Paper 3 (Economy – Inclusive Growth, Employment Generation, Agricultural Infrastructure)**, and **Prelims (Recent Government Schemes, Ministries, Constitutional Amendments)**. Also relevant for **Essay and Interview** on rural empowerment and cooperative models.

7. High Prevalence of Depression Among Infertile Women in Delhi: Key Findings from DU-LHMC Study

• Key Findings of the Study

A joint study by **Delhi University (DU)** and **Lady Hardinge Medical College (LHMC)**, commissioned by the **National Commission for Women**, found that **nearly 77% of women** seeking fertility treatment suffer from **depression**, compared to **only 23% among fertile women**. The study titled '*Infertility and its Psychological Impact*' was conducted between **2020–2022**, based on detailed interviews and clinical data.

• Decline in Fertility Rates in Delhi

According to the **Registrar General of India (2021)**, **Delhi has recorded the lowest Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** in the country, and also the **sharpest decline** in TFR in recent years.

- **TFR (Total Fertility Rate)** is defined as the **average number of children born to a woman** during her reproductive years.
- Factors cited include **rising infertility, economic pressures (inflation), increased female workforce participation, and greater reproductive autonomy**.

• Emotional and Mental Health Impact

The study highlights that **infertility is not only a medical but also a psychological issue**, with strong links to **stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation**.

- Women without **spousal support, family empathy, or peer networks** were found to have more severe psychological distress.
- In contrast, those with **emotional and social support** coped significantly better.

• Recommendations for Public Health System

The researchers recommended that **infertility treatment must be accompanied by psychological support** services:

- **Peer-group therapy**, involving women who are coping better, can provide shared emotional strategies.
- **Professional counselling** should be integrated into public hospitals to **help women manage the mental toll** of infertility and prepare for the exhausting treatment cycles.

• Legal and Policy Considerations

- **Article 47 (DPSP)** of the Constitution obligates the State to improve public health.
- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017** guarantees the **right to mental health services** and the **protection of human dignity** during treatment.



We found that women with spousal support and those with friends facing similar issues fared better than those without any emotional support

CHAKRAVERTI MAHAJAN
Researcher



- The study underscores the need to **expand reproductive rights policy** to include **mental health care**, particularly in **urban reproductive health programmes**.

• Need for Inclusive Reproductive Healthcare

This study reveals the urgent need for **integrated reproductive and mental health services**, especially in urban centers where fertility rates are declining and infertility treatments are increasing.

- Public awareness, de-stigmatization, and **gender-sensitive interventions** are crucial for a holistic approach to reproductive health.
- Women's **right to dignity, health, and emotional well-being** must be protected through a combination of **legal, medical, and psychological** frameworks.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The DU-LHMC study brings to light the **psychological cost of infertility**, especially for women in urban areas like Delhi. As India moves toward a **more inclusive health system**, addressing **mental health as part of reproductive healthcare** is essential. This is particularly relevant for **gender justice, urban governance, and public health policy**.

UPSC Relevance:

Important for **GS Paper 1 (Society – Women and Health)**, **GS Paper 2 (Governance – Health Policy, Mental Healthcare Act)**, **GS Paper 3 (Inclusive Growth, Health Infrastructure)**, and **Essay & Ethics (Human Dignity, Gender Sensitivity, Emotional Intelligence)**. Also relevant for **prelims** on schemes, health data, and legal provisions.

8. India's Deep-Sea Push for Rare Earth Exploration in Arabian Sea

• Strategic Move to Secure Critical Minerals

India is preparing to submit a formal application to the **International Seabed Authority (ISA)**, a UN body under **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)**, for the **exploration rights of a 10,000 sq. km area in the Arabian Sea**, specifically the **Carlsberg Ridge**, located between the Arabian and Indian coasts. This step aims to reduce **India's strategic dependence on China**, which currently dominates global rare earth supply chains.

• What Are Rare Earth Elements (REEs)?

