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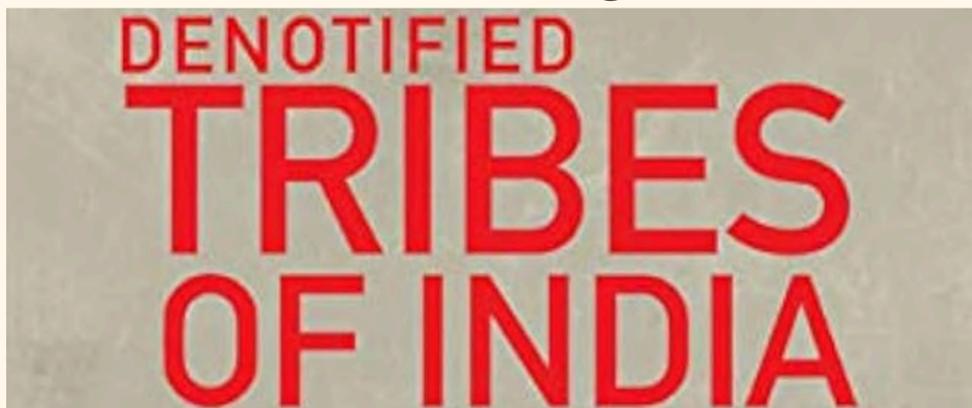
IT stocks slump on Anthropic tool launch
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Denotified tribes seek constitutional recognition, separate Census entry

Denotified tribes (DNTs), nomadic tribes, and semi-nomadic tribes are seeking a separate column and code in Census 2027, along with constitutional recognition through a distinct Schedule on the lines of SC, ST, and OBC categories. This demand coincides with India's proposed caste enumeration in 2027, the first since 1931. Historically, these communities were labelled as "criminal tribes" under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 (amended in 1924), which imposed surveillance and control. The Act was repealed in 1952, leading to their designation as denotified tribes. The Ministry of Social Justice has recommended their inclusion in the upcoming caste enumeration, and the Office of the Registrar General of India has agreed in principle

However, concerns remain over the absence of a clearly defined separate column. Leaders have also emphasised the need to recognise graded backwardness within DNTs, referring to the Supreme Court's August 2024 judgment permitting sub-classification within SCs and STs.

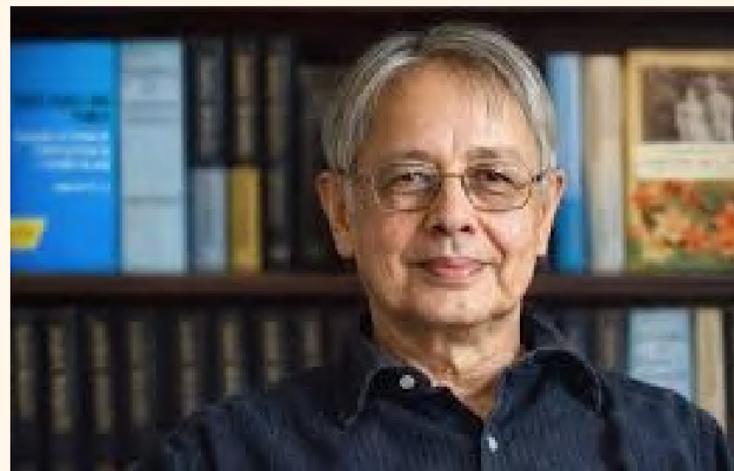


The Bhiku Ramji Idate Commission (2017) identified about 1,200 DNT communities, with 267 remaining outside SC, ST, or OBC lists. Despite welfare schemes like SEED, benefits remain limited due to certification issues and low fund utilisation.

ANDRE BETEILLE: INDIAN SOCIOLOGIST (1934-2026)

André Beteille (1934–2026) was a leading Indian sociologist whose work significantly shaped the academic study of caste, class, and inequality in India. Born in West Bengal to a French father and an Indian mother, his early life involved exposure to multiple cultural and intellectual traditions. After completing his MA at Calcutta University, he joined the University of Delhi in 1959, when sociology was an emerging discipline in India. Along with M. N. Srinivas, Beteille played a central role in developing the Department of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics into a nationally and internationally recognised centre for sociological research and teaching. He taught at the University of Delhi until his retirement in 1999.

