



CURRENT AFFAIRS: MARCH 2025

JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The discovery of wads of cash at the residence of Delhi High Court judge has raised concerns regarding accountability in India's higher judiciary.

Recent events have intensified the debate on judicial accountability:

- Previously, a former Chief Justice of India (CJI) joined a panel investigating sexual harassment charges against himself.
- Supreme Court took suo motu cognizance and stayed the Lokpal's ruling which stated that High Court Judges are amenable to Lokpal's jurisdiction.

Existing Key Mechanism for Ensuring accountability

- Impeachment: Governed by Articles 124, 217, 218 of the constitution and the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968.
- In-House Mechanism of 1999: Based on two important charters governing judicial ethics—the Restatement of Values of Judicial Life 1997 and the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct 2002.
 - o The CJI can receive complaints against the conduct of the Judges of the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice of the High Courts. High Court Chief Justices can handle complaints within their courts.
 - o A three-member committee examines the complaint and may recommend removal or criminal action. For instance, Justice Soumitra Sen and Nirmal Yadav were found guilty through such committees.
 - > In case of complaint against a HC judge, committee consists of two Chief Justices of HCs other than the HC to which judge belongs and one HC judge.
 - > In case of complaint against a HC Chief Justice, committee consists of a SC judge and two Chief Justices of other HCs.

> In case of complaint against a SC judge, committee consists of three SC judges.

IMMIGRATION AND FOREIGNERS BILL, 2025 INTRODUCED IN LOK SABHA

The Bill seeks to streamline various services related to immigration and foreigners, including their entry, exit and stay in the country.

- This bill repeals four existing laws Foreigners Act, 1946, Passport (Entry into India) Act (1920), Registration of

Foreigners Act (1939), and Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act (2000) which governs the services related to immigration and foreigners (refer to box).

- Three of these laws are from the pre-Constitution period brought during extraordinary times of World Wars I and II.

Key provisions of the Bill

- Grounds for Denying Entry or Stay: Foreigners can be denied entry if deemed a threat to national security, sovereignty, public health, or foreign relations.

- o Immigration Officers decisions will be final and binding.

- Tracking of Foreigners: Institutions such as educational establishments, hospitals, and nursing homes will be required to report foreign nationals to immigration authorities.

- Other: Stricter Penal Provisions (E.g. 5 years imprisonment or ₹5 lakh fine for entering India without valid documents)

FUTURE OF FREE SPEECH INDEX 2025

A new global survey by The Future of Free Speech ranks India 24th out of 33 countries for free speech support.

Other Key-findings

- Scandinavian countries (Norway, Denmark, and Sweden) and two democratic backsliders (Hungary and Venezuela) show the highest levels of support for free speech.
- Declining Support in Some Countries: Countries like Japan, Israel, and the U.S. have experienced significant drops in support for free speech since 2021.
- Traditional media, social media, and AI content generators play pivotal roles in shaping public discourse and raising concerns about free speech.

PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued new Priority Sector Lending (PSL) guidelines, which came into effect on April 1, 2025.

- These guidelines are issued under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (Sections 21 & 35A read with Section 56).
- Applicability: To every Commercial Bank [including Regional Rural Bank (RRB), Small Finance Bank (SFB), Local Area Bank (LAB)] and Primary (Urban) Co-operative Bank (UCB) other than Salary Earners' Bank

REMITTANCES TO INDIA

According to recent RBI Survey findings, Advanced Economies such as the US and the UK have emerged as the top sources of inward remittances for Indians in the past four years, leaving behind the Gulf nations.

Key Trends in Remittances Inflows to India

- Remittances inflow: Doubled to USD 118.7 billion in 2023-24 (compared to 2011).
- Top 5 source countries for India (2023-24): US (27.7%) followed by the UAE, the UK, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore.

o Historically, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia dominated India's remittance inflows. However, their combined share at 38% has fallen behind Advanced Economies' share of more than 50%.

- Top 3 recipient states in India (2023-24): Maharashtra (20.5%), followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

NATIONAL WATERWAYS

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) issued the National Waterways (Construction of Jetties/Terminals) Regulations, 2025.



