
Today's Prelims Topics

India govt nominates IIT Madras as UN's AI Centre of Excellence

Context

On the sidelines of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, India nominated the Indian Institute of Technology–Madras (IIT-M) as an AI Centre of Excellence (CoE) under the initiative of the United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET)

About ODET

- Established on **1 January 2025**, transforming from the earlier **Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology**.
- Created following the **UN General Assembly resolution (24 Dec 2024)** and the adoption of the **Global Digital Compact (GDC)** at the **Summit of the Future (2024)**.
- Headed by **Amandeep Singh Gill**, Under-Secretary-General and Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies.
- **Mandate:**
 - Act as the **UN focal point for digital cooperation**.
 - Provide **strategic advice and foresight** to UN leadership on technology trends, risks, and opportunities.
 - **Coordinate system-wide UN efforts** on digital and emerging technologies.
 - Facilitate **multistakeholder and inclusive policy dialogue**.
 - Support the **follow-up and implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC)**.

Source: [Businessline](#)

Direct Broadcast Network (DBNet)

Context

The National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), in partnership with New Space India Ltd (NSIL), is setting up DBNet stations in Delhi/NCR and Chennai under Mission Mausam

What is a Direct Broadcast Network (DBNet)

- It is a **global operational framework** for **real-time acquisition of satellite data** from **Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites**.
- Instead of waiting for data to be relayed to central ground stations (which causes delays), DBNet **captures satellite signals directly during overhead passes**, ensuring **near real-time access**.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Real-Time Data Acquisition:** Receives data directly from satellites within minutes of transmission.
 - **Low Latency:** Overcomes delays in conventional systems by bypassing central relay stations.
 - **Rapid Processing:** Data can be ingested into Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) models within ~5 minutes.
 - **Scalability:** Can integrate data from present (e.g., Oceansat, NOAA, MetOp) and future generations of Earth Observation satellites.
- Operates under the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** global satellite data policy.
- Data is shared through **WMO Information System – 2.0 (WIS 2.0)** to strengthen **global DBNet coverage**.

Mission Mausam - launched on occasion of 150th Anniversary of IMD

- A government initiative focusing on expanding India's weather observation and forecasting capabilities.
- **Key Components:**
 - Expanding the **weather observation network** with new instruments.
 - Improving **weather forecasting models** through enhanced understanding of atmospheric physics and the integration of **machine-learning approaches**.
 - Investigating **weather modification techniques**.
- **Implementing Agencies:** India Meteorological Department (IMD), National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), and Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM).

Source: [PIB](#)

Tylenol

Context

Former US President Donald Trump claimed that the use of **Tylenol (acetaminophen or paracetamol)** by pregnant women was linked to **autism in children** but the World Health Organization (WHO) responded that evidence for such a claim is **inconsistent and unproven**.

What Is Tylenol?

- It is a **brand name for paracetamol (acetaminophen)**.
- It is widely used as a **pain reliever** and **fever reducer**.
- When taken under **medical supervision** and in **recommended doses**, it is considered **safe during pregnancy**.

Is there a Link Between Tylenol Use in Pregnancy and Autism?

- **Scientific Consensus:** **No conclusive scientific evidence** links paracetamol use in pregnancy to autism.
 - Autism is a **complex neurodevelopmental condition** influenced by **genetic and environmental factors**, not attributable to a single drug.
- **Research Findings:** Some **observational studies** suggested a *slight increase* in autism or ADHD risk among children of mothers who used paracetamol during pregnancy.
 - However, **sibling-controlled studies** (more reliable) showed **no such association**, implying other factors were responsible.
- **Limitations of Studies:** Many studies did not account for **shared family, lifestyle, or environmental factors**.
 - Key gaps include lack of understanding of **how genes and environment interact** in autism development.

