

NEWS TODAY

67th Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council approves \$736.4 million funding

Funding has been mobilized for Projects from the **GEF Trust Fund**, **Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF)**, and **Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF)**, which together are part of the **GEF family of funds**.

- Includes Projects like **Great Green Wall (GGW)**, **Sustainable Cities Integrated Program (SCIP)** etc.
 - ⊕ **GGW** focused on restoring landscapes and ecosystems across the Sahel region of Africa.
 - ⊕ **SCIP** is a 20-country program aims to catalyze urban system transformation.
- Also includes **2 Indian Projects-**
 - ⊕ Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to meet commitment to the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets**.
 - ⊕ **CoHABITAT** - Conservation and sustainable management of **wetlands forest and grassland** to secure the population of migratory species along the **Central Asian Flyway in India**.
 - ◆ These projects are implemented by the **UNDP** along with Indian **Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change** acting as the executive agency.

Conventions served by GEF

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs),

UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Minamata Convention on Mercury.

About GEF

- **Genesis:** Established in 1992 during the eve of **Rio Earth Summit**.
- **About:** Partnership of 18 agencies to address world's most challenging environmental issues.
- **Governance:** GEF Council is the main governing body.
- **Functions:** Serves as financial mechanism to **five conventions** (refer to infographics)
- **GEF Trustee:** World Bank.
- **Member countries:** 186 countries (including India).
- **Secretariat:** Washington, D.C (US).

'India's DeepTech Dawn: Forging Ahead' Report released by NASSCOM

Report highlights the different attributes of DeepTech startups.

Key findings

- Despite having the **3rd largest** pool of DeepTech startups, India ranked 6th among the top 9 DeepTech ecosystems in the world.
- India **currently has 3600+** DeepTech startups.
- Indian DeepTech startups have raised a **cumulative \$10 Bn** in the last **5 years (2023-2019)**.
 - ⊕ In 2023, witnessed 77% decline in funding (in comparison to 2022).

About DeepTech Startups

- **DeepTech startups** leverage advanced technologies like AI, IoT, Blockchain, and Augmented Reality (AR)/Virtual Reality (VR) to create **novel solutions for complex problems**, often **combining multiple technologies** to **redefine** or **create new markets**. Ex: Agnikul, GalaxyEye, Sarvam AI
- Characterized by **extended development timelines, high capital intensity**, etc.
- **Key Potential Areas:** Promotes utilisation of **Deep Technologies** to reshape sectors like **healthcare** (AI-powered Diagnostics & Precision Medicine), **Agriculture** (Agribots & Automation), etc.

Key Challenges

- During the pre-commercialization phase, lacks access to the necessary infrastructure.
- Limited understanding of **business operations** and **market dynamics**.
- Competition from large enterprises for adequately skilled talent

Initiatives taken

- Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (2023)
- Technology Incubation and Development of Entrepreneurs (TIDE 2.0)
- **Other:** Startup India Seed Fund, India AI Mission, etc.

Steps needs to be taken by Government

- Establish **co-investment programs** with venture capitalist for DeepTech startups.
- Introduce **government backed instruments**.
- Facilitate platforms that connect enterprise with DeepTech startups
- Launch DeepTech focused **skill development programs**.
- Provide **grants/access to regulatory sandboxes to prototype and test**.
- Provide **logistical support for commercialization**.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issues notice to Odisha govt on custodial death row

The notice was sent demanding an explanation for not paying the recommended compensation to the kin of the person who died in custodial death.

- **Custodial death** is a manifestation of **custodial violence** which primarily refers to violence (including rape and torture) in **police and judicial custody**.

Status of Custodial death in India

- There were more than **660 Custodial deaths** in the country from 2017 to 2022.
- **Gujarat has reported** the highest number of **Custodial deaths (80)** followed by Maharashtra. (National Crime Records Bureau)

Constitutional and Legal Safeguards against Custodial deaths

➤ Constitutional

- ⊕ **Article 14** (Right to equality before law)
- ⊕ **Article 21** (Right to life)

➤ Legal

- ⊕ **Sec 330 & 331 of IPC** provides **punishment for injury inflicted for extorting confession** during custody
- ⊕ **Section 176 Cr.P.C.**, calls for **magisterial enquiry in case of custodial death**.
- ⊕ The upcoming **New Criminal Laws** also contain provisions like
 - ◆ **Sec 120, Sec 127 of Bhartiya Nyaya sanhita** on safeguarding the accused.

