

NEWS TODAY

Transit Oriented Development plan for large cities

Union Budget 2024-25 proposed to **formulate Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plans and strategies for 14 large cities with populations over 30 Lakhs.**

- TOD is an **innovative urban paradigm** that **leverages existing and upcoming public transit infrastructure and associated users**, to ensure **sustainable mobility** and optimise land use through **compact mixed-use development**.

Significance of TOD

- **Economic:** Increase in real estate value due to their proximity to mass transit, higher labor productivity due to reduced transit time, improved economic competitiveness of cities, etc.
- **Environmental:** Reduced carbon footprint and air pollution from urban transport, promotion and protection of urban greens, etc.
- **Social:** Walkable cities encourage physical activity and can lead to improved public health outcomes; efficient land-use can reduce urban sprawl, etc.

Three Values (3V) Framework for guiding TOD (World Bank)

- **Node value:** Importance of a station in public transit network based on passenger traffic, connections with other transport modes, etc.
- **Place value:** Quality and attractiveness of the area including diversity of land use, availability of essential services such as healthcare, etc.
- **Market potential value:** Unrealized market value measured by demand (such as current and future number of jobs in the vicinity) and supply (such as market vibrancy).

Steps taken for TOD in India

- **National Transit Oriented Development Policy, 2017:** Outlines 12 Guiding Principles (Last Mile Connectivity, Mixed Landuse, Interconnected Street Network, etc.) and 9 Supportive tools (Universal Accessibility, PPP, etc.).
- **Smart Cities Mission:** Incorporates TOD as a key component of the mission.
- **Multi-modal integration:** Efforts being made to integrate different modes of transport (metro, bus, cycling, etc.) to create seamless connectivity in different TOD zones.
- **Local TOD Policies:** TOD Manual for Delhi, etc.

A Decade of India's Act East Policy (AEP)

The AEP was articulated during the PM's visit to Myanmar for the **East Asia Summit and the ASEAN + India Summit in November, 2014.**

- AEP is the **policy graduation** from **Look East Policy** enacted in 1992.

About Act East Policy (AEP)

- AEP focuses on the **extended neighbourhood (defined for the first time)** in the **Indo-Pacific region (IPR)**, with **ASEAN** as its core.
- **Objective:** Promote **economic cooperation, cultural ties** and **develop strategic relationships** in the IPR by providing **enhanced connectivity**.

Achievements under AEP

- **AEP positioned India's launching pad to the IPR:** E.g., India's support of Philippines' on South China Sea dispute.
- **AEP forged stronger strategic partnerships** with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, etc., and established close links with BIMSTEC and the IOR.
- **Greater integration of Northeastern states** with ASEAN to end economic isolation. E.g., **India-Japan Act East Forum to promote development and connectivity.**

Roadblocks to AEP

- **Deeper Chinese integration** in the ASEAN economy.
- **India's economic under-performance:** E.g., **India's trade deficit \$ 43.57 billion.**

Initiatives under Act East Policy

- **Regional connectivity:** E.g., India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway; Kaladan multi modal transport project.
- **Played the role of 'pharmacy of the world':** E.g., Supplied Covid-19 vaccines under Vaccine Maitri initiative
- **Defense exports:** E.g., India's supply of the BrahMos missile system to the Philippines.
- **Restoring cultural ties by restoring Monuments:** E.g., My Son temples (Vietnam), Buddhist Pagodas in Bagan (Myanmar), Wat Phou Temple Complex (Laos), Preah Vihear temple (Cambodia)

Way forward: Review of **ASEAN FTA**; promote **tourism**, partner with **Singapore and Malaysia** to boost **Indian Semiconductor Mission**, etc.

Philippine oil tanker sinks near Manila, raising concerns of major spill

An oil spill/pollution includes the accidental or deliberate, operational spills of oil from ships, especially tankers, offshore platforms and pipelines.