Related Term

Leucovorin

- It is a **form of folic acid (Vitamin B9)**, also known as **folinic acid**.
- It is the **active metabolite of folic acid**, meaning the body can use it directly without requiring conversion.
- Plays a crucial role in the **synthesis of DNA, RNA, and proteins** by helping in one-carbon transfer reactions.
- **Uses:**
 - Cancer Therapy
 - Chemotherapy Enhancer

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Environmental Accounting on forest 2025

Context

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the 8th edition of its environmental accounts publication, titled “Environmental Accounting on Forest – 2025”

Some Key Highlights

- **Forest cover (2010-11 to 2021-22):** Grew by 17,444.61 sq. km (**22.5%**), reaching 7.15 lakh sq. km (**21.76%** of India’s geographical area).
 - **Major contributors to increase:** Kerala (+4,137 sq. km), Karnataka (+3,122 sq. km), Tamil Nadu (+2,606 sq. km)
- **Recorded Forest Area (RFA):** Net gain of 3,356 sq. km
 - Increase largely due to **boundary reclassification and adjustments**.
 - States with highest rise in RFA share: Uttarakhand (+6.3%), Odisha (+1.97%), Jharkhand (+1.9%).
- **Growing Stock** (volume of usable wood in living trees): Increased by **305.53 million cubic metres (7.32%)** during **2013–2023**.
 - **Top contributors:** Madhya Pradesh (136 million cubic metre), Chhattisgarh (51 million cubic metre), and Telangana (28 million cubic metre); among UTs, Andaman & Nicobar Islands (77 million cubic metre).
- **Service Accounts:**
 - **Provisioning Services (timber and non-timber products):** Value increased to ~0.16% of GDP in 2021-22.
 - **Top States:** Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala.
 - **Regulating Services (carbon retention):** Value rose to ~2.63% of GDP in 2021-22.
 - **Top States:** Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam.

Related Fact

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) adopted the **UN System of Environmental Economic Accounts (SEEA) Framework in 2018** which is an agreed international framework for the **compilation of the Environment Economic accounts since**.
- **SEEA Framework** was developed by the United Nations, European Commission, and Food and Agriculture Organization in 2012.

Source: **PIB**

Children in India 2025

Context

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the 4th issue of the Children in India 2025 Report.

Key Highlights of Children in India 2025 Report

- **Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):** Declined from **44 (2011)** to **25 (2023)**.
 - IMR = deaths of infants below 1 year per 1,000 live births.
- **Under-Five Mortality Rate (U5MR):** Fell from **30 (2022)** to **29 (2023)**.
 - U5MR = probability of dying before age five per 1,000 live births.
- **Birth Rate (2023):** National: **18.4 per 1,000 population**.
 - Rural: **20.3**, Urban: **14.9**.
- **School Dropout Rates (2022-23 → 2024-25):**
 - Preparatory stage: **8.7% → 2.3%**.
 - Middle level: **8.1% → 3.5%**.
 - Secondary level: **13.8% → 8.2%**.
- **Child Marriage (Women 20–24 years married before 18):** Reduced from **26.8% (2015–16)** to **23.3% (2019–21)**.
- **Adoption Trends:**
 - Total adoptions: **3,927 (2017-18) → 4,515 (2024-25)**.
 - In-country adoptions: **4,155**.
 - Inter-country adoptions: **360–653 annually**.
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI):** Parity achieved across all education stages (2024-25).

Source: **PIB**

National Initiative on Water Security

Context

The Indian government launched a National initiative in water security.

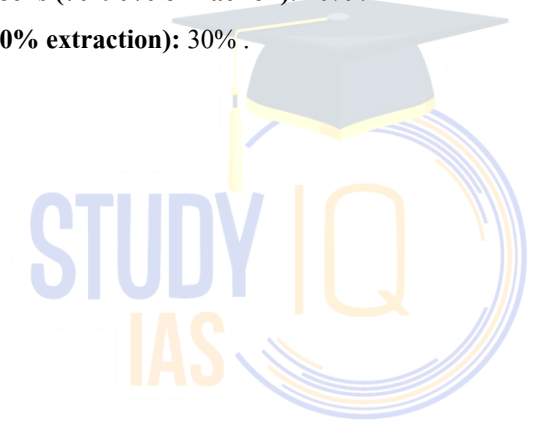
More in News

- The Government has made water security a top priority under MGNREGA by amending **Section 29(1) under Schedule I of MGNREGA, 2005**.