Rare Earth Elements are a group of 17 chemically similar elements crucial for high-tech electronics, green energy, defense systems, and telecommunications. These include **neodymium, lanthanum, cerium, yttrium, and scandium**. While not "rare" in terms of abundance, their **economical extraction is difficult** due to scattered distribution and environmental concerns.

• India's Existing Allocations and Discoveries

Under the UNCLOS framework, **India has been allocated two seabed areas:**

- **0.75 million sq. km in Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB):** Polymetallic nodules found containing **cobalt, nickel, copper, and manganese**.
- **10,000 sq. km south of Indian Ocean Ridge (below Mauritius):** Presence of **copper, cobalt, platinum, and gold** confirmed. These findings provide the basis for future **commercial mining**.





• Technological Development for Deep-Sea Mining

India is currently **not mining commercially** due to the lack of advanced undersea extraction technologies. However, it is **developing mining and pumping technologies** capable of operating at **depths of 4–5 km** under the **National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai**.

- Challenges include **continuous pumping from seabed** and **environmental safety assurance**.

• Legal Framework and International Obligations

- The **ISA** governs all mineral activities in international seabeds under **Part XI of UNCLOS**.
- As the Arabian Sea zone lies beyond India's **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**, India must obtain **exploration and future exploitation rights** through the ISA.
- The resources in these global commons are to be **shared equitably**, and all activities must be **environmentally sustainable** under the **Precautionary Principle** of International Environmental Law.

• Significance for India's Economic and Strategic Interests

This initiative is vital for India's goal of **resource diversification, critical mineral self-reliance**, and its **vision of energy transition**, including the **Make in India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** initiatives. With the geopolitical focus shifting to **blue economy and ocean governance**, India's deep-sea mining efforts mark its entry into a high-stakes domain shared by global powers like **China, France, and South Korea**.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

India's application to the ISA for deep-sea mineral exploration in the Arabian Sea symbolizes a **strategic, technological, and diplomatic initiative**. It reflects the country's rising stake in the **blue economy, global mineral geopolitics, and marine governance under UNCLOS**. With increasing global competition for rare earths, India's focus on seabed minerals is **vital for energy security, supply chain independence, and economic sovereignty**.

UPSC Relevance:

Important for **GS Paper 1 (Geography – Ocean Resources)**, **GS Paper 2 (International Institutions – ISA, UNCLOS)**, **GS Paper 3 (Economy – Strategic Minerals, Technology, Environment)**, and **GS Paper 4 (Ethics in Resource Sharing)**. Also relevant for **Prelims (ISA, UNCLOS, EEZ, REEs, Polymetallic Nodules)** and **Essay topics on Blue Economy or Strategic Autonomy**.

9. India's Fiscal Deficit Widens in Q1 FY26: Key Highlights

• Sharp Rise in Fiscal Deficit Due to Capital Expenditure Surge

India's fiscal deficit for Q1 FY26 (April–June 2025) stood at ₹2.81 trillion—17.9% of the full-year target—nearly double the Q1 FY25 figure of ₹1.36 trillion. This sharp rise was largely driven by a significant increase in capital expenditure (capex), indicating the government's push for infrastructure-led growth.

• Capital vs. Revenue Expenditure Trends

Capital expenditure rose to ₹2.75 trillion in Q1 FY26 (24.5% of full-year goal), from ₹1.81 trillion in Q1 FY25. Total expenditure rose to ₹12.22 trillion (24.1% of annual target), of which ₹9.47 trillion was revenue expenditure (includes salaries, pensions, interest payments), showing a balanced rise in both types of expenditure.

• Revenue and Tax Collections Performance

Net tax revenue fell marginally to ₹5.4 trillion (19% of FY target), from ₹5.5 trillion in Q1 FY25. However,



non-tax revenue rose significantly to ₹3.73 trillion (64% of target) from ₹2.8 trillion. Overall, total revenue receipts reached ₹9.41 trillion (26.9% of FY target), easing the pressure from lower tax collections.

• Subsidy Trends: Food Subsidy Falls, Fertilizer Subsidy Rises

Total subsidies remained nearly stable at ₹3.83 trillion in Q1 FY26. Food subsidy declined sharply to ₹42,227 crore from ₹61,969 crore. However, fertilizer subsidies rose: nutrient-based subsidy increased to ₹9,499 crore and urea subsidy surged to ₹31,523 crore, reflecting input cost pressures.