➤ Other Safeguards

- ⊕ **NHRC's Guidelines on Custodial deaths (1993)**
 - ◆ It calls for reporting of custodial death or rape within 24 hrs of occurrence.
- ⊕ **SC gave specific guidelines for safeguarding of detainees** and procedure for arrest (DK Basu Case).

Challenges in curbing Custodial death

Non-ratification of UN Convention against torture, 1997

Absence of a National level anti-torture framework

Lengthy judicial proceedings

Tremendous pressure on the police to detect cases whenever there is a surge in crime, and particularly heinous crime

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revises Priority Sector Lending (PSL) norms

RBI has amended the **Master Directions on PSL**, which applies to every Commercial Bank (including Regional Rural Bank (RRB), Small Finance Bank (SFB), Local Area Bank), and Primary (Urban) Cooperative Bank (UCB).

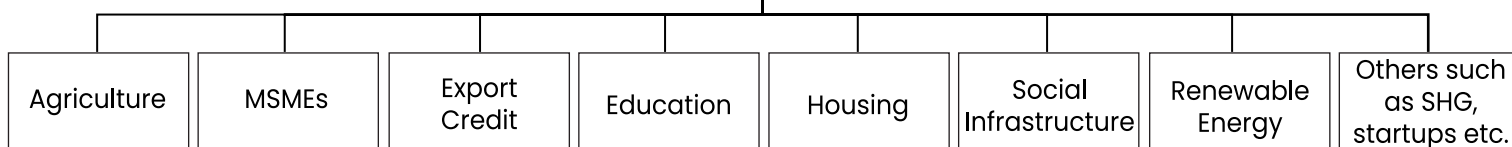
New PSL Guidelines

- To address regional disparities, **districts will be ranked** based on per capita credit flow to the priority sector.:
 - ⊕ It aims to build an **incentive framework** with higher weight (125%) for **districts with comparatively lower credit flow** and a **disincentive framework** with lower weight (90%) for districts with comparatively higher credit flow.
 - ⊕ **Effective Period:** From FY 2024-25 to FY 2026-27.
- **All bank loans to MSMEs shall qualify** for classification under PSL.

About Priority Sector Lending (PSL)

- **PSL was formalised in 1972** to facilitate flow of credit to such sectors, which though creditworthy, are unable to access credit from formal financial institutions.
- **PSL Targets:** Banks have to mandatorily allocate a **portion of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) or Credit Equivalent of Off-Balance Sheet Exposure (CEOBE)**, whichever is higher, towards PSL.
 - ⊕ Mandated target differs for different banks and is 40% for Scheduled commercial banks and foreign banks (with 20 or more branches) while it is **75% for RRBs and SFBs**.
 - ⊕ **UCBs** have to allocate 65% to PSL in FY 2024-25 but **increasing it to 75% in FY 2025-26**.

Categories under PSL



Patna High Court (HC) struck down Bihar reservation laws increasing reservation to 65%

HC has set aside **Bihar Reservation laws**, that enhanced the reservations for **SCs, STs and Backward Classes to 65%** from existing 50%, as **unconstitutional**.

Reasons for striking down the amendments

- HC termed the amendments **violative of Articles 14, 15 and 16** of the Constitution.
- There is a **ceiling limit of 50%** for reservations, as prescribed by a 9-judge constitution bench in **Indra Sawhney case (1992)**.
- Reservation was based on mere proportion of population of backward classes (**proportionate reservation**), which is **not sanctioned** by the constitution.
- State did not conduct any **analysis or in-depth study** before enhancing reservations.

