

## Today's Prelims Topics

### Cabinet Nod To Rejig Skilling Initiatives With A Combined Scheme

#### Context

The Union government has decided to restructure its skilling initiatives, combining three of them into the Skill India Programme.

#### The 3 Schemes

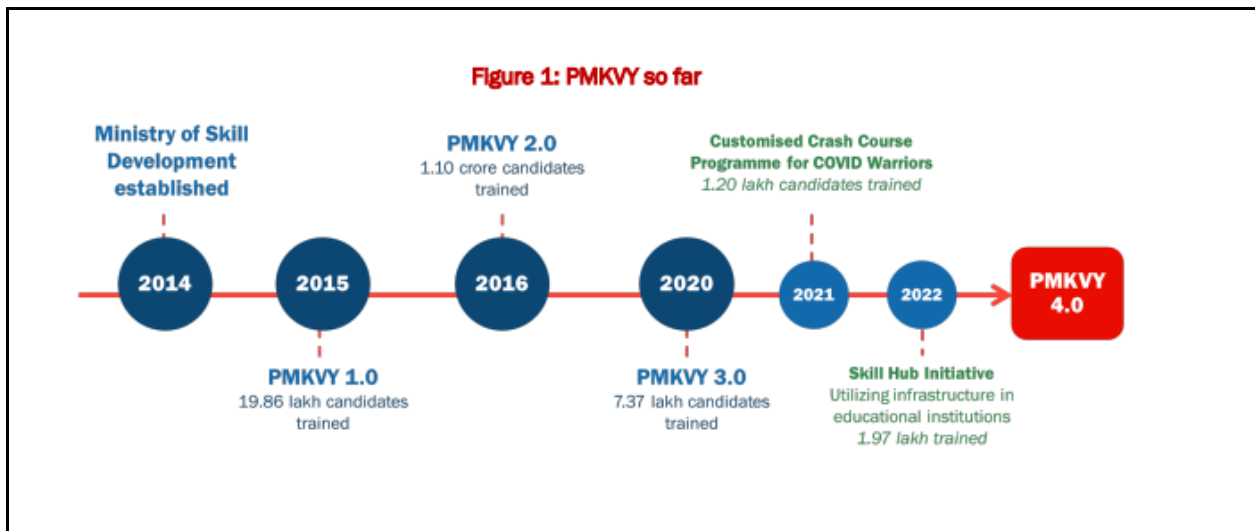
##### Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0)

- **Ministry:** Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- **Implemented by:** National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).
- **Duration:** FY 2022-2026.
- **Target beneficiary:** 15-59 years of age.
- **Objective:**
  - Aims to provide **industry-relevant skill training** to Indian youth.
  - Helps individuals secure better employment opportunities.
- **Skill Certification:**
  - Recognizes and certifies individuals with **prior learning experience**.
  - Includes **assessment under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) framework**.

**Figure 2: Broad Implementation Framework**



- MSDE launched Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) in 2015.



### Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS)

- **Objective:** Aims to facilitate a smooth transition from education to employment through apprenticeship training.
  - Provides industry-specific skills via real-world workplace exposure.
- **Financial Support:** Central Government covers **25% of the stipend**, up to **₹1,500 per month per apprentice**, via **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Open to individuals aged **14 to 35 years**.
- **Industry Alignment:** Encourages apprenticeships in **traditional manufacturing** as well as emerging fields like **AI, robotics, blockchain, green energy, and Industry 4.0 technologies**.
- **Support for Small Enterprises:** Promotes enrolment in **MSMEs**, especially in **aspirational districts** and the **North-East Region**, expanding opportunities in underserved areas.

### Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme

- **Community-Centric Skilling Initiative:** Focuses on providing **affordable, flexible, and inclusive** vocational training.
- **Beneficiary:** Targets **women, rural youth, and economically disadvantaged groups (15-45 years age group)**.
- **Accessible Training Model:** Offers **low-cost, doorstep training with flexible schedules** to promote both **self-employment and wage-based livelihoods**.
- **Integrated with:** Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) and ULLAS (Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society).
- **Certification & Formal Recognition:** Certifications aligned with **National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)**.
  - Integrated with **DigiLocker** and **National Credit Framework (NCrF)** to facilitate **employment and higher education opportunities**.
- **Significance:**
  - Reinforces **continuous upskilling and reskilling** under the **Skill India Programme**.
  - Contributes to **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data** to align workforce policies with economic trends.
  - Beyond skill training, JSS promotes **social empowerment** through awareness on **health, hygiene, financial literacy, gender equality, and education**.

Source: [The Hindu: Cabinet nod to rejig skilling initiatives with a combined scheme](#)

## Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX-25)

### Context

India is conducting Theatre Level Operational Exercise (TROPEX-25) in the Indian Ocean Region.

### About TROPEX

- It is the **Indian Navy's largest biennial maritime exercise.**
  - Includes testing **Combat readiness** and **joint warfighting capabilities.**
- **Location:** Conducted across the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR).**
- **Participation:** Led by the **Indian Navy** with active involvement from the **Indian Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard.**
- **Key Features:**
  - Strengthens **maritime security** and enhances **anti-submarine, cyber, and electronic warfare** capabilities.
  - Involves **live weapon firings** and **simulated combat scenarios.**
  - Tests **integrated response strategies** against **conventional, asymmetric, and hybrid threats.**
  - Includes **joint work-up phases** and **amphibious exercises** for coordinated operations.

Source: [The Hindu: 9 submarines, 65 ships taking part in TROPEX exercise](#)



## Trump sanctions ICC for 'illegitimate probes'

### Context

U.S. President Donald Trump imposed sanctions on the International Criminal Court for probes targeting America and its ally Israel.

### More in News

- Trump stated that the court had “abused its power” by issuing an arrest warrant for visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who held talks with the U.S. President

### About International Criminal Court (ICC)

- ICC is a permanent judicial institution **established in 2002** under the **Rome Statute of 1998**.
  - It is headquartered in **Hague, Netherlands**.
- **Mandate:** To investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate individuals accused of committing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression.
- **Members:** 123 (Important **non-member** countries: **India, US, China & Russia**)
- **Composition:** The Court has **18** judges, each from a different member country, elected for a **nine-year term**.
- ICC **can only hear a case if either** the country where the crime was committed or the perpetrator's country of origin is a party to the Rome Statute.
- After **issuing an arrest warrant ICC relies on countries to make arrests and transfer suspects to the ICC**.
- Unlike the International Court of Justice (ICJ) it is **not an organ of the United Nations**.

### Difference between ICC & ICJ

Parameter	ICC (International Criminal Court)	ICJ (International Court of Justice)
Establishment & HQ	2002, Hague (Netherlands)	1946, Hague (Netherlands)
UN Relation	Independent- may receive case referrals from UN Security Council	Official court of the UN, known as the World Court
Case types	Criminal prosecution of individuals	Contentious between parties, and advisory opinions
Subject matter	Genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes of aggression	Maritime disputes, sovereignty, natural resources, trade, treaty violations and treaty interpretations, human rights, etc.
Funding	Contributions from parties to the Rome Statute, voluntary contributions from the UN, governments, corporations, organisations, etc.	UN

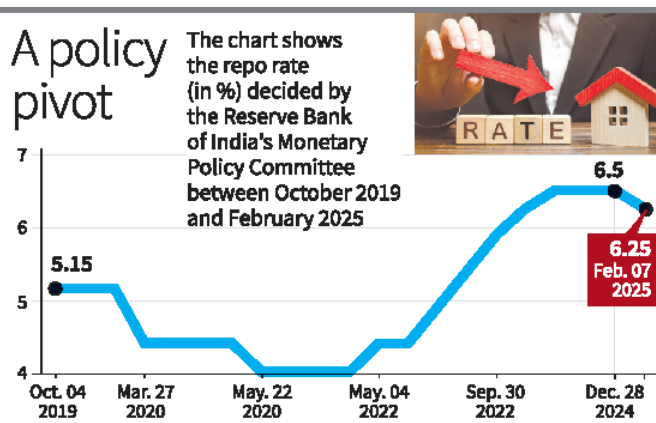
Source: [The Hindu: Trump sanctions ICC for 'illegitimate probes'](#)

## RBI Slashes Rate By 0.25% To Revive Growth

### Context

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has **reduced the repo rate to 6.25%**.

