

Today's Prelims Topics

Law on phone-tapping, and two HC rulings

Context

In a landmark ruling with significant constitutional implications, the **Madras High Court has struck down a 2011 phone-tapping order** issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Judgment Overview

- The Court ruled that the surveillance violated **Article 21 – the Right to Privacy**, as it wasn't based on "public emergency" or "public safety."
- The decision strengthens the jurisprudence of **PUCL (1997)** and **Puttaswamy (2017)**.

Legal Framework

1. **Indian Telegraph Act, 1885**
 - **Section 5(2)**: Allows interception of messages **only in cases of public emergency or public safety**.
 - Grounds must align with **Article 19(2)**: sovereignty, state security, public order, etc.
2. **Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951**
 - **Rule 419-A**:
 - Authorization by Home Secretary (Centre/State) or an officer not below Joint Secretary in urgent cases.
 - Mandatory review by a **Review Committee** within 2 months.
 - Interception valid up to **60 days**, extendable to **180 days**.
3. **Information Technology Act, 2000**: Governs electronic/digital communications (e.g. emails, WhatsApp).

Landmark Judgments

- **PUCL v. Union of India (1997)**
 - Supreme Court laid down **procedural safeguards** for phone tapping.
 - Only senior officials can approve.
 - Review Committee oversight is mandatory.
- **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)**: Recognized **Right to Privacy as a Fundamental Right** under Article 21.

Recent High Court Rulings (2025)

Delhi High Court (June 26, 2025)

- Upheld CBI-ordered tapping in ₹2,149 crore ITPO corruption case.
- Held that **large-scale corruption** posed a threat to **public safety**, justifying interception.

2. Madras High Court (July 2, 2025)

- Quashed MHA's 2011 phone-tapping order in ₹50 lakh bribery case.
- Reason:
 - No "public emergency" or "public safety" as per Section 5(2).
 - **Review Committee process not followed**.
- Reaffirmed that **secret surveillance cannot be used for ordinary crime detection**.

Key Safeguards & Procedural Requirements

- Must be **proportional, necessary, and legally justified**.
- Review Committee must examine each interception order.
- Any evidence from **illegally obtained tapping** is **inadmissible** in court.

- Periodic **data destruction** and accountability measures required.

Source: [IndianExpress](#)



Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)

Context

CAQM is reviewing **Delhi government's appeal to suspend the fuel ban on overage vehicles** due to technical glitches and public inconvenience.

About CAQM

- **Establishment:**
 - **Statutory body** established under the **Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021**.
 - Jurisdiction: **Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas** (Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh).
- **Mandate & Functions**
 - To ensure **better coordination, research, monitoring**, and resolution of air pollution issues.
 - Focus on improving **Air Quality Index (AQI)** in the **National Capital Region**.
 - Coordinates actions among the **central government, Delhi**, and neighbouring state governments.
- **Powers & Authority**
 - Can **restrict activities** contributing to air pollution.
 - Empowered to:
 - **Conduct investigations and research** on air pollution.
 - **Frame codes, policies, and guidelines** for pollution control.
 - **Issue binding directions** on inspections, regulations, and compliance.
 - **Orders and directions are legally binding** on individuals, officers, and authorities.
 - **Accountable directly to Parliament**.
- **Composition**
 - **Chairperson:** Senior government official (Secretary/Chief Secretary rank); tenure: **3 years or until 70 years of age**, whichever is earlier.
 - **Five ex officio members:** Chief Secretaries/Environment Secretaries from Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh.
 - **Three full-time technical members**.
 - **Three NGO members** working in environment-related fields.
 - **Technical experts** from:
 - **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)**
 - **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**
 - **NITI Aayog**

Source: [IndianExpress](#)

Chakma and Hajong Communities

Context

A rights activist warned Arunachal Pradesh officials against violating the **Supreme Court's 1996 judgment** protecting the **Chakma-Hajong** communities, amid fresh calls for deportation and land record reviews.

Who are the Chakma and Hajong Communities?