Effects on Coastal and Marine Ecosystems

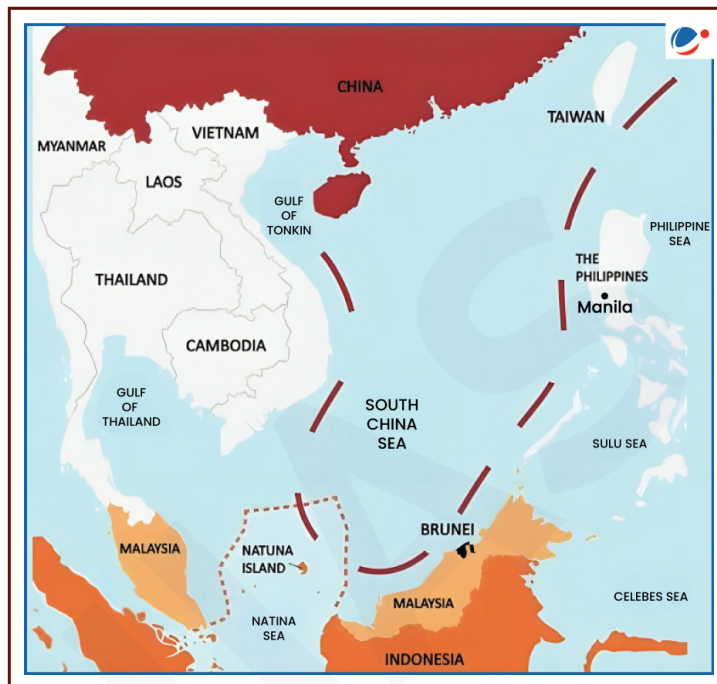
- **Biodiversity loss:** For ex. **Exxon Valdez spill** killed an estimated 250,000 sea birds.
- **Food chain disruption:**
 - ⊖ **Bioaccumulation** (accumulation of chemicals in an organism) of toxic substances.
 - ⊖ Affects photosynthesis of phytoplankton.

Oil Pollution remedies

- **Standard SoPs:** Safe barrel handling procedures and use of doubly walled equipments.
- **Bioremediation** (use of living organisms in the removal of contaminants): For e.g., Oilzapper and Oilivorous-S.
- **Use of Booms and Skimmers:** to limit spread and to remove oil spills.
 - ⊖ Booms are physical barriers that slow the spread of oil and keep it contained.
 - ⊖ Skimmers are boats deployed to remove the oil.

Laws and Conventions

- **International**
 - ⊖ International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)
 - ⊖ International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage 1992
 - ⊖ OPRC (Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Cooperation) 1990
- **National**
 - ⊖ National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan, 1996
 - ⊖ The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958
 - ⊖ **The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**



Experiments reveal that Integrated Nutrient Management maintained Soil Fertility

Union Government recently informed Parliament that **Long term fertilizer experiment** conducted by Indian Council of Agriculture Research revealed that **Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) practices maintained soil fertility status.**

About INM

- It refers to **maintenance of soil fertility and plant nutrient supply** at an optimum level for **sustaining desired productivity** through **optimization of benefits from all possible sources of organic, inorganic, and biological components** in an integrated manner.
- Rather than focusing nutrition management practices on one crop, INM aims at **optimal use of nutrient sources on a cropping-system or crop-rotation basis.**

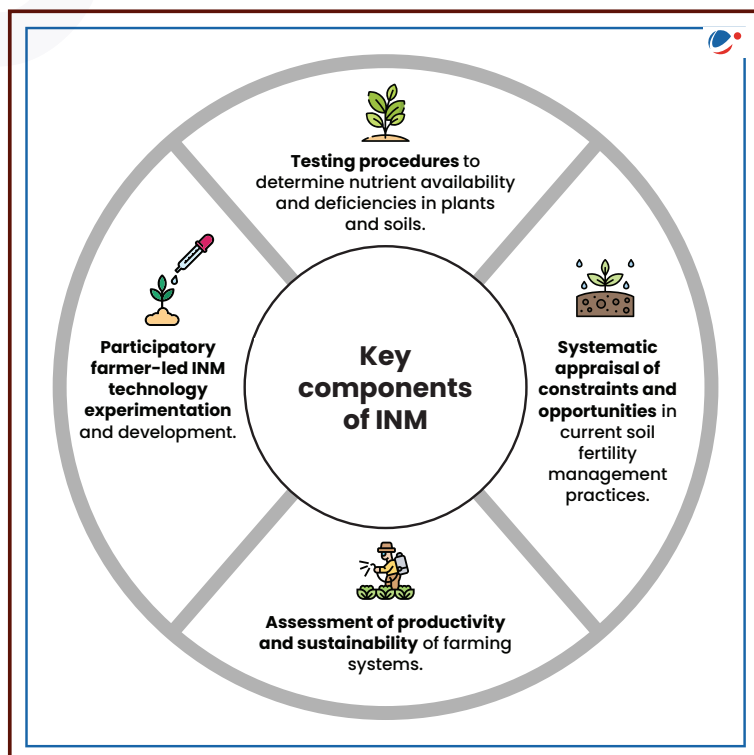
Significance of INM

- **Enhanced soil fertility and health:** By increasing soil organic matter which improves nutrient retention, soil structure, and water-holding capacity.
- **Sustainable crop production:** Reduces pollution from excessive fertilizer use, synchronizes the nutrient demand of the crop with nutrient supply from native and applied sources, etc.
- **Others:** Cost-effective by optimizing resource-use, food security, etc.