• Government's Fiscal Consolidation Target

Despite the Q1 fiscal gap, the Centre remains committed to reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.4% of GDP by FY26, down from 5.6% in FY25. The full-year fiscal deficit target for FY26 is ₹15.69 trillion (lower than FY25's ₹16.85 trillion), in line with the FRBM Act's medium-term roadmap.

• Definition and Implications of Fiscal Deficit

Fiscal Deficit = Total Expenditure – (Revenue Receipts + Non-debt Capital Receipts). It reflects the borrowing requirement of the government. While some deficit is healthy to stimulate demand, excessive deficit risks crowding out private investment and increasing inflation and debt burden.

Centre's finances		
(Figures, as % of annual target)	Q1	
	FY25	FY26
Fiscal deficit	8.4	17.9
Total spending	20.1	24.1
Capex	16.3	24.5
Revenue spending	21.3	24.0
Net tax revenue	21.3	19.0
Non-tax revenue	51.3	64.0
Total receipts*	26.0	26.9

*Non-debt Source: CGA

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The significant increase in fiscal deficit in Q1 FY26 reflects the government's strategic front-loading of infrastructure and development spending post-election. Though tax revenues remain subdued, strong non-tax revenues and a long-term fiscal consolidation roadmap provide balance. For UPSC, this topic is relevant for:

- *GS Paper 3: Indian Economy – Public Finance, Budgeting, Infrastructure*
- *Prelims*: Concepts like fiscal deficit, capital vs. revenue expenditure, subsidy classification
- *Mains*: Questions may be framed around fiscal discipline vs. growth priorities, or analysis of subsidy rationalization and capital investment impacts.

10. Forest Land Diversion in India (2021–25): Key Highlights

• Extent of Forest Land Diversion in Recent Years

Between April 1, 2021, and March 31, 2025, the Government of India approved the diversion of **78,135.84 hectares** of forest land for non-forest purposes. In the first half of 2025 alone (up to June), **12,324.32 hectares** were approved for diversion, indicating a continued pace of forest clearance for development activities.

• Purpose of Diversion: Infrastructure and Development Projects

Forest land has been diverted mainly for infrastructure development, including **road construction, mining, irrigation, defense, and industrial projects**. These diversions are carried out under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**, which allows for non-forest use of notified forest land with prior approval of the Central Government.

• Legal Framework: Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

The diversion of forest land is regulated under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**, which aims to restrict and regulate the





de-reservation and use of forest land for non-forest purposes. As per Section 2 of the Act, no forest land can be diverted without prior approval from the Central Government.

- **Environmental Concerns and Biodiversity Impact**

Such large-scale diversion poses serious risks to **ecosystem services**, **biodiversity conservation**, and **climate mitigation efforts**. Forests play a vital role in **carbon sequestration**, **groundwater recharge**, and act as habitat for diverse flora and fauna. Continuous forest loss increases vulnerability to climate change, floods, and habitat fragmentation.

- **Constitutional Provisions and Environmental Governance**

Article 48A (Directive Principles) and Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duties) of the Indian Constitution impose a duty on both the State and citizens to **protect and improve the environment** and **safeguard forests and wildlife**. The diversion trend raises concerns regarding the balance between development and environmental sustainability.

- **Definition: Forest Land Diversion**

Forest land diversion refers to the legal process of allocating forest areas for non-forest activities such as industrial use, urban development, and infrastructure projects. It requires statutory clearance under environmental laws and often involves compensatory afforestation measures.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

The diversion of over 78,000 hectares of forest land in just four years highlights the tension between economic development and environmental conservation in India. While development is necessary, such figures call for **stricter environmental scrutiny**, **transparency**, and **sustainable alternatives**.

UPSC Relevance:

- *GS Paper 3: Environment and Ecology – Conservation, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Forest Policies*
- *Prelims:* Important laws like the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**, and related constitutional provisions
- *Mains:* Can be linked to questions on **development vs. environmental sustainability**, **climate commitments**, or **biodiversity loss and afforestation policies**.