About the Initiative

- **Budget under MGNREGA: ₹88,000 crore.**
- **Objective: Boost groundwater recharge, rejuvenate rivers, ensure sustainable water management.**
- Blocks classified by **Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) (Dynamic Ground Water Resources Assessment Report 2024)**.
- **Fund Allocation under MGNREGA:**
 - **Critical blocks (90–100% extraction): 65% .**
 - **Semi-critical blocks (70–90% extraction): 40% .**
 - **Safe blocks ($\leq 70\%$ extraction): 30% .**

Source: **PIB**



Financial Intelligence Unit- India (FIU-IND)

Context

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) signed an MoU to enhance **information sharing and coordination** against misuse of telecom resources in cyber-crimes and financial frauds.

Key Highlights of the Partnership

- **Enhanced Data Sharing:** Real-time sharing of **Financial Fraud Risk Indicator (FRI)** data on mobile numbers.
 - DoT to share **Mobile Number Revocation List (MNRL)** with FIU-IND.
 - FIU-IND to share mobile numbers linked to **Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs)**.
 - Secure exchange through DoT's **Digital Intelligence Platform (DIP)** and FIU's **Finnex 2.0** portal.
- **Strengthening Telecom–Financial Cybersecurity:** Combines **telecom intelligence + financial intelligence** for fraud detection.
 - Enables **proactive fraud prevention** rather than reactive action.
 - Shared FRI data helps banks/FIs flag risky mobile numbers during transactions.
- **Impact So Far: 2.84 crore fraudulent mobile connections** disconnected under *Sanchar Saathi*.
 - FRI helped banks prevent/decline **48 lakh transactions**, saving **₹140 crore**.
 - DIP platform already connects **700+ stakeholders** (36 State/UT Police, SEBI, NPCI, FIU-IND, 650 banks/FIs).

About FIU-IND

- **Established:** 18 November 2004.
- **Head:** Director, FIU-IND (rank equivalent to Additional Secretary, GoI).
- **Parent Body:** Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue.
- Functions as an **independent body** reporting directly to the **Economic Intelligence Council (EIC)** headed by the **Finance Minister**.
- Derives power from Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
- **Functions:**
 - Uses advanced analytics to detect patterns, networks, and links to **money laundering, terror financing, cyber frauds**.
 - Works with regulators like RBI, SEBI, IRDAI, PFRDA, law enforcement, and international bodies.
 - Supports India's obligations under **FATF (Financial Action Task Force)**.

Source: **PIB**

Nightmare Bacteria

Context

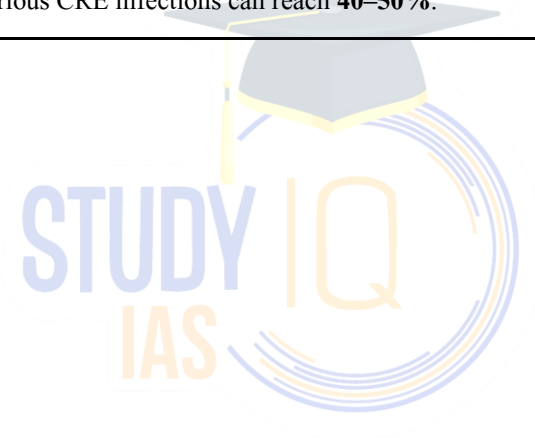
The US CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) reported that **drug-resistant “nightmare bacteria” infections** rose by nearly **70% between 2019 and 2023**.

What are “Nightmare Bacteria”?

- A term used by the **CDC** to describe **multi-drug resistant bacteria** that are extremely difficult to treat.
- Often refers to **Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE)** such as:
 - *Klebsiella pneumoniae*
 - *Escherichia coli (E. coli)*
 - Bacteria carrying **NDM gene (New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase)** → makes them resistant to **carbapenem antibiotics** (last-resort drugs).

Related Fact

- WHO lists **AMR (Antimicrobial Resistance)** as a **top 10 global health threat**.
- **Mortality rates** in serious CRE infections can reach **40–50%**.



Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT)

Context

The Union Finance Minister formally launched the GSTAT.