Beteille's scholarship covered caste structures, landholding patterns, political institutions, education, and questions of equality and social justice, with a strong emphasis on empirical research and conceptual clarity. His major works, including *Caste, Class and Power* (1965), *Society and Politics in India* (1991), and *Equality and Universality: Essays in Social and Political Theory* (2002), remain relevant for understanding Indian society and polity.



Influenced by British social anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes, he contributed to sociological theory, political sociology, and kinship studies. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2005 for contributions to literature and education and later served with the Indian Council of Social Science Research and as Chancellor of Ashoka University (2014–2017).



NATIONAL

NDMA's first-ever guidelines for identification of disaster victims

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has released India's first Standard Operating Procedure for the identification and management of victims in mass fatality incidents. Titled National Disaster Management Guidelines on Comprehensive Disaster Victim Identification and Management, the document was released on Republic Day and addresses critical gaps in the handling of human remains after large-scale disasters. It lays down procedures for systematic recovery, registration, identification, and the dignified handover of remains to families. The guidelines follow multiple major incidents in the previous year, including the Ahmedabad air crash, industrial accidents, infrastructure failures, floods, and the Delhi bombing, which highlighted persistent challenges in victim identification.

The guidelines recommend the creation of a National Dental Data Registry to enable identification through dental records and advocate the use of forensic odontology and forensic archaeology, including in cases where identification is required months or years after a disaster. The document outlines the roles of various stakeholders and flags deficiencies such as inadequate trained manpower, logistical constraints, and coordination issues across agencies and levels of government. It identifies four stages in the identification process: recovery of remains, collection of post-mortem data, collection of ante-mortem data from families, and reconciliation for confirmation and release. Drawing on international practices, including Interpol guidelines, the NDMA aims to establish trained, specialised teams across States to strengthen disaster victim identification and ensure a structured and humane response.



National Disaster
 Management
 Authority

Manipur President's Rule ends; Khemchand new CM



A BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government was formed in Manipur, ending nearly a year of President's Rule. Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla administered the oath of office to Yumnam Khemchand Singh, a BJP leader from the Singjamer constituency, as Chief Minister. President's Rule, imposed on February 13, 2025, followed the resignation of former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh amid ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities that began in May 2023. To reflect the State's diversity, Kangpokpi MLA Nemcha Kipgen from the Kuki-Zo community and Naga People's Front MLA Losii Dikho were sworn in as Deputy Chief Ministers. Two other MLAs were inducted as Ministers.



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INTERNATIONAL

Talks with Russia 'substantive and productive', says Ukraine

A round of U.S.-mediated talks involving Ukraine, Russia, and the United States aimed at exploring pathways to end the Ukraine war concluded its first day in Abu Dhabi. Ukraine described the discussions as “substantive and productive,” stating that they focused on concrete steps and practical solutions, though no immediate breakthrough was reported. The negotiations were scheduled to continue into a second day. These talks form part of ongoing diplomatic efforts that have so far not resulted in an agreement to halt the conflict, which began with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and has since become Europe’s deadliest conflict since the Second World War.

The talks took place against the backdrop of intensified Russian strikes on Ukraine’s power infrastructure, which caused widespread electricity outages in Kyiv amid extreme winter temperatures. Despite these developments, Ukraine’s chief negotiator, Rustem Umerov, emphasised the constructive nature of the discussions. Meanwhile, Russia reiterated its established position, with the Kremlin stating that military operations would continue until Ukraine agreed to its demands. A key obstacle in the negotiations remains the future status of territories in eastern Ukraine. Russia is seeking the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from parts of the Donbas region and international recognition of territories it has seized during the conflict. These issues continue to define the core challenges in efforts toward a negotiated settlement.



Nicolas Maduro's ouster, Trump's oil blockade push Cuba to the brink



Cuba is facing a severe energy crisis, with estimates indicating that it has only 15–20 days of oil left at current demand and production levels. The immediate trigger has been recent U.S. actions against Venezuela, including a naval blockade that disrupted Venezuelan oil shipments to Cuba and a military operation that led to the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro. The situation has been further aggravated by a U.S. executive order issued on January 29, threatening punitive tariffs on countries supplying oil to Cuba. This has constrained alternative suppliers, particularly Mexico, which had emerged as a major source after a decline in Venezuelan supplies.