Inland Water Transport

- Definition: Inland water transport (IWT) refers to the movement of people and goods on navigable waterways like rivers, canals, lakes, and other inland bodies of water.
- Benefits:
 - o Fuel Efficient: 1 Litre of fuel moves 24 tonne-km on road, 95 tonne-km on rail and 215 tonne-km on IWT.
 - o Cost Effective: Among different transport modes, the freight cost per ton-kilometer is ₹1.36 for railways, ₹2.50 for highways, and ₹1.06 for Inland Water Transport (IWT).
 - o Lower infrastructure costs: Compared to building and maintaining roads and railways, inland waterways are generally cheaper to develop and upkeep needing a terminal/quay side investment mostly.
 - o Reduced congestion: By taking bulk goods off roads, IWT helps alleviate traffic congestion on roads and railways, improving overall supply chain efficiency.
 - o Lower greenhouse gas emissions: Compared to trucks, barges and other vessels used in IWT produce less air and noise pollution.

Status of Inland waterways in India





- Navigable Waterways: India has about 14,500 km of navigable waterways which comprise of rivers, canals, backwaters creeks, etc.
 - o About 133.03 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) of cargo is being moved annually by Inland Water Transport (IWT).
- Comparison with Other Countries: In India, only 3.5% of trade happens through waterways, compared to 47% in China, 40% in Europe, and 35% in Bangladesh.

PAC CALLS FOR REVIEW OF GST

Parliamentary Committee on Public Accounts sought comprehensive review of GST Framework.

Key Issues Highlighting the Need for Review of GST Framework

- Issues of MSMEs: Struggle with compliance due to complexity of Inverted Duty Structure and administrative burden.
- Issues of Exporters: Faced delays in input tax credit (ITC) refunds, causing cash flow issues and reducing global competitiveness.
- Issues of steel rolling mills: Pay dual taxes as scrap dealers evade GST (thus, hindering ITC claims by mills); some businesses relocate to states with GST relaxations.
- Tax evasion by Online Gaming Sector: Despite recent amendments to the GST law targeting this sector, tax evasion persists due to varied business models.

Goods and Services Tax (GST)	
	Launched in July 2017 After the 101th Constitutional Amendment, Act, 2016
	Comprehensive Destination-Based Indirect Tax <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Imposed at every level of supply chain ⊗ Eliminates Cascading Tax Effect (Tax on Tax)
	Central Taxes Subsumed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Service Tax ⊗ Central Excise Duty ⊗ Additional Duties of Excise (Goods of Special Importance) ⊗ Excise Duty under Medicinal & Toilet Preparation (Excise Duties) Act, 1995 ⊗ Additional Duties of Customs (known as CVD) ⊗ Special Additional Duty of Customs (SAD) ⊗ Surcharges & Cesses
	State Taxes Subsumed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Central Sales Tax ⊗ Purchase Tax ⊗ Entertainment and Amusement Tax (other than those levied by local bodies) ⊗ Luxury Tax ⊗ Octroi and Entry Tax (All forms) ⊗ Taxes on lotteries, betting & gambling ⊗ Taxes on advertisements ⊗ State Cesses and Surcharges



MISSILE 'GANDIVA'

The DRDO has officially designated its air-to-air missile technology as "Gandiva."

Key Features of Gandiva/Astra MK-3

- It is next in line of the Astra series, building upon the success of its predecessors, the Astra MK-1 and MK-2.
- Propulsion System: It is powered by a Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet propulsion system, a cutting-edge technology that utilizes atmospheric oxygen as an oxidizer.
- Speed: It can sustain supersonic speeds, reportedly up to Mach 4.5, over extended ranges of 300–350 kilometres

BIOFUELS

India has emerged as the world's third-largest biofuel producer.

About Biofuels

- Biofuels are fuels produced from renewable resources and used in place of or blended with diesel, petrol, or other fossil fuels for transport, stationary, portable, and other applications.
- Types: Categorised into four generations (refer to infographic).
- Key Players: The USA is the largest producer followed by Brazil.
- It includes ethanol and biodiesel blending, Compressed Biogas (CBG), Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF), etc.

BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE SITES (BHS)

Kasampatty Sacred Grove is declared as Tamil Nadu (TN)'s second BHS (Arittapatti in Madurai being the first in TN).