About GSTAT

- **Statutory Body** established under the **CGST Act, 2017**.
- Hears **appeals against orders** passed by Appellate or Revisional Authorities.
- Provides a **specialized, independent forum** → improves credibility, orderliness, and predictability of GST laws.
- **Objectives:**
 - Create a **single, unified appellate forum** (“One Nation, One Forum”).
 - Ensure **timely resolution of disputes** → better cash flow and business certainty.
 - Deliver **citizen-centric governance** with simplified formats, plain-language decisions, checklists, and **virtual hearings**.
 - Aligned with **Next-Gen GST reforms** and principle of “*Nagarik Devo Bhava*.”
- **Structure:**
 - **Principal Bench:** New Delhi.
 - **31 State Benches** across **45 locations** for nationwide reach.
 - **Bench Composition:**
 - 2 Judicial Members
 - 1 Central Technical Member
 - 1 State Technical Member
- **Function:**
 - **Three S’s Approach:**
 - **Structure:** Judicial + technical expertise.
 - **Scale:** Multiple state benches; single-member benches for simple cases.
 - **Synergy:** Integration of technology, process, and human expertise.
 - **e-Courts Portal:** Online filing, case tracking, and virtual hearings.

Source: [PIB](#)

Places in News

Venezuela



News? A 6.2-magnitude earthquake hits northwest Venezuela

About Venezuela

- **Location:** Northern coast of **South America**
- **Capital:** Caracas
- **Geographical Boundaries**
 - **North:** Caribbean Sea & Atlantic Ocean
 - **East:** Guyana
 - **South:** Brazil
 - **West/Southwest:** Colombia
- **Physical Features**
 - **Andes Mountains** in the north
 - **Orinoco River Basin** with vast **Llanos (plains)**
 - **Lake Maracaibo** – Largest lake in South America
 - **Angel Falls** – World's **highest waterfall**
- **Major Rivers**
 - **Rio Negro** (2,250 km) – Tributary of Amazon; shared with Colombia & Brazil
 - **Orinoco River** (2,101 km) – 3rd longest river in South America
- **Islands and Archipelagos (Caribbean):** Margarita Island, La Blanquilla, La Tortuga, Los Roques, Los Monjes
- **Natural Resources:** Holds the world's largest oil reserves
 - **Mene Grande** is on the **eastern coast of Lake Maracaibo**, an important area for the country's oil industry.

Source: [TheHindu](#)

Mains Topics

Export Potential of NE States

Context

Despite sharing 5,400 km of international borders with ASEAN countries, China, and Bangladesh, the Northeastern region contributes only 0.13% to India's national exports.

Export Concentration and Spatial Imbalance in India

- **High Regional Concentration:**
 - Four States - Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka - account for **over 70% of exports**.
 - Gujarat alone contributes more than **33%**, leveraging ports and industrial clusters.
- **Northeast Marginalisation:** 8 States with **5,400 km of international borders** contribute just **0.13% of exports**.
 - No functional trade corridors, weak logistics, and minimal representation in export policy bodies.
- **Neglected Heartland:** Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, despite large populations and agricultural potential, together contribute only ~5% of exports.
- **Structural Vulnerability:** Over-dependence on a few coastal enclaves makes India's trade pipeline fragile - a disruption in Gujarat or Tamil Nadu can paralyse exports.

Neglect of the Northeast in Policy

- **Security Lens over Trade Lens:** Governance in the region is dominated by counterinsurgency and surveillance rather than commerce and connectivity.
- **Policy Blind Spots:** Export-linked schemes like **PLI, RoDTEP** implemented mainly in western and southern belts.
 - **DGFT's 2024 export plan** (87 pages) made no mention of northeastern corridors.
- **Weak Institutional Representation:** No member from NER in the PM's Economic Advisory Council or Board of Trade.
- **Border Trade Collapse:** Post-2021 Myanmar coup and scrapping of Free Movement Regime (2024), trade posts like **Moreh (Manipur)** and **Zokhawthar (Mizoram)** are reduced to skeletal checkpoints.
- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Poor highways, lack of cold storage, warehousing, and customs facilities block export growth.

Potential of the Northeast Region in Boosting Exports

- **Strategic Geography:**
 - Shares borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, and China.
 - Can serve as a bridge to ASEAN markets under the Act East Policy.
- **Agro and Plantation Products:**
 - Assam's tea (over half of India's output), spices from Sikkim, ginger from Meghalaya, horticultural produce (pineapple, kiwi, orange) with export potential.

- **Energy and Natural Resources:**
 - Petroleum and natural gas in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
 - Potential for hydroelectric power exports to neighbouring countries.
- **Handloom and Handicrafts:**
 - Unique crafts, bamboo-based products, and sericulture (Muga silk) can tap niche international markets.
- **Tourism & Services Exports:**
 - Eco-tourism and cultural tourism in NER can complement merchandise exports.

Challenges Facing Northeast in Exports

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Poor roads, limited rail connectivity, inadequate warehouses, and lack of cold chain.
- **Border Instability:** Myanmar political crisis, border tensions, and insurgency undermine corridor projects.
- **Policy Neglect:** Export strategies ignore NER's potential; no dedicated incentives.
- **Market Access Issues:** Absence of branding and packaging facilities (e.g., Assam tea remains bulk CTC grade).
- **Dependence on Few Products:** Heavy reliance on tea and crude oil, without diversification.
- **Competition from China & ASEAN:** China's rapid infrastructure penetration into Myanmar leaves India behind.

Way Forward

- **Dedicated Export Strategy for Northeast:** Create a Northeast Export Promotion Policy under DGFT with product and corridor focus.
- **Strengthen Connectivity:** Fast-track India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project, and border haats.
 - Improve logistics hubs, ICDs (Inland Container Depots), and cold-chain infrastructure.
- **Institutional Representation:** Ensure NER voices in the Board of Trade, PM-EAC, and export councils.
- **Value Addition and Branding:** Invest in tea branding, spice processing, and organic certification for NER products.
- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** Negotiate with ASEAN, Bangladesh, and Bhutan for market access via regional FTAs.
- **Empower Local Communities:** Skill development and cooperative models to engage farmers, artisans, and women entrepreneurs in export value chains.
- **Balance Security with Trade:** Shift governance from counterinsurgency mindset to trade facilitation, while ensuring stability.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Rising Debt on Indian States

Context

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has published a unique ten-year analysis (2013-14 to 2022-23) on the fiscal condition of Indian states, revealing a significant rise in public debt and the challenges it poses for maintaining fiscal sustainability.

Current Status of State Debt

- **Total Debt:** ₹17.57 lakh crore in 2013–14 → ₹59.6 lakh crore in 2022–23 (3.39 times increase).
- **Debt-to-GSDP Ratio:**
 - 2013–14: **16.66%** of GSDP.
 - 2022–23: **22.96%** of GSDP.
 - National GDP share: States' combined debt = **22.17% of India's GDP** (₹2,68,90,473 crore in 2022–23).
- **Inter-State Variation:**
 - **Highest Ratios:** Punjab (40.35%), Nagaland (37.15%), West Bengal (33.70%).
 - **Lowest Ratios:** Odisha (8.45%), Maharashtra (14.64%), Gujarat (16.37%).
 - 8 States >30% of GSDP, 14 between 20–30%, and 6 <20%.
- **Debt vs Revenue Receipts:** Over the past decade, state debt averaged 150% of annual revenue receipts.
 - 128% (2014–15) → 191% (2020–21).
- **Golden Rule Breach:** Borrowings should fund **capital expenditure** (assets, infra) not **revenue expenditure** (salaries, subsidies).
 - **11 states** (including Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, WB, Kerala, Bihar, Tamil Nadu) used borrowings for day-to-day expenses.
 - **Punjab & Andhra Pradesh:** Only **26% and 17%** of net borrowings went into capital spending.
 - **Haryana & Himachal:** ~50% for capex.

Why is State Debt Rising?

- **Post-Covid Expenditures:** Health, welfare, and stimulus measures sharply increased revenue expenditure.
 - GSDP contraction in 2020-21 raised debt ratios.
- **GST Compensation Dependence:** Expiry of GST compensation (2022) worsened revenue positions.
 - Centre provided **back-to-back loans** for compensation shortfall (2020–22), adding to liabilities.
- **Subsidy Burden & Freebies:** Rising outlays on power subsidies, farm loan waivers, and social freebies strain state finances (Punjab, Rajasthan, AP).
- **Interest Payments:** Growing share of revenue spent on debt servicing crowds out capital expenditure.

Sources of State Debt



Loans raised from open market (bonds, securities, treasury bills)



Borrowings from banks (SBI, others)



Ways and Means Advances (WMA) from RBI



Loans from financial institutions like LIC, NABARD

- **Borrowing for Current Spending:** Violation of the “Golden Rule”: borrowing should finance capital projects, not revenue expenditure.
- **Weak Own Tax Revenues:** Reliance on Centre transfers, low tax buoyancy in poorer states (Bihar, UP, Jharkhand).
- **Populist Political Pressures:** Competitive politics has led to fiscal imprudence in many states.

Implications of Rising Debt

- **Fiscal Stress:** High debt-servicing costs reduce fiscal space for productive investments.
- **Crowding Out of Capital Expenditure:** Borrowings financing current expenditure erode multiplier effects on growth.
- **Risk to Financial Stability:** Persistent fiscal deficits and rising debt could raise bond yields and stress the financial system.
- **Centre–State Tensions:** Over-reliance on central loans (GST compensation, special assistance) raises questions of fiscal federalism.
- **Macro-Economic Spillovers:** State debt accounts for ~30% of India’s general government debt, affecting sovereign credit ratings.
- **Intergenerational Burden:** Rising liabilities passed on to future taxpayers without corresponding asset creation.
- **Reduced spending on human development:** Cramped fiscal space can curtail education, health and welfare allocations.
- **Governance risks:** Off-budget financing and opaque guarantees reduce accountability.

Way Forward

- **Adhere to Fiscal Prudence:** Enforce fiscal deficit limits; debt sustainability must guide borrowing.
- **Golden Rule Compliance:** Ensure borrowings are used only for capital expenditure and asset creation.
- **Boost Revenue Mobilisation:** Strengthen GST collections, expand property tax base, improve efficiency of state tax administration.
- **Expenditure Rationalisation:** Rationalise subsidies and control populist schemes. Targeted welfare spending using DBT and Aadhaar to cut leakages.
- **Strengthen Institutional Oversight:** Establish an independent Fiscal Council to monitor both Centre and State finances.
- **Enhance Centre–State Coordination:** Better alignment on GST, compensation mechanisms, and borrowing ceilings.
- **Capacity Building:** Train state finance departments for debt management, risk analysis, and innovative financing.
- **Diversify Financing Sources:** Encourage municipal bonds, state development loans, PPP models, and tapping global climate funds.
- **Establish State Debt Management Cells (DMCs):** Professionalise borrowing strategy, tenor matching and minimise refinancing risk (15th FC suggestion).
- **Strengthen own revenue mobilisation:** Broaden tax base (improve property tax, user-charges, local revenues); digitalise tax admin; adopt outcome-based budgeting.

Best Practice States

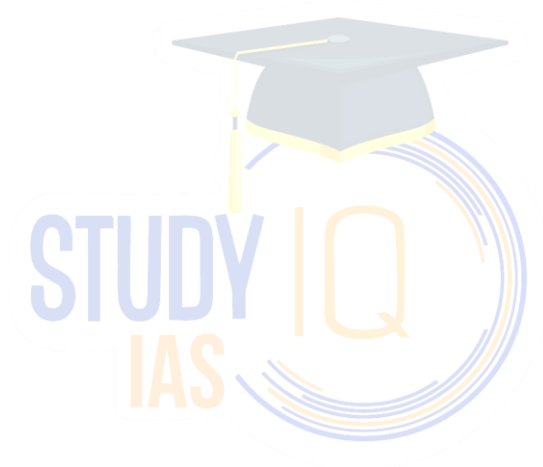
Odisha

- Transformed from a **high-debt state in early 2000s** to one of the most fiscally prudent.
- Adopted **strict adherence to FRBM norms**, maintained fiscal deficit below 3% of GSDP.
- Efficient debt restructuring and focus on capital spending.
- Built up large cash surpluses and avoided populist freebies.
- **Result:** Debt-to-GSDP ratio just 8.45% in 2022–23, the lowest among Indian states.

Gujarat

- Known for **fiscal discipline** and prudent borrowing.
- Debt-to-GSDP at **16.37%**, well below the national average.
- Focused on **infrastructure investment (roads, power, industrial corridors)** with long-term economic returns.
- Strong industrial base and high tax buoyancy from VAT/GST collections ensure better revenue mobilization.

Source: [Indian Express](#)



India's Tea Sector - Opportunities & Challenges

Context

India is the second-largest producer and consumer of tea and the third-largest exporter. With strategic reforms, India has the potential to emerge as a superpower in the global tea industry, strengthening both its economy and soft power.