Cuba’s vulnerability is structural, as oil accounts for 83% of electricity generation and over half of total energy consumption across sectors. Power shortages have severe implications for food security in a country that imports around 80% of its food. The crisis also reflects the cumulative impact of long-standing U.S. economic measures, beginning with the 1962 embargo and reinforced through the Torricelli Act (1992), Helms-Burton Act (1996), and subsequent sanctions. Past crises, such as the post-Soviet ‘Special Period’, were mitigated by external support, notably from Venezuela, which is no longer available. While the U.S. has justified its current measures on national security grounds, Cuba has rejected these allegations and expressed willingness to cooperate on specific issues. The burden of the crisis is expected to fall primarily on the Cuban population.

INTERNATIONAL

U.S., Iran confirm talks amid flare-up over drone downing

After weeks of heightened tensions, the United States and Iran are preparing to hold talks in Oman over Tehran's nuclear programme. Iran's Foreign Ministry has confirmed that preparations for the talks are complete, with venue details to be announced. This comes amid recent military incidents in the region: the U.S. shot down an Iranian drone that approached the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea, and U.S. naval forces intervened to protect a U.S.-flagged tanker near the Strait of Hormuz. While the U.S. has combined diplomatic signals with military posturing and troop mobilisation, Iran has responded with parallel diplomatic engagement and live-fire military drills in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint. Both sides have thus kept open channels for negotiation while maintaining deterrence.

Beyond the immediate nuclear issue, the United States' engagement with Iran is shaped by its broader strategic and economic interests in West Asia. The U.S. seeks to preserve stability in a region that remains central to global energy flows, particularly oil and liquefied natural gas. As the world's largest oil producer and leading LNG exporter, the U.S. has an interest in preventing disruptions in supply routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, where any prolonged blockade could trigger sharp price volatility and impact the global economy. Diplomatic engagement, combined with deterrence, is therefore aimed at reducing the risk of large-scale conflict that could destabilise energy markets.

Additionally, the U.S. views Iran's vast petroleum resources as economically significant in the long term. If nuclear-related risks are addressed, ending sanctions and integrating Iran into global energy markets could allow international, including U.S., companies to invest in Iran's oil and gas sector, which requires capital, technology, and market access. This would also limit the strategic space currently occupied by China, Iran's largest trading partner under sanctions.

More broadly, the U.S. approach reflects an effort to sustain its economic and strategic primacy in West Asia while encouraging a regional environment conducive to trade, investment, and predictable energy supplies, without which long-term stability in the region remains difficult to achieve. For Iran, sanctions relief and access to investment and technology remain critical for reviving its energy sector. However, durable outcomes depend on regional stability, economic delivery to Iran's population, and a balance between sovereignty and external engagement.