Challenges with INM: Complex decision-making process, inadequate technical knowledge and training, etc.

Government initiatives to promote INM and Organic farming

- **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)**
- **Mission Organic Value Chain Development in North East Region (MOVCDNER)**
- **Market Development Assistance (MDA)** to promote **organic fertilizers**
- **PM-PRANAM** to promote sustainable and balanced use of fertilizers, etc.



CBSE launches SAFAL test cycle 2024 with a plan to reduce exam stress

It aims to develop a **first-of-its-kind "census" on learning gaps** to help plan timely remedial action.

Structured Assessment For Analyzing Learning (SAFAL)

It is a **Competency-based Assessment for Grades 3, 5 and 8** that assesses core concepts, **application of knowledge** and **higher order thinking skills**.

Key Features:

- ⊕ **Test core concepts** and move away from rote learning in all schools.
- ⊕ **Diagnostic information** will be shared for development of **learning outcomes**.
- ⊕ **Continuous handholding and improvement** and not for promotion to the next grade.
- ⊕ It will **test proficiency of students at 4 levels of skills and knowledge** – Below Basic (2 years below Grade), Basic (1 year below Grade), Proficient and Advanced (Current Grade).
- ⊕ **No additional classes or special preparations** are required for students to take SAFAL.

Competency-based Framework under NEP, 2020

Competency-based education is an approach that focuses on the **development and demonstration of specific skills, knowledge, and abilities**, rather than **solely relying on traditional standardized testing or rote memorization**.

- ⊕ It is in line with promoting **skill development and employability** in the country's workforce.
- ⊕ **PARAKH (National Assessment Centre)** is constituted in line with NEP to fulfill the objectives of competency-based assessment.

About PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development)

- Set up in **NCERT** as an independent constituent unit in 2023.
- There are four major areas of focus for PARAKH:
 - ⊕ **Capacity Development** under **Project Vidyasagar**
 - ⊕ **National Achievement Survey (NAS)** for continuous monitoring and assessment.
 - ⊕ **Equivalence of School Boards** to bring uniformity of credit system.
 - ⊕ **Holistic Progress Cards** for the Foundational, Preparational, Middle and Secondary Stages.

Centre criticizes State of Kerala for appointing 'External Cooperation' Official

Ministry of External Affairs criticized **Kerala government's order appointing a Secretary in charge of External Cooperation**, stating that State Governments should not intrude into matters that are beyond their constitutional jurisdiction.

Constitutional provisions regarding External Affairs

- **Seventh Schedule:** "Foreign affairs; all matters which bring the Union into relation with any foreign country" is listed as **item 10 under Union List**.
- **Article 253:** Parliament has power to make any law for implementing any treaty with any other country or any decision made at any international conference, etc.
- **Article 293:** Places territorial limits on borrowing power of the states, i.e., states non-access to foreign loans.

State's interests in External Affairs

- **Economic interests:** Attracting FDI and promotion of trade. E.g., Investor Summits of states like Vibrant Gujarat, etc.
- **Resource sharing:** e.g., opposition by West Bengal to a **potential Teesta River Treaty** between India and Bangladesh.
- **Cultural and diaspora connections:** States with large diaspora populations abroad, like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Punjab, have interests in maintaining connections and facilitating remittances.
- **Others:** State's like Goa have interests in issues like Visa regulations for promotion of tourism, trans-boundary movement and national security in states and UTs like Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, etc.

Way Forward to promote and protect State's interests in External Affairs

- **Strengthen and empower existing mechanisms like Inter-State Council (ISC)** for state involvement in foreign policy.
- **Establish Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) branch offices** staffed by state officials in all state capitals.
- **Revive regular meetings between MEA and state Chief Secretaries** on foreign policy matters.
- **Allow interested states to station representatives** in Indian embassies abroad.
- **Encourage states to create international affairs cells** headed by senior officials with MEA support.

Also in News



Saffron

Erratic weather patterns such as a protracted **dry spell, heatwaves, etc.** have led to **saffron farmers of J&K switching to apple and mustard plantations**.

About Saffron

- **Fragrant stigmata** found in the **Crocus flowers**.
- One of the **most costly spices in the world** as 75,000 flowers are needed to make one ounce of pure saffron.
- Contains **aromatic essential oil crocin and the colouring principle crocerin (yellow)**.
- **Agronomic conditions required for saffron cultivation:**
 - ⊕ **Sub-temperate** climate with **altitude** (1500-2250 meters)
 - ⊕ Annual **rainfall** (30-40cm) and **remaining covered with snow in winter** is conducive.
 - ⊕ Neutral/slightly alkaline **well-drained loamy soil**.



PMGDISHA

Recently, Union Government informed the Parliament that under **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)**, over **6 crore trained and over 4.7 crore candidates** have been certified.