India's Tea Industry: Key Statistics

- **Global Tea Production (2024):** 7.074 billion kg.
 - **Top Producing Countries:** (1) China (2) India (3) Kenya (4) Sri-Lanka
- **Global Consumption:** 6.97 billion kg.
- **India's Contribution (2024):**
 - **Production:** 1.303 billion kg ($\approx 18\%$ of global output).
 - **Consumption:** 1.22 billion kg ($\approx 17\%$ of global demand).
 - **Exports:** 255 million kg valued at **\$800 million**.
 - **Top Tea Producing States:** (1) Assam (2) West Bengal (3) Tamil Nadu (4) Kerala (5) Karnataka.
 - **Other Tea producing states:** Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur and Nagaland.
- **Comparisons:**
 - **Kenya:** Largest exporter, exports almost all its production.
 - **China:** Major producer, but consumes much domestically.
 - **Sri Lanka:** Exported 245 million kg, worth **\$1.4 billion** - highlighting higher value realisation than India.
- **Per Capita Consumption:**
 - India: 840 g/year.
 - Turkey: 3 kg/year (highest globally).
 - Even a small rise to **1 kg/year in India** could absorb the entire domestic production.

Potential of India as a Tea Industry Superpower

- **Production Scale:** India has one of the largest tea-growing areas, with strong traditional hubs like Assam, Darjeeling, Nilgiris, and Kangra.
- **Large Domestic Market:** Rising middle class and changing consumer preferences for premium teas.
- **Export Opportunity:** Potential to expand into South America, Africa, and Central Asia.
- **Brand Value:** Iconic global recognition of "**Darjeeling Tea**" (first GI tag of India), Assam and Nilgiri teas.
- **Employment and Livelihoods:** Provides direct and indirect employment to over 1.2 million workers, many of them women.
- **Soft Power:** Tea diplomacy (e.g., "Chai Pe Charcha") can enhance India's cultural influence abroad.

Challenges in the Tea Sector

- **Low Export Value Realisation:** India exports more volume than Sri Lanka but earns less due to lack of branding, packaging, and value addition.

- **Over-reliance on Bulk CTC Tea:** Limited focus on high-value specialty teas (green, white, organic, flavoured).
- **Productivity Issues:** Ageing tea bushes, low mechanisation, and outdated practices reduce yields.
- **Price Stagnation and Labour Costs:** Small tea growers (STGs) face low margins. Labour-intensive production raises costs.
- **Climate Change:** Erratic rainfall and rising temperatures affect quality, particularly in Darjeeling and Assam.
- **Market Competition:** Kenya offers cheaper teas, while Sri Lanka and China dominate the premium tea market.
- **Domestic Consumption Gap:** Per capita consumption remains relatively low compared to global standards.

Government Initiatives

- **Tea Board of India:** Oversees development, quality certification, and promotion of Indian tea.
- **Tea Development and Promotion Scheme (2021–26):** Focus on tea promotion, market access, productivity improvement, and workers' welfare. With a Budget of ₹967 crore.
- **GI Tags and Certification:**
 - “Darjeeling Tea” was India’s first GI tag (2004).
 - Certification marks like “Assam Orthodox” and “Nilgiri Tea.”
- **Market Diversification Efforts:** Promotion of Indian tea in West Asia, CIS countries, and Europe.
- **Worker Welfare Measures:** Schemes for housing, healthcare, and education for plantation workers.

Way Forward

- **Focus on Quality and Branding:**
 - Shift from bulk exports to value-added, branded, and specialty teas.
 - Encourage premium segments like organic, herbal, and flavoured teas.
- **Diversify Export Markets:** Target emerging consumer bases in Africa, South America, and East Asia.
- **Boost Domestic Consumption:** Promote tea culture within India to raise per capita consumption beyond 1 kg/year.
- **Support Small Tea Growers (STGs):** Provide training, access to finance, and support for branding.
- **Climate Adaptation:** Invest in climate-resilient tea varieties and promote sustainable farming practices.
- **Research & Innovation:** Encourage R&D in tea processing, packaging, and mechanisation.
- **Strengthen Global Image:** Position India as a premium tea exporter with strong GI-based branding.
- **Public–Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with industry players for marketing campaigns, tea tourism, and global trade fairs.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Ladakh Statehood Protest

Context

Recently, the ongoing protest in Ladakh demanding statehood turned violent, leaving 4 people dead and 30 injured.