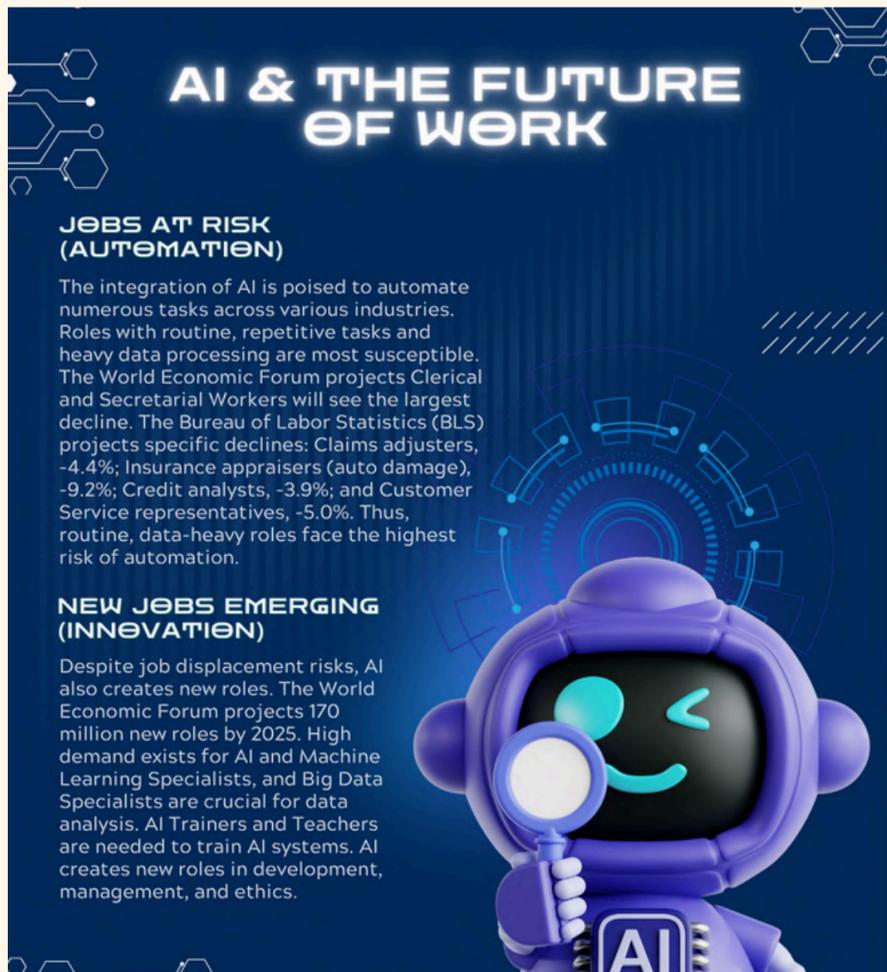


ECONOMICS

IT stocks slump on Anthropic tool launch

Indian IT stocks witnessed a sharp decline, mirroring a sell-off in global technology shares, particularly in the United States. Major IT companies recorded significant losses on the BSE, with Infosys declining over 7%, followed by Tata Consultancy Services, LTIMindtree, Hexaware Technologies, Persistent Systems, HCL Technologies, Tech Mahindra, and Wipro, all registering notable falls. As a result, the combined market capitalisation of these firms eroded by ₹1.66 lakh crore, and the BSE IT index dropped 5.49%. The downturn in IT stocks emerged as the primary drag on overall market performance.

The weakness in the sector was attributed to deteriorating investor sentiment amid concerns over the future of traditional outsourcing models. Market participants reacted to developments in the global technology space, particularly after AI startup Anthropic unveiled an end-to-end workflow automation productivity tool. This announcement revived apprehensions that rapid advances in artificial intelligence could disrupt conventional software services and affect industry-wide profitability. The decline in Indian IT stocks also tracked losses in U.S. markets,



US farm exports to India surged, even with no deal

Table 1: US-India agri trade (mn \$)

	US exports to India	US imports from India	US trade balance
2020	1,820	5,300	-3,480
2021	1,853.10	6,421.90	-4,568.80
2022	2,348.50	6,658.80	-4,310.30
2023	2,040.70	5,811.50	-3,770.80
2024	2,378.80	6,211.90	-3,833.10
Jan-Nov 2024	2,127.60	5,624.80	-3,497.20
Jan-Nov 2025	2,853.70	5,914.30	-3,060.60

Table 3: Key products in India's agriculture exports to the US (mn \$)

	2024	Jan-Nov 2024	Jan-Nov 2025	Growth
Seafood	2,483.80	2,245.90	2,392.40	6.50
Spices	410.20	369.70	360.80	-2.40
Rice	391.20	353.30	347.70	-1.60
Processed fruits and vegetables	227.60	206.10	223.50	8.40
Baked goods*	247.50	228.80	239	4.50
Essential oils	212.10	192.30	180.80	-6.90
Sugars**	171	159	193	21.40
Vegetable oils	174.80	161.90	145.90	-9.80
Food preparations	137.90	127.20	103.80	-18.30
TOTAL	6,211.90	5,624.80	5,914.30	5.10

Table 2: US agri exports to India (mn \$)

	2024	Jan-Nov 2024	Jan-Nov 2025	Growth
Tree nuts	1,116.10	993.90	1,314.40	32.20%
Ethanol	420.90	394.40	379.80	-3.70%
Soyabean oil	37.5	0.20	212.50	105.372%
Cotton	209	193.30	377.90	95.50%
TOTAL	2,378.80	2,127.60	2,853.70	34.10%

*INCLUDES CEREALS & PASTA; **INCLUDES SWEETENERS & BEVERAGE BA
 SOURCE: US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Recent statements by US officials suggest that the India-US trade deal could expand American agricultural exports to India and reduce the US farm trade deficit. While the US Agriculture Secretary cited a deficit of \$1.3 billion in 2024, trade data indicates that the deficit was higher and has been narrowing even without a formal deal.