- It is located near the Alagarmalai Reserve Forest in Dindigul district.

About Biodiversity Heritage Site

- BHS are unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems having rich biodiversity comprising - species richness, high endemism, presence of rare, endemic and threatened species, keystone species, etc.
- Notified as per Section 37 (1) of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
 - o It states that State Government, in consultation with the local bodies, notify in the Official Gazette, areas of biodiversity importance as BHS.

STRATEGIC CRYPTO RESERVE









The U.S. President signed an executive order establishing a Strategic Bitcoin Reserve (SBR) and the U.S. Digital Asset Stockpile to have a Strategic Crypto Reserve (SCR).

- It aims to include cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, Ethereum, XRP, Solana's SOL and Cardano's ADA in efforts to elevate America's crypto industry.
- It also aims at addressing the crypto management gap as the US will have a strategic advantage to being among the first nations to create an SBR.

What is Cryptocurrency?

- Cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency that uses cryptography for security and operates on decentralized blockchain technology.
- Unlike traditional fiat currencies, cryptocurrencies are not controlled by any central authority such as a government or central bank.
- Examples: Bitcoin (BTC), Ethereum (ETH), Ripple (XRP), Tether (USDT).

Exercises in News

<p>Exercise INDRA 2025</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14th Edition of Exercise INDRA is taking place in Chennai from March 28, 2025 to April 02, 2025. About Exercise INDRA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a bilateral naval exercise between India and Russia, taking place since 2003. The exercise will be conducted in two phases – Harbour phase (at Chennai), and Sea phase in Bay of Bengal. Participation: Russian Federation Naval Ships Pechanga, Rezkiiy, and Aldar Tsydenzhapov and Indian Naval Ships Rana, Kuthar, and Maritime patrol aircraft P8I.
<p>Exercise Prachand Prahar</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force) conducted a tri-service integrated multi-domain exercise, Prachand Prahar, in Arunachal Pradesh. It validated integrated planning, command and control, and seamless execution of surveillance and firepower platforms across the three services.
<p>Varuna Exercise 2025</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently, VARUNA Exercise 2025 was concluded. About Varuna 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a bilateral naval exercise between India and France. Location: Arabian Sea Aim: Enhanced jointmanship, upholding principles of rules-based maritime order, promoting stability in Indo-Pacific It included mock air-to-air combat between French Rafale-M and Indian MiG-29K.
<p>Bongosagar 2025</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India-Bangladesh Naval Exercise Bongo Sagar 2025 and Coordinated Patrol was conducted in the Bay of Bengal. The exercise saw participation of INS Ranvir from the Indian Navy. The first edition of Bongosagar was held in 2019. Other bilateral exercise Between India and Bangladesh: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise Sampriti: Annual joint military exercise Focuses on counterterrorism, disaster response, and military cooperation.
<p>Exercise Khanjar</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KHANJAR-XII edition of 2025 is set to take place in Kyrgyzstan. About Khanjar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise. It is held annually and conducted alternatively in both the countries. Aim: To exchange experiences and best practices in Counter Terrorism and Special Forces Operations.
<p>TROPEX - 2025</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TROPEX 25 conducted over a period of three months from Jan to Mar 25. About TROPEX <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is the Indian Navy's premier biennial war exercise. Aim: To assess and enhance the operational preparedness of the Indian Navy in coordination with the Indian Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard
<p>Exercise Desert Hunt 2025</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise Desert Hunt 2025 was conducted by Indian Air Force at Air Force Station Jodhpur. About Exercise Desert Hunt 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an integrated Tri-Service Special Forces exercise. It involved elite units from all three services, Para (Special Forces) of Indian Army, Marine Commandos (MARCOS) of Indian Navy and Garud Special Forces of Indian Air Force. It focused on interoperability, synergy, and rapid response in simulated combat scenarios.
<p>INIOCHOS-25</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indian Air Force to Participate in Multinational Air Exercise in Greece. About INIOCHOS-25 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an annual multinational air exercise hosted by Greece's Hellenic Air Force. It serves as a platform for air forces to hone their skills, exchange tactical knowledge, and strengthen military ties.

NATIONAL GENE BANK

Union Government has announced the establishment of second National Gene Bank (NGB) to conserve 10 lakh crop germplasm, ensuring future food and nutritional security.