- **Chakmas** are predominantly **Buddhist**, while **Hajongs** are **Hindus**.
- Originally from the **Chittagong Hill Tracts of East Pakistan** (now Bangladesh).
- They fled to India in the **early 1960s** due to:
 - Displacement from the **Kaptai Dam project**
 - **Religious persecution** of minorities in East Pakistan
- The Indian government **resettled over 14,000 of them in Arunachal Pradesh** (then NEFA – North-East Frontier Agency) between 1964–1969.
- Estimated population now: **65,000+**, mostly in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

1996 Supreme Court Judgment (NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh)

- The **State government must protect the life and personal liberty** of each Chakma and Hajong person.
- Any form of **threats, eviction notices, or violence** issued by local groups or bodies is **unlawful**.
- Court observed that "**quit notices**" by groups like AAPSU are equivalent to a **threat to life and liberty** and **must be dealt with strictly** under the law.
- Ordered the Centre and State to **process citizenship applications** of Chakma-Hajongs under **Section 5(1)(a) of the Citizenship Act, 1955** (naturalization based on birth in India before 1987).

Controversy and Local Opposition

- Several tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh, especially **AAPSU**, have **opposed permanent settlement** of Chakma-Hajong communities.
- Concerns include:
 - **Demographic changes**
 - Pressure on **land and resources**
 - Loss of **tribal identity and rights** under Article 371(H)
- Demands for their **deportation** or relocation outside the state are frequently raised, despite SC's protection.

Legal and Constitutional Dimensions

- **Article 21** – Right to Life and Liberty applies to **all persons**, not just citizens.
- **Contempt of Court** – Disregard for SC orders may attract contempt charges.
- **Citizenship Act, 1955** – They qualify for Indian citizenship under certain provisions due to long-term residence.
- **Human Rights obligations** – India is a party to international conventions that prohibit **statelessness and forced eviction**.

Source: [TheHindu](https://www.thehindu.com)

Vera C Rubin Observatory

Context

The **Vera C. Rubin Observatory in Chile** has unveiled its first test images, highlighting its capability to revolutionize astronomy by capturing millions of celestial events, tracking asteroids, and detecting dark matter signals each night.

Vera C. Rubin Observatory

- A cutting-edge astronomical observatory located on **Cerro Pachón mountain**, in the **Chilean Andes** at an elevation of **8,684 ft**.
- Aims to create the **most detailed dynamic map of the universe**.
- Jointly funded by the **U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)** and the **National Science Foundation (NSF)**.
- **Main Objectives**
 - **Map the entire southern sky** every 3 days for 10 years.
 - Create a **dynamic record of the universe** to monitor cosmic changes.
 - **Track near-Earth objects (NEOs)** and identify potential asteroid threats.
 - Conduct high-precision studies on **dark matter** and **dark energy**.
 - Provide **open-access data** to researchers and the global public.

Key Features

- **Wide Field of View**
 - Captures an area equal to **40 full Moons** in a single image.
 - Offers broader sky coverage than **Hubble** and **James Webb** telescopes.
- **World's Largest Digital Camera**
 - **3,200 Megapixel resolution**.
 - **Weighs 2,800 kg** (size of a small car).
 - Detects objects **100 million times dimmer** than visible light.
 - Uses **six spectral filters** (UV to infrared) for comprehensive analysis.
- **Rapid Movement & Imaging**
 - Telescope slews between targets in just **5 seconds**.
 - Capable of taking **1,000 images per night**.
 - Completes full-sky scans in **72 hours**.
- **Automated Detection Software**
 - Generates up to **10 million alerts per night** by comparing image data.
 - Detected **2,100+ new asteroids** in just **10 hours** during testing.
- **Massive Data Output**
 - Produces **20 terabytes of data per day**.
 - Over the next decade, expected to detect and catalogue:
 - **5 million+ asteroids**
 - **100,000+ NEOs**