Important Judgements regarding reservation

- **Indra Sawhney Case (1992)**: Sets the limit for reservation as 50%.
 - ⊕ It also **nullified the provision of reservation in promotions** and the concept of **'Creamy layer'** was introduced.
- **M. Nagaraj Case (2006)**: Affirmative action should be only to such an extent as **not to compromise efficiency in administration**.
- **Jarnail Singh Case (2018)**: **Reservation in promotions does not require the state to collect quantifiable data** on the backwardness of the SCs and the STs.
- **Janhit Abhiyan case (2022)**: **Upheld the validity of 103rd Constitutional amendment for providing EWS reservation (10%)**.

Constitutional Provisions for Reservation

- **Article 15's clauses 4, 5, & 6** deals with **reservation in educational institutions** for ensuring the advancement of deprived sections.
- **Article 16(4) and 16(6)** deals with **reservation in Government jobs** for ensuring **adequate representation (not proportionate representation)**.
- **Article 330 and 332** deals with **reservation in Parliament and State Legislature** for ensuring political representation.

New gene revolution driving Genetically Modified (GM) crops

This new gene revolution is being driven by **new gene editing tools such as CRISPR**, allowing precise gene editing without the introduction of foreign genes.

- It is helping to develop **new varieties of GM crops** (plants whose DNA has been altered using genetic engineering techniques) which are **expected to enhance food security**.

Status of GM crops in India

- **Bt cotton** is the only **GM crop approved for commercial cultivation** in India.
- In 2022, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has approved the **environmental release of Mustard hybrid DMH-11**; however, the matter is pending before Supreme Court.
- Several **more crops** such as chickpea, pigeonpea, corn, sugarcane, etc. are in **various stages of research and field trials**.

Significance of GM Crops

- **Increased crop yield** thus improving food availability and farmers' income.
- Improve **nutritious content**, helping fight malnutrition.
- Offers **beneficial traits to survive extreme weather** and new climate-induced diseases and disasters.
- Can be optimized to better **capture and store atmospheric carbon**, thus helping fight climate change.

Concerns with GM Crops

- **Probability of building up of resistance** in target pests.
- **Monopoly with respect to Intellectual Property** by a few large companies.
- Often involve **large-scale monocultures** thus requiring great amounts of artificial fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation.
- **Deficiencies in risk assessment** of GM crops.

Regulation of GM crops in India

- In India, regulations for GM crops are provided in the **Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms (HM) Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989** under the **Environment Protection Act (1986)**.
- GEAC functioning under **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** is responsible for appraisal of proposals relating to release of GM crops.

Also in News



e-SAKSHI Portal

Government held a **training workshop on e-SAKSHI Portal** for revised fund flow procedure under **MPLADS (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme)**.

- **eSAKSHI portal** is an end-to-end solution for efficient and transparent implementation of the MPLAD scheme.

About MPLADS

- **Type**: Central Sector Scheme
- **Ministry**: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
- An amount of **Rs. 5 crore** is allotted to each MP for recommending developmental works for creating durable community assets based on locally felt needs.
 - ⊕ **Funds are non-lapsable** and are carried forward to next year.
- **Atleast 15% of MPLADS entitlement** is allocated for areas inhabited by Scheduled Caste population and **7.5% for areas inhabited by Scheduled Tribe** population.



Output from agriculture and allied sectors

NSO releases **'Statistical report on value of output from agriculture and allied sectors (2011-12 to 2022-23)'**.

Key highlights

- **Agriculture and allied sector accounted for 18.2% of the Gross Value Added (GVA)** at current prices in 2022-23.
- Share of various sub-sectors are **Crop (54.3%), Livestock (30.9%), Forestry (7.9%), and Fishing and aquaculture (6.9%)**.
- **Output trend of sub-sectors (2011-12 to 2022-23)**:
 - ⊕ **Crop: Declined** from 62.4% to 54.3%.
 - ⊕ **Livestock: Increased steadily** from ₹487.8 thousand crore to ₹878.5 thousand crore.
 - ⊕ **Forestry: Increased** from ₹149 thousand crore to ₹223 thousand crore.
 - ⊕ **Fishing: Increased steadily** from ₹80 thousand crore to ₹195 thousand crore.

National Testing Agency (NTA)

Government announced formation of a **high-level committee** to provide recommendations for improving the functioning of the National Testing Agency (NTA).