- The first NGB was established in 1996 at the ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) in New Delhi.

About Gene Banks

- Gene banks are biorepositories that store genetic material of plants, animals, and microorganisms to preserve biodiversity and ensure long-term food security.
- Types of Gene Banks: Seed Banks (Svalbard Global Seed Vault, Norway), Field Gene Banks (live plants conserved in natural conditions), Cryo-preservation Banks (preserve tissues, embryos, and cells), Pollen and DNA Banks, etc.
- Other Gene Banks in India
 - Animal Gene Bank: ICAR-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR), Haryana.
 - Microbial Gene Bank: ICAR-National Bureau of Agriculturally Important Microorganisms (NBAIM), Uttar Pradesh.

NASA'S ASTRONAUTS RETURN TO EARTH AFTER BEING STUCK IN SPACE FOR 286 DAYS

NASA astronauts, Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, had travelled to the International Space Station (ISS) on board Boeing's CST-100 Starliner.

- Starliner experienced helium leaks and a malfunctioning thruster, which helps steer and control reentry making it unsafe for astronauts.
- Soviet cosmonaut Valeri Polyakov holds the record for the longest single stay in space, spending 438 days aboard the Mir space station.

NORTH INDIA'S FIRST NUCLEAR POWER PROJECT

North India's first nuclear power project will be established in Gorakhpur, Haryana.

- Gorakhpur project consists of two twin units, each with a Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR), for a total capacity of 2800 MW

About PHWR

- A PHWR uses Heavy Water (D₂O) as both coolant and moderator, with natural uranium as fuel.

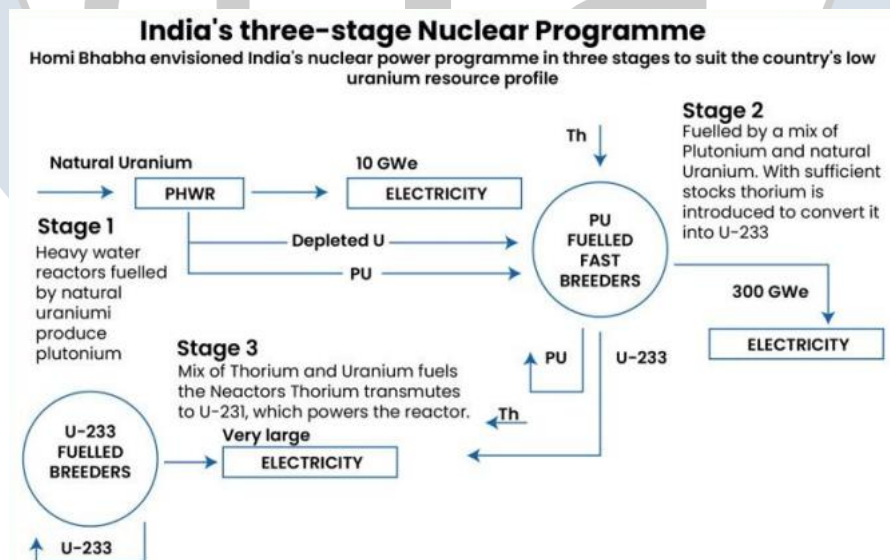
o Heavy water is water that contains heavy hydrogen (also known as deuterium) in place of regular hydrogen.

o Heavy water is used because it slows down neutrons effectively and also has a low probability of absorption of neutrons.

- India's PHWR Development

o Introduced through Indo-Canadian nuclear cooperation in the 1960s.

o First 220 MW reactor built at Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS-1).





JNANPITH AWARD

Vinod Kumar Shukla is selected for 59th Jnanpith Award. It is recognized as the highest literary award in India.

About Jnanpith Award

- The Jnanpith Award has been presented annually by Bharatiya Jnanpith since 1965 for outstanding contributions to Indian literature.
 - o Bharatiya Jnanpith, established in 1944, is one of the premier literary organizations.
- Jnanpith Award, considered the highest literary award in India, given annually for the best creative literary output to writers in any of the 22 languages recognized by the Constitution of India.
 - o From 2013, works in English language were also considered.

STARLINK SATELLITE INTERNET

Indian telecom companies Airtel and Reliance Jio ink pacts with SpaceX to bring starlink's satellite internet services to India.

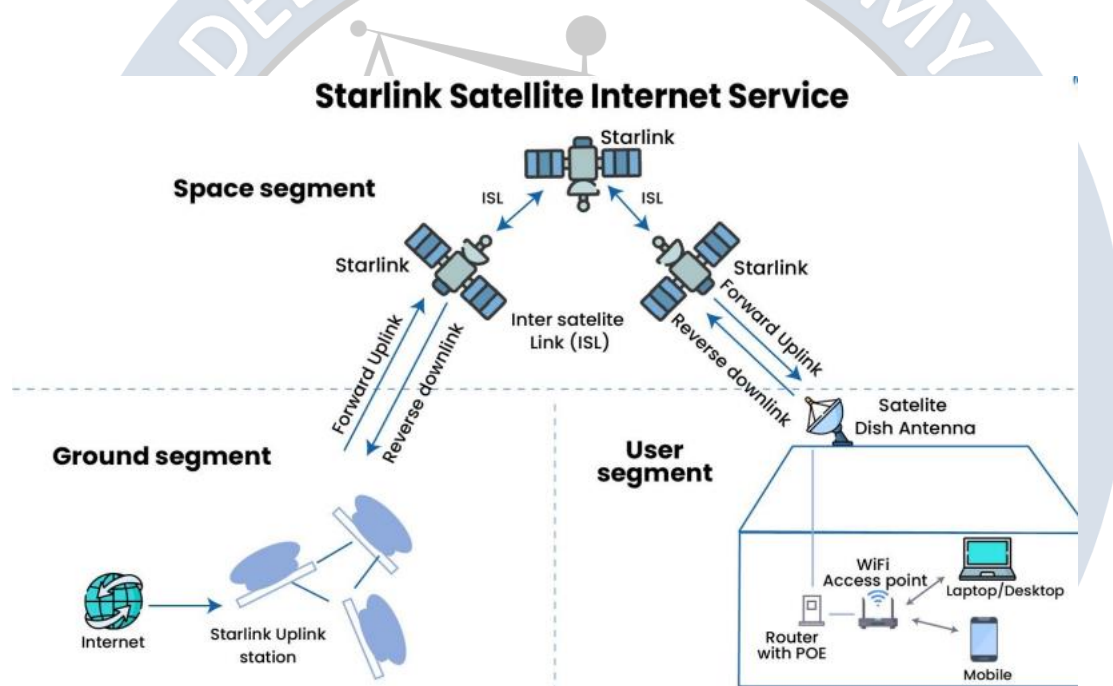
- Starlink is the world's first and largest satellite constellation that uses Low Earth Orbit (LEO) to provide high-speed, low-latency broadband internet.

Satellite Internet

- It is a wireless internet through communication satellites orbiting the Earth and is location independent, providing global coverage.
- Satellites communicate with each other using lasers, reducing dependence on ground stations.

Starlink Satellite Internet Service

- Presently, there are around 7,086 starlink satellites in orbit.
- Each starlink satellite:
 - o Contains 3 space lasers (Optical Intersatellite Links or ISLs) operating at up to 200 Gbps, which together across the constellation form a global internet mesh.
 - o Uses 5 advanced Ku-band phased array antennas and 3 dual-band (Ka-band and E-band) antennas to provide high-bandwidth connectivity.






METEORITE

Scientists confirm meteorite fall in a village in Beed (Maharashtra).

- Meteorites are when a meteoroid survives its trip through the atmosphere and hits the ground.

Difference between Meteoroid, Meteor and Meteorite

 In space Meteoroid	 In atmosphere Meteor	 On earth Meteorite
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are space rocks, usually, pieces of other, larger bodies that have been broken or blasted off. E.g. Planets, asteroids, comets. They are both rocky and/or metallic. They are smaller than asteroids and contain less water and ice than comets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are formed when meteoroids enter the Earth's or a planet's atmosphere. They are called 'shooting stars' as they enter with high speed and burn up due to atmospheric pressure. 'Meteor showers' is a celestial event where several meteors hit Earth's atmosphere over a short period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a meteoroid survives the trip through the atmosphere and hits the ground, it is called a Meteorite. Types: stony, iron, and stony-iron. They have a dark, burned exterior with a roughened, smooth, or thumbprint surface due to thermal ablation. They can create 'Impact Craters' on impact with the surface. E.g. Lonar Lake (Maharashtra)

Note1: >50,000 meteorites have been found on Earth. Of these ~99.8% come from asteroids. (NASA).