US agricultural exports to India rose sharply during January-November 2025, reaching \$2.85 billion, a 34.1% increase over the previous year, and are projected to exceed \$3.1 billion for the full year. In contrast, US imports of Indian farm produce grew modestly, leading to a reduction in the US agricultural trade deficit with India. Key US exports driving this growth include tree nuts such as almonds and pistachios, cotton, soyabean oil, and ethanol.

Policy measures by India, including temporary duty-free cotton imports and reduced duties on crude soyabean oil, contributed significantly to this surge. However, India continues to restrict ethanol imports for fuel blending and has maintained safeguards on sensitive sectors like agriculture and dairy.

On the other hand, Indian agricultural exports to the US slowed in the latter half of 2025, following the imposition of higher US tariffs. Several export categories witnessed a decline, indicating adverse effects of tariff measures. A proposed tariff reduction may help restore some balance in bilateral agricultural trade.

UNION BUDGET 2026 : KEY TAKEAWAYS - SPECIAL FEATURE**What does the Budget offer urban India?**

The Union Budget 2026 reiterates the familiar emphasis on capital investment, growth momentum, and the vision of Viksit Bharat, while portraying cities as engines of productivity and development. However, a closer examination of budgetary allocations reveals a contrasting fiscal reality for urban India. The total central outlay for urban development has declined from ₹96,777 crore in the previous year to ₹85,522 crore in 2026–27, reflecting a nominal reduction of ₹11,255 crore, or about 11.6%. When adjusted for inflation, this represents a sharper real contraction, occurring at a time when cities face mounting pressures from migration, climate stress, infrastructure deficits, and employment challenges.

Within this shrinking budgetary envelope, expenditure remains heavily skewed towards metro rail projects. Despite an 8% reduction in metro allocations—from ₹31,239 crore to ₹28,740 crore—metro rail still absorbs about 33.6% of total central urban spending. This concentration highlights a persistent policy preference for capital-intensive, spatially limited transport systems, while relatively less emphasis is placed on bus-based transport, non-motorised mobility, suburban rail, and last-mile connectivity that serve the majority of urban residents. Urban mobility, therefore, appears framed largely as a technical infrastructure issue rather than a social and accessibility concern.

At the same time, flagship centrally sponsored urban schemes have witnessed notable cuts. The allocation for PMAY-Urban has fallen by 5.9%, affecting urban housing support amid persistent shortages. The Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban has seen a drastic 50% reduction, signalling a rollback in sanitation investment despite its ongoing service requirements. AMRUT allocations have declined by 20%, weakening efforts to address urban water stress, sewerage, and ageing infrastructure.

Overall, the Budget reflects a contraction in central support for cities without compensatory fiscal devolution or strengthened municipal financing. Urban local bodies remain dependent on tied transfers, limiting their capacity for long-term planning. The outcome is a clear tension between rhetorical recognition of cities as growth drivers and a fiscal framework that constrains urban investment at a critical juncture.

In ₹ crore	2024-25	2025-26	2025-26	2026-27
	(Actuals)	(Budget Estimates)	(Revised Estimates)	(Budget Estimates)
Revenue Receipts	3,03,6619	34,20,409	33,42,323	35,33,150
Capital Receipts	16,16,249	16,44,936	16,22,519	18,14,165
Total Receipts	46,52,867	50,65,345	49,64,842	53,47,315
Total Expenditure	46,52,867	50,65,345	49,64,842	53,47,315
Effective Capital Expenditure	13,24,609	15,48,282	14,03,906	17,14,523
Revenue Deficit	5,64,296	5,23,846	5,26,764	5,92,344
Effective Revenue Deficit	2,91,640	96,654	21,8613	99,642
Fiscal Deficit	15,74,431	15,68,936	15,58,492	16,95,768
Primary Deficit	4,58,856	2,92,598	28,4154	2,91,796