About NTA

- Established by **Ministry of Education (MoE)** as a premier, specialist, autonomous and self-sustained testing organization.
- **Purpose:** To conduct entrance examinations for admission/fellowship in higher educational institutions.
- **Registered society** under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860.**
- Chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by MoE.

Gas Flaring

Global Gas Flaring Tracker Report has been released by the **World Bank.**

- Report is compiled with the help of World Bank's **Global Flaring and Methane Reduction (GFMR) Partnership.**
- **Key Findings**
- Global gas flaring in 2023 has **increased by 7% from 2022** leading to a rise of 23 million tonnes of CO2 emissions.
- **Major Contributor:** Russia, Iran, Iraq, USA, etc.

About Gas Flaring

- Refers to burning of the natural gas associated with oil extraction.
- **Reasons:**
 - ⊕ **Safety Concern** (de-pressurise the equipment).
 - ⊕ **Economical** (logistical issues in transporting gases from oil fields are located in remote and inaccessible places).
- **Key Measures taken:** Zero Routine Flaring by 2030 (ZRF) initiative (World Bank).

Cyber Mercenaries

UN chief has warned about the rise of malicious and illegal cyber activities through "Cyber Mercenaries".

About Cyber Mercenaries

- Cyber mercenaries are described as a **person, group of persons, or private actors** that are hired to carry out **cyber offensive or defensive operations** to take action on particular cyber networks and infrastructure.
 - ⊕ These **enable spying** on networks, computers, phones, or devices connected by the internet.
- **Examples of cyber mercenaries** include Lazarus, Ocean Lotus group, NSO group etc.
- Use of cyber mercenaries is considered as a **'grey-zone' activity** due to absence of agreed international conventions regulating the domain.

Nord Stream

New Study reveals thousands of tonnes of methane may have dissolved in **Baltic Sea.**

- In 2022, the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines suddenly began leaking at four locations.

About Nord Stream

- Comprises a **network of offshore pipelines (Nord Stream 1 and 2) supplying natural gas from Russia to northern Germany.**
- Pipelines pass through the **territorial waters and/or Exclusive Economic Zones of Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany.**
- **Impacts of Nord Stream's Leakage:** The high concentration of methane in water may have promoted the growth of **methanotrophic bacteria.**
 - ⊕ This bacteria uses methane as their sole source of carbon and energy.

UP-PRAGATI Accelerator programs (UPPAP)

KisanKraft Limited has joined the **Low Methane Rice project (LMRP)** under UPPAP to promote the Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) in Uttar Pradesh.

- **LMRP** is an initiative of World Bank's 2030 Water Resource Group (WRG).
- The WRG is a multi-donor trust fund hosted by the World Bank Group.

About UPPAP

- Aims to bring about significant agricultural advancements and boost incomes across the state by promoting **water-use efficiency and low-carbon practices** through **technological and institutional innovations.**
- Launched by **Uttar Pradesh Multi-Stakeholder Platform**, and is supported by 2030 WRG.
 - ⊕ Its implementation is being supported by the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.**

Mirage 2000

Qatar offered to sell 12 Mirage 2000 fighter aircrafts to India.

About Mirage 2000

- **Manufacturer:** Dassault Aviation, France.
- It is a **single engine delta-wing multirole aircraft.**
- It is **supersonic combat aircraft with maximum speed of Mach 2.2.**
- Mirage 2000 can **carry laser guided bombs**, air-to-air and air-to-surface missiles and has a Thomson-CSF RDY (Radar Doppler Multi-target) radar on board.
- First commissioned in Indian Air Force in 1985 which gave it the name **'Vajra'.**
- It played a **decisive role in 1999 Kargil war and operation Bandar** of 2019.

Places in News

Armenia (Capital: Yerevan)

Armenia has officially recognised Palestine as a State.

Political Boundaries

- **Location:** Landlocked country of Transcaucasia (populated region to the south of the Caucasus Mountains).
- **Border:** Azerbaijan, Turkey, Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (an enclave of Azerbaijan), Georgia, and Iran.
 - ⊕ **Nagorno-Karabakh** is a disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Geographical features

- **Topography:** Mountainous terrain with no lowlands
- **Highest Peak:** Mount Aragats (Alaghez)
- **Rivers:** Aras River