Scientific Significance

- **Dark Matter & Cosmic Structure:** Builds detailed **3D maps of the universe** to study **gravitational effects** and **galaxy distribution**.
- **Planetary Defence:** Enhances **early detection** of NEOs, improving Earth's **asteroid defense systems**.
- **Astrophysical Discoveries**
 - Supports breakthroughs in understanding:
 - **Galaxy formation**
 - **Cosmic evolution**

■ Universe's expansion theories

Source: [IndianExpress](#)



Also in News

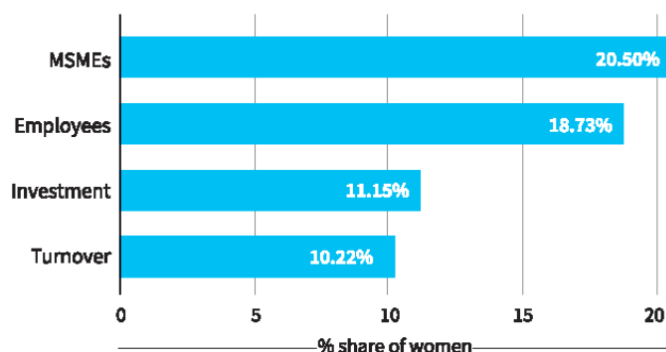
17th BRICS Summit

- The **17th BRICS Summit** was held in **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**.
 - ◆ **Theme: Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance.**
 - ◆ **Indonesia officially joined BRICS**, while Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Nigeria, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Uganda, and Uzbekistan were welcomed as BRICS partner countries.
 - ◆ **India will assume the BRICS Chairship and host the 18th BRICS Summit in 2026.**

Women in MSMEs

● Participation

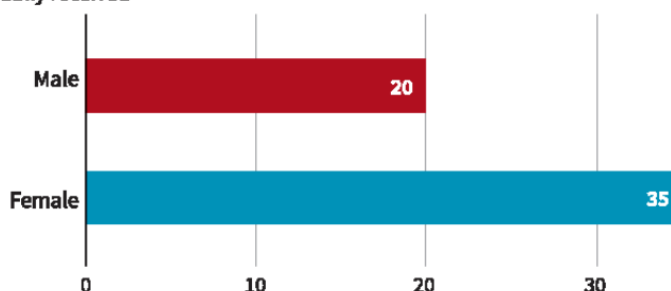
Chart 1: The share of women-led MSMEs, share of women employed in MSMEs, share of investment attracted by women-led MSMEs and share of turnover of women-led MSMEs



- **Women-owned MSMEs:** Around **20%** of all MSMEs registered in India are women-owned.
 - Contribution to total MSME turnover: **~10%**
 - Share in total MSME sector investment: **11–15%**

● Access to Credit

Chart 2: The credit gap across genders. Credit gap refers to the difference between the amount of credit requested by the borrower and the amount actually received



- **Credit Gap: Women-led MSMEs** credit gap of about **35%** (i.e., over a third of their financial needs are unmet).
 - **Men-led MSMEs:** Credit gap of about **20%**.
 - **Reasons:**
 - Low collateral/property ownership, financial illiteracy, and bias in lending.
 - Women are often perceived as riskier borrowers by banks.

● Government Schemes & Impact

- **PM MUDRA Yojana (PMMY):** Women hold **~64%** of PMMY loan accounts.

- However, they receive only ~41% of the total sanctioned loan amount.
- **Udyam Assist Portal:** Over **1.86 crore Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs)** registered in 2024.
 - **Women own 70.5%** of registered IMEs.
 - Women-led IMEs generated **70.8%** of employment in this segment.

In SIR Battle, SC Referred to M.S. Gill vs. Chief Election Commissioner 1977 Verdict

- **What was the Verdict?** Supreme Court held that while the **Election Commission has wide powers** to ensure free and fair elections **under Article 324**, it **cannot act arbitrarily**.
- ◆ Its actions must be fair and are **subject to judicial review**—preventing the EC from becoming a “constitutional despot.”