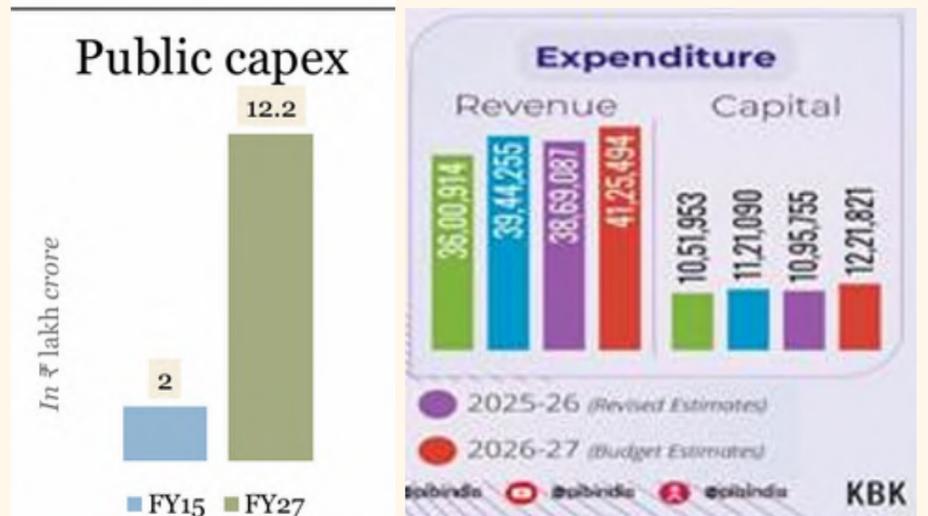
(UPSC PYQ GS II PAPER 2019 : How is efficient and affordable urban mass transport key to the rapid economic development of India?)

UNION BUDGET 2026 : KEY TAKEAWAYS - SPECIAL FEATURE

Union Budget 2026: India's Capex-Led Growth Model and the Employment Disconnect

Public capital expenditure (capex) has emerged as the organising principle of India's post-pandemic fiscal strategy. Successive budgets, including Budget 2026-27, have prioritised infrastructure-led growth to crowd in private investment, raise productivity, and sustain macroeconomic stability. While this approach has strengthened headline GDP growth, its employment outcomes remain uneven.

On the positive side, sustained capex has improved logistics, reduced transaction costs, and enhanced India's manufacturing and investment climate. Strategic support to sectors such as MSMEs, semiconductors, and biopharma reflects a long-term vision of building productive capacity rather than relying on short-term stimulus. Infrastructure creation has also supported allied activities such as materials, transport, and services.



However, labour market indicators reveal a growing disconnect between growth and employment. Employment elasticity in construction, the sector most directly linked to public investment, has declined in the post-pandemic period despite record infrastructure spending. Simultaneously, agriculture has been re-absorbing labour, indicating distress-driven fallback into low-productivity activities rather than structural transformation. Youth NEET rates remain elevated, signalling weak labour absorption even as capital formation accelerates.

This pattern reflects a structural bias towards capital-intensive production. Large firms, better positioned to leverage new infrastructure, dominate value creation while remaining relatively labour-light. Productivity gains increasingly accrue as profits rather than wages, resulting in subdued income growth. Consequently, employment appears to be treated more as an eventual by-product of growth rather than a co-equal policy objective.

Capital Expenditure outlay under Budget 2026–27

- ❖ **Setting up Infrastructure Risk Guarantee Fund** to provide prudently calibrated partial credit guarantees to lenders.
- ❖ Recycling of real estate assets of CPSEs through the setting up of dedicated REITs.
- ❖ Establishment of new **Dedicated Freight Corridors** connecting Dankuni in the East, to Surat in the West.
- ❖ Operationalising **20 new National Waterways** connecting mineral rich areas, industrial centres and ports.
- ❖ Setting up of ship repair ecosystem catering to inland waterways.
- ❖ Launch a **Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme** to increase the share of inland waterways and coastal shipping from 6% to 12% by 2047.
- ❖ Launching a **Seaplane VGF Scheme** to indigenise manufacturing.
- ❖ ₹2 lakh crore support to states under **SASCI Scheme**.
- ❖ **Purvodaya: Development of Integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor.**

Going forward, capex must be complemented with labour-absorbing strategies such as scaling labour-intensive MSMEs, improving urban employment ecosystems, targeted skilling aligned with industry demand, and regulatory reforms that encourage formal hiring. Without this balance, India risks achieving growth without commensurate employment generation.

(UPSC PYQ GS III PAPER 2022 : Economic growth in the recent past has been led by increase in labour activity." Explain this statement. Suggest the growth pattern that will lead to creation of more jobs without compromising labour productivity)

(UPSC PYQ GS III PAPER 2017 : Account for the failure of manufacturing sector in achieving the goal of labor-intensive exports rather than capital-intensive exports. Suggest measures for more labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive exports)

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Consider the following statements:
(2018)

1. The definition of “Critical Wildlife Habitat” is incorporated in the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
2. For the first time in India, Baigas have been given Habitat Rights.
3. Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change officially decides and declares Habitat Rights for Primitive and Vulnerable Tribal Groups in any part of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

2) How is the National Green Tribunal (NGT) different from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)? (2018)

1. The NGT has been established by an Act whereas the CPCB has been created by an executive order of the Government.
2. The NGT provides environmental justice and helps reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts whereas the CPCB promotes cleanliness of streams and wells, and aims to improve the quality of air in the country.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN**108 DAYS TO GO****CASE STUDY*****Reimagining Anganwadis***

Arjun Pandian, a 2017-batch IAS officer of the Kerala cadre and District Collector of Thrissur, undertook focused administrative interventions to strengthen anganwadis, drawing from long-standing personal exposure to these institutions. His mother has served as an anganwadi worker for over 26 years in Idukki district, which informed his understanding of their challenges and potential. After assuming charge as District Collector in 2024, Pandian initiated efforts to transform anganwadis from limited service-delivery units into community-centric public institutions.

Under his leadership, anganwadis in Thrissur were developed as community centres with improved infrastructure and added facilities such as libraries. Through mobilisation of corporate social responsibility funds and public contributions, 15 anganwadi libraries were established under the programme “Va Vayikkam (Come, Let Us Read)”, with additional centres under development. Addressing infrastructure gaps, his administration facilitated the construction of buildings for 20 anganwadis that earlier lacked basic facilities, while formal processes were completed for 50 more. Local governments responded positively, with several panchayats participating in the initiative, including one centre named “Collector’s Dream” in recognition of the effort.

Pandian also instituted monthly taluk-level review committees for monitoring progress and conducted weekly interactions with schoolchildren to incorporate feedback into governance. His initiatives were recognised through the Best District Collector award under the Integrated Child Development Services scheme.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option a

The definition of "Critical Wildlife Habitat" is incorporated in the Forest Rights Act, 2006: This statement is Correct. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 recognizes the concept of Critical Wildlife Habitat. It provides for the recognition of rights over forest lands and their management by Indigenous communities, while also addressing the issue of conservation. Under the FRA, Critical Wildlife Habitats are areas declared by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), where certain rights may be restricted to enable better protection of biodiversity and wildlife.

For the first time in India, Baigas have been given Habitat Rights. This statement is Correct. Baigas, a tribal community, were indeed the first in India to be granted Habitat Rights under the Forest Rights Act. This was a landmark decision in the recognition of community rights over forest areas. It was part of the efforts to protect the rights of Indigenous people while promoting conservation efforts, particularly in areas like Madhya Pradesh where the Baigas reside.

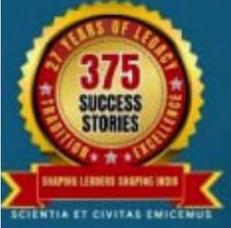
Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change officially decides and declares Habitat Rights for Primitive and Vulnerable Tribal Groups in any part of India: This statement is Incorrect. The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change does not directly declare Habitat Rights. According to the Forest Rights Act, the Gram Sabha (village council) is responsible for determining and recognizing individual and community forest rights, including Habitat Rights. These decisions are subject to the approval of higher authorities like the State Government. The Ministry plays a supporting role but does not directly declare such rights.

2) Answer is option b.

Statement 1 - The NGT has been established by an Act whereas the CPCB has been created by an executive order of the Government: This is Incorrect. Both the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) were created by Acts of Parliament. The NGT was established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010. The CPCB was established under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, which was later amended, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. Both organizations were created through legislation, not through executive orders.

Statement 2 - The NGT provides environmental justice and helps reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts, whereas the CPCB promotes cleanliness of streams and wells, and aims to improve the quality of air in the country. This statement is Correct.

The NGT is a quasi-judicial body that provides environmental justice. It specifically handles cases related to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources. The main purpose of the NGT is to reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts and deliver swift and efficient justice on environmental matters. The CPCB, on the other hand, is a statutory body that operates under the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. Its primary responsibility is to promote cleanliness of streams and wells, monitor and control air pollution, and advise the government on matters related to environmental pollution. The CPCB focuses on regulation and monitoring of pollution levels and ensuring that environmental standards are met.



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