### More in News



- Hope of inflation easing to 4.4% in this quarter and 4.2% through 2025-26.
- Projected a **real GDP growth of 6.7%** for 2025-26 from the 6.4% estimated this year.
- **Foreign exchange reserves** stood at **\$630.6 billion**, providing an import cover of over 10 months.

### Monetary Policy Committee

- MPC was constituted in **2016** as a **statutory body** under the **RBI Act** to formulate monetary policy in India (on recommendation of **Urjit Patel committee**)

- Composition (**Chairperson + 5 Members**): Quorum: 4 members.
  - RBI Governor - ex-officio chairperson
  - RBI Deputy Governor + 1 more member from RBI to be nominated by the Central Board of Directors.
  - 3 other members are appointed by the Central Government.

- Members of MPC hold office for a period of **4 years** and are **not eligible for re-appointment**.

- MPC is required to **meet at least four times in a year**.

- MPC takes decisions based on **majority vote** (by those who are present and voting. In case of a tie, the **RBI governor will have the second or casting vote**).

- **The decision of the committee is binding on the RBI.**



### How is the Repo Rate Used by the MPC?

- **Inflation Control:** The MPC adjusts the repo rate to manage inflation.
  - A higher repo rate makes borrowing costlier for banks, reducing the money supply in the economy and thereby controlling inflation.
  - Conversely, a lower repo rate boosts lending and stimulates economic activity.
- **Liquidity Management:** By altering the repo rate, the MPC influences liquidity in the financial system.
  - A higher rate tightens liquidity, while a lower rate eases liquidity conditions.
- **Economic Growth:** The repo rate affects overall interest rates in the economy.

- Lowering the repo rate promotes borrowing and investment, supporting economic growth.
- Raising it can slow growth to manage overheating or inflationary pressures.
- **Exchange Rate Stability:** Changes in the repo rate can impact the value of the rupee by affecting capital flows and investor sentiment.

#### RBI Uses Various Tools To Achieve These Objectives

- **Repo rate:** It is the interest rate at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends money to commercial banks against government securities as collateral for short-term needs.
- **Standing Deposit Facility (SDF):** It is a monetary policy tool that RBI uses to absorb excess liquidity from commercial banks.
- **Liquid adjustment facility (LAF):** It is a facility provided by RBI to scheduled commercial banks to avail of liquidity in case of need or to park excess funds with RBI on an overnight basis against the collateral of government securities.
- **Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR):** The amount of money that banks must keep with the RBI as a percentage of their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL). A higher CRR reduces the funds available for banks to lend, tightening liquidity in the market.
  - **Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR):** The percentage of a bank's total deposits that must be invested in government securities or other approved securities. A higher SLR reduces the money available for banks to lend, limiting cash flow in the economy.

#### UPSC PYQ

**Q.** If the RBI decides to adopt an expansionist monetary policy, which of the following it would not do? (2020)

1. Cut and optimise the Statutory Liquidity Ratio
2. Increase the Marginal Standing Facility Rate
3. Cut the Bank Rate and Repo Rate

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Answer: B**

**Source:**

- [The Hindu: RBI slashes rate by 0.25% to revive growth](#)

## Places in News

### Georgia to adopt new foreign influence law modelled after U.S.

#### Georgia

→ **News?** Georgia's ruling party announced it will replace the controversial "foreign influence" law with a version identical to a U.S. law.



- **Location:** Caucasus region, on the **eastern edge of the Black Sea**.
- **Capital:** Tbilisi.
- **Bordered by:** Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Black Sea.
- It was **part of the Soviet Union until 1991**.

#### Source:

- [The Hindu: Georgia to adopt new foreign influence law modelled after U.S.](#)

## Editorial Summary

### India's voice must resonate in global AI conversations

#### Context

The **International Network of AI Safety Institutes** was inaugurated in **November 2024** in **San Francisco, U.S.**, following the **Seoul Statement of Intent**, under which nations pledged to collaborate on AI safety.

#### More in News

- This network aims to unify global efforts in AI safety research, technical expertise, and policy innovation to establish best practices and harmonized safety standards.
- However, India has **not yet joined** this international initiative, despite being a major AI adopter.

#### Evolving Nature of AI

- AI is a **borderless** technology, rapidly advancing across sectors like healthcare, finance, agriculture, and cybersecurity.
- With **30% AI adoption in India** (higher than the **global average of 26%**) and **10% of ChatGPT users being Indian**, AI has become deeply integrated into India's economy.
- However, the **geopolitical landscape** is shifting, with the U.S. imposing **export controls on advanced AI** to restrict China's access.
- This could impact India's access to crucial AI technologies, making global participation in AI governance even more critical.

#### India's Stance

- India has **not yet joined** the **International Network of AI Safety Institutes**, despite its growing AI ecosystem.
- The **absence** from this forum risks India losing influence over **global AI regulations**.
- Engaging in **international AI safety initiatives** is essential for:
  - **Protecting India's AI ecosystem** – Ensuring ethical, secure, and competitive AI development.
  - **Strengthening India's global leadership** – Shaping AI governance frameworks and influencing global standards.
  - **Navigating geopolitical challenges** – Preventing potential restrictions on AI technology access.
  - **Fostering innovation & investments** – Aligning policies with global norms to attract AI funding and partnerships.
- India's strengths, like its **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** and a robust **tech talent pool**, position it well to **lead global AI safety discussions** rather than remain a **passive observer**.
- The need for a **national AI safety institution** and proactive international engagement is urgent.

#### What India Needs to Do in the AI Race

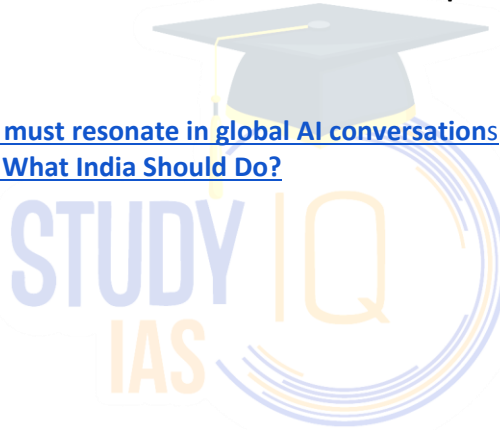
- **Develop Cost-Effective AI Solutions:** India must **innovate with efficiency**, similar to ISRO's approach, by focusing on **low-energy, cost-effective AI models** that can scale rapidly.
  - This will allow India to do **more with less**, ensuring AI is accessible and sustainable.
- **Strengthen Open-Source AI Ecosystem:** Encouraging **open-source AI models** will foster innovation and democratize AI development.
  - Support startups and developers in building **domain-specific AI solutions** that cater to **India's unique needs** (e.g., healthcare, agriculture, education).



- **Build Sovereign AI Models with Indian Data:** Develop **frontier AI models** trained on **Indian datasets** to ensure they are **culturally relevant and free from foreign biases**.
  - Move beyond application-layer AI and **develop an end-to-end AI ecosystem**, including foundational models and infrastructure.
- **Invest in AI Hardware & Semiconductor Independence:** GPUs are critical for AI, but **US restrictions** limit India's access to advanced chips.
  - India must **build domestic semiconductor capabilities** through investments in **chip manufacturing, AI computing power, and energy-efficient hardware**.
- **Develop Multilingual & Multimodal AI Models:** India has **22 official languages and hundreds of dialects**—AI models must support **multilingual and multimodal** capabilities to make AI truly inclusive.
  - Initiatives like **BHASHINI** need to be scaled up for broader reach.
- **Secure Tier-I Status in Global AI Supply Chains:** As a **Quad partner**, India must **demand Tier-I status** in AI diffusion policies to avoid restrictions on **high-end GPUs and AI technologies**.
  - Strengthen **diplomatic and trade negotiations** to ensure unrestricted access to AI hardware and software.
- **Adopt a Mission-Driven, Urgent Approach:** AI is a **global strategic priority**—India must act with **urgency and mission-mode execution**, similar to its success in **UPI, Aadhaar, and digital infrastructure**.
  - Establish an **IndiaAI Mission Task Force** to drive **policy, funding, and AI research collaboration**.

Sources:

- [The Hindu: India's voice must resonate in global AI conversations](#)
- [Indian Express: AI Race: What India Should Do?](#)



## Technology And The Challenge Of Equitable Education

### Context

Technology has revolutionized education but its full potential remains untapped for the underprivileged.

### How Technology Helped in Education

- **Increased Access to Learning Materials:** Smartphones became a primary tool for education during the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitating access to texts, worksheets, and videos as substitutes for traditional textbooks.
  - Virtual training sessions for teachers and students became common.
- **Wider Smartphone Penetration in Rural India:** In 2018, 36% of rural households had smartphones, which increased to 84% by 2024 (ASER 2024).
  - More children now own personal smartphones, enhancing individual access to digital education.
- **Overcoming Language Barriers:** AI-powered tools now allow dictation, writing, and translation in local languages, making digital learning more inclusive.
- **Potential for Community-Based Learning:** Broadcast learning programs, piloted in Maharashtra during the pandemic, showed group learning models can be effective, even in remote villages.
- **Support for Mothers' Education:** A large number of mothers (40%) have very low schooling, but digital learning offers opportunities for their education, enabling them to support their children's learning.

### Challenges of Equitable Education

- **Digital Divide:** While smartphone penetration has increased, internet access and affordability remain barriers, especially in rural and low-income households.
  - Device sharing within families limits personalized learning opportunities.
- **Quality vs. Access:** Enrolment rates have surged, but learning outcomes remain poor (ASER reports).
  - Mere access to schools or digital tools does not guarantee quality education.
- **Language and Content Gaps:** While AI-driven translation has improved, many educational resources are still in English or urban-centric languages, making them less useful for rural learners.
- **Teacher Training and Integration of Technology:** Many teachers lack digital skills to integrate technology effectively into the classroom.
  - Traditional teaching methods remain dominant, limiting the impact of digital learning.
- **Gender Gap in Education:** Lower smartphone ownership among mothers and girls restricts access to online learning opportunities.
  - Societal norms and early marriages further disrupt female education.
- **Economic Constraints:** Private schools and paid digital learning platforms widen the gap between privileged and underprivileged students.
  - Lack of affordable digital education solutions for low-income families.
- **Standardization vs. Local Needs:** National or global curricula often overlook regional and local educational needs.
  - AI-driven education must adapt to cultural and contextual requirements.
- **Profit-Driven Technological Innovations:** Most ed-tech solutions are profit-driven, limiting accessibility for marginalized communities.
  - Philanthropic investments in public digital education are insufficient to bridge this gap.

### Way Forward

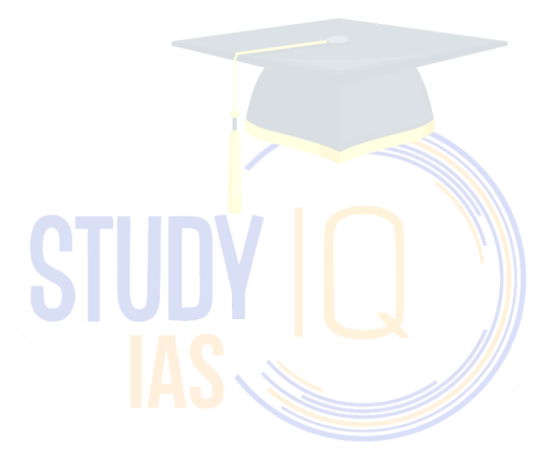
- **Improve digital infrastructure** in rural areas.

- **Localize content** to ensure cultural relevance.
- **Train teachers** to use technology effectively.
- **Promote free and open-source** educational platforms.
- **Support female education** with targeted policies and digital access programs.

Source: [The Hindu: Technology and the challenge of equitable education](#)

#### Conclusion

To **avoid becoming a technological colony of the US or China**, India must **rapidly build self-reliant AI capabilities**. By focusing on **hardware independence, open-source AI, sovereign models, and policy influence**, India can **secure its place as a global AI leader**. The AI revolution is happening **now**, and **India must lead, not follow**.



## Detailed Coverage

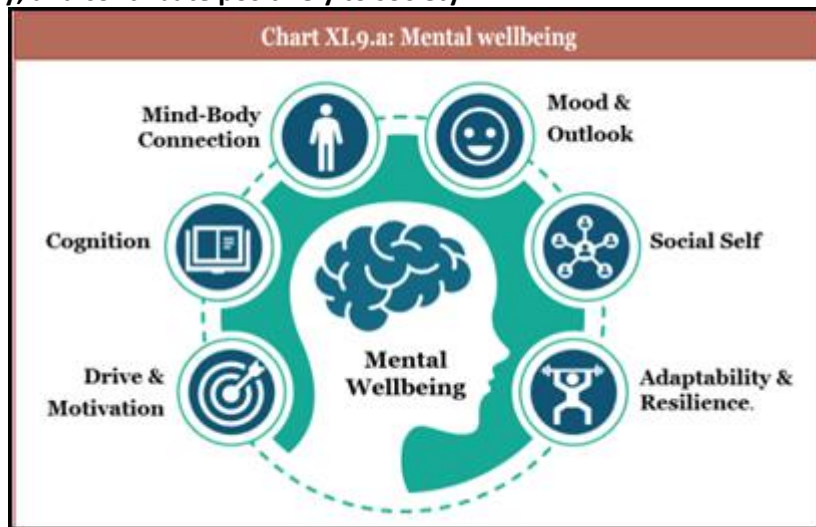
### Advancing Mental Healthcare in India

#### Context

Economic Survey 2024-25 highlighted that Mental well-being encompasses all our mental-emotional, social, cognitive, and physical capabilities.

#### What is Meant by Mental Health?

As per the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, mental health is a state of well-being that enables individuals to **handle life's challenges, recognize their potential, learn effectively, work productively, and contribute positively to society.**



#### Quote

- “The unexamined life is not worth living.” – Socrates

#### Trends of Mental Health in Workplace

- **Global Trend:** An alarming increase in suicides among young professionals has emerged, with excessive workplace stress identified as a primary cause.
- **Crisis in Japan:** The term ‘karoshi’ (death from overwork) is used in Japan, where 2,900 people committed suicide in 2023 due to overwork.
- **Statistics in India:** According to a Statista report, 11,486 suicides among Indian professionals in the private sector were recorded in 2022.
  - **Recent Incidents:** In July, a **26-year-old woman executive** from a multinational consulting firm took her life due to immense work pressures.
    - In September, a **38-year-old software engineer with 15 years of experience** in Chennai ended his life while being treated for depression linked to work stress.
- These incidents highlight the struggle between outward success and internal mental health challenges, such as **depression** and **anxiety**.

#### Reasons for Rising Stress and Anxiety

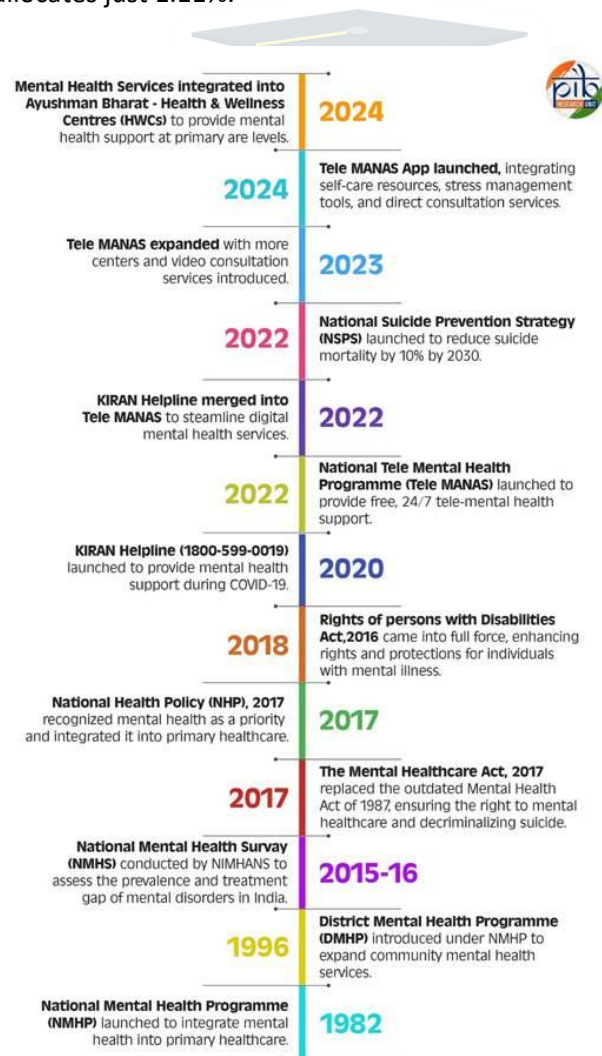
- The modern emphasis on **efficiency and material wealth** leads to **disconnection from self-awareness** and contributes to the mental health crisis.
- **Urban Pressures:** The pressures of **urban living, financial instability, and fierce competition** contribute significantly to mental health issues.

- Many individuals find that material success does not equate to true well-being, leading to **feelings of isolation and purposelessness**.
- The focus on profit, efficiency, and cost-cutting leads to immense pressure on employees, resulting in **long working hours and stressful conditions**.
- **Consumerism:** A growing focus on consumerism fosters a culture where **status is defined by luxury goods, resulting in stress and social comparison**.
  - This cycle of chasing material wealth **neglects emotional and psychological needs**.

### Reasons for Poor Mental Health Status in India

- **Lack of Awareness and Sensitivity:** In India, mental health issues are often **not regarded as healthcare concerns**.
  - **Example:**
- **Shortage of Mental Healthcare Personnel:** India faces a severe shortage of mental health professionals.
  - **Example:** National Mental Health Survey (2015-2016) highlighted that India has only 0.75 psychiatrists per 1 lakh population.
- **Treatment Gap: 70% to 92% of individuals** with mental disorders **do not receive treatment** due to **lack of awareness, stigma, and shortage of professionals**.
- **Low Budget Allocation:** While developed countries allocate 5-18% of their healthcare budget to mental health, India allocates just 1.11%.

### Government Initiatives



### Way forward

- The Economic Survey 2024-25 suggested:
  - **Enhance Mental Health Education in Schools:** Early intervention strategies to address anxiety, stress, and behavioural issues in students.
  - **Improve Workplace Mental Health Policies:** Address job stress, long working hours, and burnout.
  - **Expand Digital Mental Health Services:** Strengthen Tele MANAS and integrate AI-based mental health solutions.
- **Brazil's Initiatives:** Community gardens in Brazil have successfully fostered social connections among residents. Similar initiatives in India could help mitigate the isolation caused by urban living.
- **Fostering Open Conversations:** Creating a culture that encourages open discussions about mental health can help eliminate stigma.

Source: [PIB: Advancing Mental Healthcare in India](#)