Note2: In India, Geological Survey of India (GSI) is the custodian of all meteorite falls/finds in the country.

VIKRAMSHILA UNIVERSITY

A decade after Nalanda University came up in the foothills of Rajgir, work is on to revive another ancient centre of learning in Bihar i.e. Vikramshila.

About Vikramshila University

- Founded: By Pala king Dharmapala (8th-9th Century AD), it thrived alongside Nalanda.
- Known for Vajrayana/Tantrayana Buddhism, occult studies, and theological disciplines.
- Scholars from Tibet came to study here. Many manuscripts were written in Sanskrit and also translated into Tibetan.
- Atisha Dipankar (980-1054), a Buddhist in the Pala kingdom was an *adhyaksha* (head of the university) here.
- Destroyed in late 12th century by Bakhtiyar Khalji, a military commander of Qutubuddin Aibak.

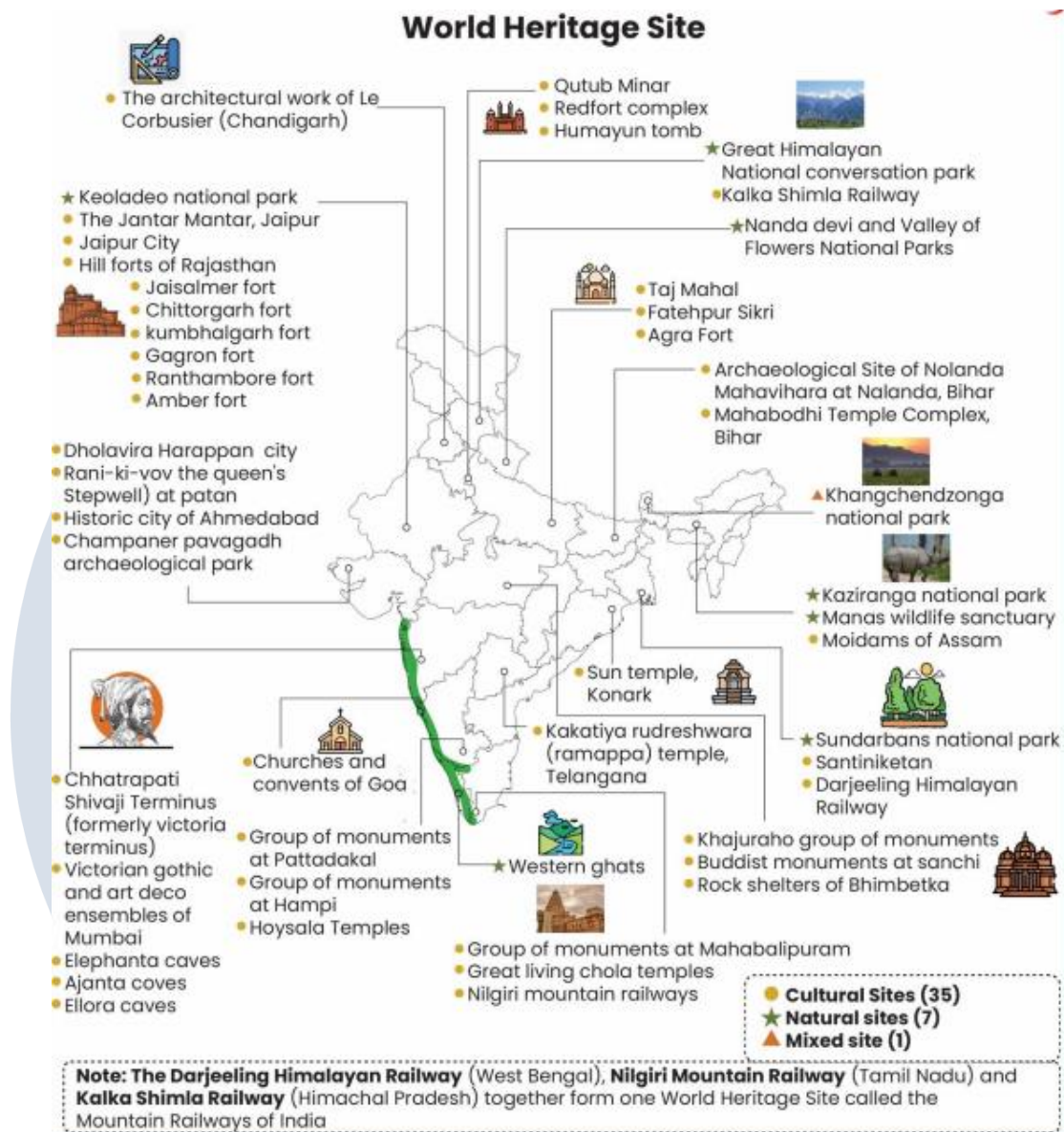
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Six sites have been added to India's Tentative List by UNESCO's World Heritage Centre in 2025.