Editorial Summary

Fostering A Commitment to Stop Maternal Deaths

Context

The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) for India is on the decline, but there are States that need to focus on basic and systemic issues.

Challenges in Maternal Care in India

- **Three Delays Model:** Delay in recognizing complications and seeking care (due to low awareness, financial issues, social taboos).
 - Delay in reaching a health facility (poor roads, remote areas, lack of ambulances).
 - Delay in receiving adequate care at the facility (staff shortages, lack of blood banks, delayed referrals).
- **Shortage of Trained Health Professionals:** High vacancy rates for specialists (obstetricians, anaesthetists, paediatricians), especially in Community Health Centres and First Referral Units (FRUs).
 - E.g., 66% vacancies of specialists in 5,491 community health centres.
- **Anaemia and Malnutrition:** A large proportion of pregnant women are anaemic or malnourished, increasing the risk of complications and maternal deaths.
 - E.g., According to NFHS-5 (2019-21), over 50% of pregnant women in India are anaemic.
- **Home Deliveries and Unsafe Abortions:** Despite progress, a section of deliveries still happen at home by untrained birth attendants, leading to sepsis, trauma, and increased mortality.
- **Socio-cultural and Economic Barriers:** Early marriages, low education levels, poverty, and gender inequality hinder timely and safe maternal care.
- **Ineffective Maternal Death Audits:** Weak implementation of mandatory reporting and audit of maternal deaths in several states limits systemic improvement.



MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIO (MMR) IN INDIA: 2019-21

(Maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births)

INDIA MMR: 93

103 97 93

Empowered Action Group (EAG) States

Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam

State	MMR	MMR
Madhya Pradesh	175	175
Assam	167	-
Others (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, UP, Uttarakhand)	51	

Southern States

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu

State	MMR	MMR
Kerala	20	20
Telangana	45	46
Andhra Pradesh	46	49
Tamil Nadu	49	63

Major Government Initiatives Related to Maternal Care

Initiative	Launched	Main Focus	Key Features
Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)	2005	Promote institutional delivery	Cash incentives for mothers & ASHAs to deliver at health facilities
Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)	2011	Free maternity and newborn care	Free delivery (incl. C-section), drugs, diagnostics, diet, blood, and transport for mother & newborn
PMSMA (Pradhan Mantri	2016	Quality antenatal care	Free specialist ANC on 9th of

Surakshit Abhiyan)	Matritva			every month; focus on early risk detection
LaQshya		2017	Labour room quality improvement	Upgradation of labour rooms, maternity OTs, staff training, quality assurance
SUMAN (Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan)		2019	Dignified, assured maternal-newborn services	Zero expense, respectful, quality care; grievance redressal; covers all public health facilities
Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB)		2018	Reduce anaemia in women and children	6x6x6 strategy: IFA, deworming, fortified foods, testing, behavior change, address non-nutritional causes

Way Forward

- **Strengthen the Three Delays Model Response:** Increase community awareness on maternal danger signs and the importance of institutional deliveries.
 - Expand financial and transport incentives for timely referral and access.
 - Ensure rapid response and triage at facilities, with a clear protocol for emergencies.
- **Increase Investment in Health Infrastructure:** Fill vacancies of obstetricians, anaesthetists, and staff nurses at all FRUs/CHCs.
 - Upgrade operation theatres, blood banks, and critical care units at district and sub-district levels.
- **Improve Quality of Maternal Death Audits:** Mandatory, confidential reviews of every maternal death (e.g., Kerala Model), with accountability and follow-up actions.

Kerala Model: Compulsory to **report and review every maternal death**, regardless of cause or location (hospital or home). All cases are reported **within 24 hours**.

- **Focus on Nutrition and Anaemia Control:** Strengthen Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, nutrition counseling, and community-based interventions for adolescent girls and pregnant women.
- **Empower Frontline Workers and Women's Groups:** Continue training and incentivizing ASHAs, ANMs, and SHGs for community mobilization and support.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Climate Change Impact On India's Coastal Communities

Context

Climate change is affecting India's coastal communities with a deep social and economic impact.