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II. PROJECT 17A – DELIVERY OF INDIGENOUS STEALTH FRIGATE ‘HIMGIRI’ TO INDIAN NAVY

• Key Milestone in Indigenous Warship Development:

‘Himgiri’, the third frigate of the Nilgiri-class under **Project 17A**, was delivered to the Indian Navy on **31 July 2025**. Built by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE)**, Kolkata, it marks a significant advancement in India's efforts toward **Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance)** in defence shipbuilding.

• Project 17A Frigates – Features and Enhancements:

Project 17A frigates are **multi-mission stealth platforms**, designed by the **Warship Design Bureau (WDB)**. They feature **enhanced stealth, modular construction, increased automation, and improved survivability** compared to earlier frigates (like Project 17 – Shivalik class). Construction followed the **‘Integrated Construction’** philosophy for better modularity and faster delivery.

• Technological Specifications and Combat Capability:

Himgiri is equipped with:

- **Supersonic Surface-to-Surface Missiles (SSMs)**
- **Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MRSAM)**
- **76 mm naval gun, 30 mm & 12.7 mm Close-In Weapon Systems (CIWS)**
- **Propulsion: Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) system, with Controllable Pitch Propellers (CPP)**
- **Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS)** for real-time monitoring and control of shipboard systems



• Symbol of Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Defence:

The frigate has **75% indigenous content**, involving **over 200 MSMEs**, and generated direct employment for 4,000 people and indirect employment for over 10,000. This aligns with **India’s Defence Production Policy** and the **Make in India** initiative in defence sector.

• Strategic and Naval Relevance:

Himgiri is a reincarnation of the erstwhile INS Himgiri (Leander class), decommissioned in 2005, reflecting continuity and advancement in naval legacy. The frigate enhances the Navy's blue-water capabilities, essential for **securing India's maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific**.

• Legal and Constitutional Framework (Optional Addition):

- Defence and national security fall under the **Union List (Entry 1 & 2, Schedule VII, Constitution of India)**.
- Procurement policies are governed by **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020**, promoting indigenous manufacturing and strategic partnerships.

Conclusion and UPSC Relevance:

Project 17A represents India’s **transition to indigenous high-tech naval systems** and reflects the strategic intent to reduce dependency on foreign defence imports. It is a landmark under the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan** in defence. For UPSC, this topic links with **GS Paper 3 (Defence, Science & Tech, and Indigenization)**, and also with **GS Paper 2 (Security and International Relations – Indian Ocean strategy)**. Understanding such initiatives helps explain how India is modernizing its naval forces and reinforcing national security through indigenous capabilities.



12. TAMIL NADU TO AMEND SUCCESSION LAWS TO ENSURE INHERITANCE RIGHTS FOR TRANSGENDER PERSONS

• Major Legal Reform for Transgender Rights in Tamil Nadu:

The Tamil Nadu government, under CM M.K. Stalin, released the **Tamil Nadu State Policy for Transgender Persons, 2025**, which proposes to **amend the Hindu Succession Act** and the **Indian Succession Act** to **ensure equal inheritance rights** for transgender and intersex persons. This is a significant step towards equality and social justice.

• Implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:

The policy emphasizes proper implementation of the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019**, particularly provisions related to:

- Changing name and gender in academic certificates
- Protection from gender-based violence by family or intimate partners
- Prohibiting discrimination in access to services, employment, and education

• Welfare Measures and Housing Benefits:

The State will:

- Provide **preference in affordable housing schemes**
- Distribute **free house site pattas** to transgender and intersex persons
- Establish **short-stay homes** to provide safe accommodation during emergencies or displacement



• Additional Infrastructure and Governance Initiatives:

Alongside the policy announcement, the CM inaugurated new infrastructure projects by the **Police, Fire & Rescue Services**, and laid foundation stones for **new buildings in central prison campus (₹229 crore)** and **tax department facilities (₹27 crore)**, showcasing a governance push in both social justice and state infrastructure.