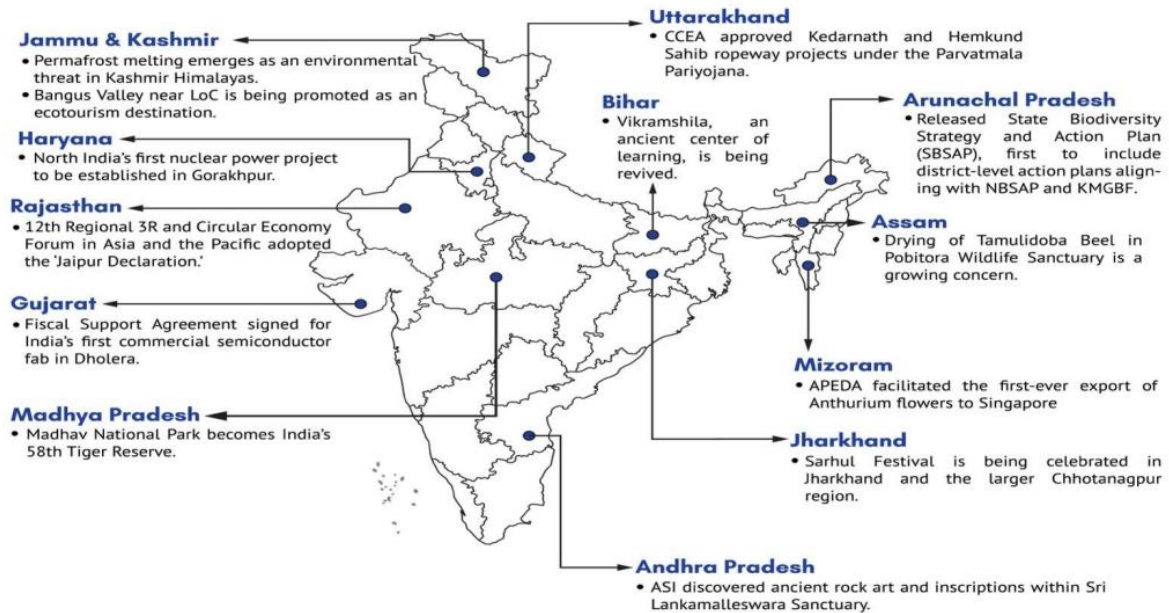
- A tentative list is an “inventory” of properties a country believes deserves to be a World Heritage Site.
- Process: After inclusion in Tentative List, the country has to prepare a nomination document that will be considered by UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
 - In India, Indian National Commission for Co-operation with UNESCO (INCCU), and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) play a key role in this regard.
- The 6 sites are
 - Mudumal Menhirs of Telangana
 - Kanger Valley National Park in Chhattisgarh
 - Ashokan Edict Sites in multiple states
 - Chausath Yogini Temples in Madhya Pradesh and Odisha
 - Gupta Temples in multiple states
 - Palace-Fortresses of the Bundelas in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

What are UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS)?

- A World Heritage Site is a location recognised by UNESCO for its “outstanding universal value”.
- It is guided by Convention Concerning Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage (called World Heritage Convention).
- Three categories: Cultural heritage, Natural heritage, and Mixed heritage (cultural as well as natural).



India



World