How Climate Change is Impacting Coastal Communities in India

- **Environmental Impacts:**
 - **Sea Level Rise:** Swallowing villages (e.g., Satabhaya in Odisha), flooding, permanent land loss.
 - **Saltwater Intrusion:** Contaminates soil and freshwater, reducing agricultural productivity.
 - **Ecosystem Degradation:** Loss of mangroves, wetlands, and sand dunes reduces natural coastal protection.
 - **Extreme Weather Events:** Increased cyclones, storms, and flooding cause recurrent displacement.
- **Socio-economic and Livelihood Impacts:**
 - **Displacement:** Thousands forced to migrate as homes and livelihoods disappear.
 - **Loss of Traditional Livelihoods:** Agriculture and fishing become unviable due to degraded resources.
 - **Urban Migration:** Displaced families enter precarious, informal urban labor markets.
 - **Community Disintegration:** Social networks and cultural identities are eroded.

Key Challenges Faced by Coastal Communities

- **Livelihood Insecurity**
 - **Loss of Traditional Livelihoods:** Coastal communities have long depended on fishing, farming, and related activities. Rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion have destroyed fertile farmland and fishing zones.
 - **Example:** In Satabhaya, Odisha, seawater has engulfed villages and ruined both fields and ponds, forcing families to abandon farming and fishing.
 - **Urban Migration and Job Insecurity:** Displaced families often migrate to cities, but lack marketable skills and documentation, ending up in informal, unstable jobs such as construction labor, domestic work, or brick kilns.
 - **Example:** Fisherfolk from Honnavar, Karnataka, or Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, are now seen working as daily wage laborers in Bengaluru and Chennai.
- **Legal and Policy Gaps:**
 - **No Legal Recognition for Climate Migrants:** Existing frameworks such as the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notifications, including the diluted CRZ 2019, are **limited either to disaster response or environmental conservation**, without adequately factoring in the socio-economic dimensions of displacement.
 - **E.g.,** CRZ 2019 prioritizes commercial interests over community rights.
 - **Lack of Socio-Economic Safeguards:** No legal guarantees for decent work, housing, education, or healthcare for climate migrants.
 - **Labour Codes** (such as Building and Other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996) do not extend specific protections to climate-displaced workers.
 - **Weak Rehabilitation:** Resettlement colonies lack basic amenities and sustainable livelihood options.
 - **Weak Enforcement of Environmental Justice:** Supreme Court judgments (like M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India) recognize environmental rights, but there's **no robust framework** to translate this into practical protection for climate migrants.

- **Environmental Injustice:**
 - **Lack of Community Consent:** Large-scale development projects often proceed without genuine, informed consent of local communities, despite legal requirements.
 - **Example:** Fishing communities in Gujarat's Kutch region have protested loss of access to traditional fishing grounds to port and industrial development, but with limited impact.
 - **Suppression of Environmental Defenders:** Grassroots protests (like the Ennore Creek movement in Tamil Nadu or Pattuvam in Kerala) face police intimidation, legal harassment, and criminal charges, discouraging community activism.

What Can Be Done

- **Legal and Policy Reforms:** Explicitly define and protect climate-induced migrants in law and policy.
 - Extend workplace protections, social security, and rights to climate migrants.
 - Prioritize ecological sustainability and community rights over commercial development.
- **Livelihood and Social Security:** Offer new skill programs tailored for displaced coastal populations.
 - Guarantee access to housing, health, education, and work for migrants in cities.
 - Strengthen public distribution, insurance, and welfare schemes for at-risk families.
- **Participatory and Community-Led Adaptation:** Involve communities in coastal zone management and resettlement planning.
 - Protect and restore mangroves, wetlands, and sand dunes as natural barriers.
 - Protect environmental defenders and promote local, sustainable alternatives.
- **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure:** Design resettlement colonies with climate resilience in mind.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