Causes Behind the Protests

- **Loss of Political Autonomy (Post-2019):**
 - Ladakh became a UT **without a legislature**, unlike J&K.
 - Elected institutions like **Hill Development Councils** saw powers diluted.
- **Employment Crisis:**
 - After separation from J&K, Ladakh lost access to **JKPSC and recruitment boards**.
 - Rising unemployment and lack of a dedicated **Public Service Commission**.
- **Tribal Safeguards Ignored:**
 - Over **90% of Ladakh's population is Scheduled Tribes**.
 - Repeated demands for **Sixth Schedule protections** have gone unmet.
- **Ecological and Livelihood Concerns:**
 - Fear of large-scale **mining and industrial projects** displacing Pashmina herders and harming fragile ecosystems.
 - Declining traditional livelihoods like **Pashmina goat rearing and agriculture**.
- **Border and Security Anxiety:**
 - Chinese activities along the **LAC in Eastern Ladakh** raise local fears of land loss.
 - Communities feel excluded from decision-making on borderland development.

Key Demands

- Full Statehood for Ladakh.
- Inclusion under the Sixth Schedule to protect tribal land, culture, and resources.
- Establishment of a Ladakh Public Service Commission for jobs and recruitment.
- Separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil districts.
- Strengthening of Hill Development Councils with legislative and financial powers.

Inclusion of Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule

- People of Ladakh are demanding UT's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule.
- 6th Schedule provides for Administration of Tribal Areas.
- According to a 2019 report from the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST), 97% of Ladakh's population is tribal.
- **Special Provisions under 6th Schedule:**
 - Creation of Autonomous district Councils which have Legislative, Judicial and Executive powers.
 - District Councils are empowered to prepare a budget for their respective Council.
 - The councils derive all their powers and functions directly from the Constitution.

- Acts passed by Parliament or state legislatures do not apply to autonomous districts and regions, or they apply with certain changes and exceptions.
- Presently 4 states have Sixth Schedule Areas: **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.**

Granting Statehood to Ladakh

Pro's	Con's
● Political Empowerment: Restores democratic governance, reducing alienation. ● Responsive Administration: Statehood ensures local decision-making closer to ground realities. ● Safeguards Federalism: Strengthens India's democratic image by addressing regional aspirations. ● Balanced Development: Allows tailored policies for Ladakh's fragile ecology and tribal population.	● Strategic Sensitivity: Full statehood may complicate defence and border management in a region with China and Pakistan borders. ● Administrative Viability: Small population (~3 lakh) may not justify statehood; financial sustainability doubtful. ● Precedent Setting: Could trigger similar demands from other UTs (Andaman, Lakshadweep). ● Centre-State Tensions: Statehood may weaken Centre's direct control over a sensitive borderland.

Measures taken by the Government

- Set up a **High-Powered Committee (HPC)** to engage in structured dialogue with the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA).
- Raised **ST quota**: 80% in direct recruitment and **84% in promotion** under the amended reservation rules.
- Adopted **one-third reservation for women** in the Hill Councils (LAHDCs).
- Declared **Bhoti and Purgi** among the official languages of Ladakh.
- Initiated recruitment processes for **~1,800 posts** to benefit local candidates.
- Introduced a **local job quota (85%)** under new domicile and reservation policy in the UT.

Way Forward

- **Structured Dialogue:** Resume talks between Centre, LAB (Leh Apex Body), and KDA (Kargil Democratic Alliance) with a time-bound roadmap.
- **Constitutional Safeguards:**
 - Consider Sixth Schedule or similar protections for land, culture, and resources.
 - Strengthen Hill Development Councils with real authority.
- **Balanced Autonomy Model:**
 - Instead of full statehood, explore UT with a legislature like Puducherry.
 - Create a Ladakh Public Service Commission to resolve the jobs crisis.
- **Ecology and Livelihood Protection:**
 - Ban reckless mining; promote eco-friendly industries and sustainable tourism.
 - Support traditional livelihoods like Pashmina herding.

- **Border-Sensitive Development:**

- Invest in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and connectivity with local participation.
- Ensure civil-military coordination respects local sensitivities.

- **Trust-Building Measures:** Create consultative forums for youth and civil society.

Source: [Indian Express](#), [The Hindu](#)