• Definition and Constitutional Backing:

- **Transgender Person:** As per the 2019 Act, a person whose gender does not match the gender assigned at birth. It includes trans-men, trans-women, genderqueer, and intersex people.
- **Legal Provisions:**
 - **Article 15** – Prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (interpreted by courts to include gender identity).
 - **Article 14** – Equality before law for all persons.
 - **NALSA v. Union of India (2014)** – Supreme Court recognized the rights of transgender persons and directed the government to treat them as socially and educationally backward classes for affirmative action.

• Conclusion and UPSC Relevance:

Tamil Nadu's initiative represents **progressive legal and social reform** aimed at mainstreaming transgender persons and fulfilling constitutional guarantees of **equality and dignity**. For UPSC, this topic is relevant under **GS Paper 2 (Governance, Social Justice, Vulnerable Sections)**, **GS Paper 1 (Society – Gender Issues)**, and **GS Paper 4 (Ethics – Equality, Empathy, and Justice)**. It also touches upon **Centre-State**



relations in policy innovation, and can be used in Essay writing on topics like gender justice, inclusion, and rights-based governance.

13. Electoral Revisions, Citizenship Proof, and the Democratic Dilemma

• Electoral Revision and the Citizenship Proof Debate

The Election Commission of India (ECI) launched a *Special Intensive Revision (SIR)* in Bihar, mandating all voters to submit fresh proof of citizenship within a month to remain on the electoral rolls. This includes hard-to-obtain documents like birth certificates or passports, while widely held IDs such as Aadhaar and ration cards are excluded. This exercise, although framed as a technical accuracy measure, risks mass *disenfranchisement* of over 65 lakh citizens, particularly the poor and marginalised.

• From Presumed Inclusion to Presumptive Exclusion

India's founding democratic principle was *universal adult franchise* irrespective of caste, class, or education. The current revision approach shifts the burden of proof onto the citizen, reversing the foundational principle that citizenship is a right by birth and not something to be repeatedly proven. This move echoes a systemic transition from inclusion to exclusion, undermining political equality.

• Historical Parallels and Legal Safeguards

Similar to the *Jim Crow laws* in the US (late 19th to mid-20th century) that disenfranchised African Americans through bureaucratic hurdles, the SIR process risks weaponising procedure against vulnerable citizens.

Supreme Court judgments like *Md. Rahim Ali v. State of Assam (2024)* and *Lal Babu Hussein v. ERO (1995)* have clearly ruled against arbitrary disenfranchisement. The

ECI's approach may violate **Article 326** (universal adult suffrage), **Article 14** (equality before law), and **Article 21** (right to life and dignity) of the Constitution.

• Impact on Democracy and Representation

This policy risks creating two Indias — one with documented voting power and the other silenced through bureaucracy. If the poor, landless, migrants, and minorities are excluded, political discourse, policies, and welfare will only reflect the interests of the enfranchised middle class. The right to vote, as Dr. Ambedkar noted, is central to *political equality*, which precedes social and economic justice.

• Role of Institutions: Judiciary, ECI and Civil Society

The Supreme Court has asked pointed questions to the ECI, highlighting humanitarian concerns. However, the Commission's responses have remained technical, not empathetic. Inaction or silence risks constitutional regression. The Court, civil society, and Parliament must act decisively to prevent democratic erosion masked under procedural pretexts.

• Conclusion and UPSC Relevance

India's democratic legitimacy rests on inclusive electoral participation. The Bihar SIR case underlines the tension between administrative efficiency and constitutional morality. Voting is not a privilege of the documented, but a fundamental right of every adult citizen.

UPSC Relevance:

- **GS Paper 2:** Constitutional provisions (Article 326), role of statutory bodies (ECI), issues related to vulnerable sections.
- **GS Paper 1:** Social justice, exclusion, and historical parallels (e.g. Jim Crow laws).
- **Essay & Ethics:** Democratic values, inclusion vs exclusion, dignity of the individual.
- **Current Affairs:** Electoral reforms, voter ID norms, role of judiciary in protecting rights.