About PMGDISHA

- **Launched:** In 2017 for **digital literacy in rural India**.
- **Implementing agency:** CSC e-Governance Services India Limited.
- **Targeted beneficiaries:** One person (age group of 14-60 years) from every eligible rural household.
- **Coverage:** Applicable **only for rural areas** with a Gram Panchayat centric approach.
- **20-hour training** covering **digital devices, internet use, and cashless transactions** in **22 scheduled languages and English**.
- **Third-party assessment** by recognized agencies, with **certificates uploaded to trainees' Digi-Locker accounts**.



Aquilaria Malaccensis (agarwood)

CITES eases export of agarwood from India, move to benefit lakhs of farmers.

About Agarwood:

- **Aquilaria Malaccensis (agarwood)** is an evergreen tree native to Northeast India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and parts of Southeast Asia, and is considered a precious aromatic plant in the region.
- **Economic Utility:** aromatic plant's oil and chips both are highly valued in the market.

Protection:

- **IUCN Status:** Critically Endangered
- **CITES:** Appendix II
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule IV



Charles Darwin's frog (Minervarya charlesdarwini)

New study reveals unique upside-down spawning behaviour.

About Minervarya Charlesdarwini Frog

- It is endemic to **Andaman Island**.
- **Features**
 - ⊖ **Intricate Calls:** to attract females
 - ⊖ **Upside down spawning:** defensive adaptation to protect the eggs.
- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- **Threats:** Habitat Loss



Oropouche Virus

Brazil recently reported the world's first death due to Oropouche virus.

About Oropouche Virus disease

- It is caused by **Oropouche virus (OROV)**, a segmented single-stranded RNA virus.
- Found to circulate in **Central and South America and the Caribbean**.
- **Transmitted to humans** primarily through the **Culicoides paraensis midge** (found in forested areas and around water bodies), or **Culex quinquefasciatus mosquitoes**.
- **Symptoms:** similar to dengue (fever, headache, joint stiffness, pain, nausea etc.)
- To date, there is **no evidence of human-to-human OROV transmission**.
- There is **no specific antiviral treatment or vaccine** for Oropouche virus disease.



MyGov

Recently, MyGov platform completed 10 years since its launch in July 2014.

About MyGov Platform

- It is a **citizen-centric platform that empowers people to connect with the Government & contribute towards good governance**.
- It is a part of **Digital India Corporation, a Section 8 Company (not-for-profit)** under the Union **Ministry of Electronics and IT**.
- **Functions:** To engage with citizens for policy formulation and seeks the opinion of people on issues/ topics of public interest and welfare.
- It adopted **multiple engagement methodologies**. E.g. communication via **social media, polls, surveys, competitions for crowdsourcing ideas like Logo design for schemes, etc.**

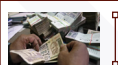


Gaganyaan Mission

Union Government informed the Parliament that one of the four astronauts undergoing training for Gaganyaan mission will travel to International Space Station as part of a collaborative effort with NASA.

About Gaganyaan Mission

- Envisages **demonstration of human spaceflight capability** by launching **crew of 3 members to an orbit of 400 km for a 3 days mission** and bring them back safely to earth.
- **Launch vehicle: Human rated LVM3 (HLVM3)**
 - ⊖ HLVM3 is a **re-configured version of LVM3** (consists of **solid stage, liquid stage, and cryogenic stage**) to meet human rating requirement.
- Successful launch of Gaganyaan will make **India only the 4th country** (after the US, Russia, and China) that have launched crewed spacecraft.



Inter Creditor Agreement

Default by Government-owned Rashtriya Ispat Nigam (RINL) forced lenders to seek cover through an Inter Creditor Agreement (ICA).

About ICA

- It describes **terms and allocation of collateral between common lenders** in the event of a default by borrower.
- It **establishes borrower's rights and positions concerning collateral, payment, and payment priority**, as well as the hierarchy between various creditors.
- According to **Reserve Bank of India (Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets) Directions 2019**, any decision agreed by lenders representing **75% by value of total outstanding credit facilities and 60% of lenders by number** shall be **binding on all lenders**.

Places in News



Golan Heights

Rockets struck in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

About Golan Heights

- Israel seized **Golan Heights from Syria during Six-Day War (1967)** and annexed it in 1981 (it's not recognised internationally).

Key Geographical Features

- It's a rocky plateau in **south-western Syria**.
- Golan is bounded by **Jordan River and Sea of Galilee (west); Mount Hermon (north), seasonal Wadi Al-Ruqqād (east), and Yarmūk River (south)**.
- It's a **key source of water** for an arid region.
- The **land is fertile; volcanic soil is used to cultivate vineyards**.



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI