

NEWS TODAY

NITI Aayog Launches 'Vocal For Local' Initiative Fostering Grassroots Entrepreneurship and Self-reliance

Key Highlights of Initiative

- ⊕ **Launched under:** Aspirational Blocks Programme (ABP)
- ⊕ **Aim:** Encouraging a **spirit of self-reliance** among people of **Aspirational Blocks**, propelling them **towards sustainable growth and prosperity**.
 - ◆ It will bolster **local economies** and also **drive inclusive growth**.
- ⊕ **Implementation:** Government e-marketplace (GeM) and Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) platforms will provide support to entrepreneurs for **e-commerce onboarding, establishing linkages, enhancing financial and digital literacy**, etc.
- ⊕ **'Aakanksha' window on GeM portal:** Created for **showcasing indigenous local products from 500 ABP**.

About ABP

- ⊕ **Genesis:** Launched in 2023 by NITI Aayog, **ABP** is built on the success of the **Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)**.
- ⊕ **Focus:** **Improving governance** to enhance the quality of life of citizens in the **most difficult and relatively underdeveloped blocks of India**.
- ⊕ **Coverage:** **500 blocks** from 27 states and 4 UTs
- ⊕ **Progress monitoring:** Across **40 socio-economic indicators under 5 themes**:
 - ◆ Health and Nutrition,
 - ◆ Education,
 - ◆ Agriculture and Allied Services,
 - ◆ Basic Infrastructure,
 - ◆ Social Development.
- ⊕ **Programme strategy:**
 - ◆ **Convergence** (of Central and state Schemes)
 - ◆ **Collaboration** (between NITI Aayog, Central Ministries, State Departments, District and block Administration)
 - ◆ **Competition** among blocks driven by a spirit of mass Movement

About ADP

- ADP was **launched in 2018** and **initially covered 112 most under-developed districts across the country**.
- With States as the main drivers, this program **focuses on the strength of each district, identifying low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement and measuring progress by ranking districts every month**.

High level Committee (HLC) led by former President Ramnath Kovind submits its report on One Nation, One Election (ONOE)

- Committee was given mandate to explore the mechanism for **ONOE** or **Simultaneous Elections (SE)**.

Key Recommendations:

- ⊕ **Two-step approach for SE:**
 - ◆ **First in Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies (SLA)** and then **synchronise Municipalities and Panchayats elections (M&PE)** with the Lok Sabha and SLA.
 - » Needs amendment in Article 324A for enabling the same (does not necessitate states ratification)
 - » M&PE are to be held within 100 days of the holding of elections of Lok Sabha and SLA.
- ⊕ **Dealing with hung House/adoption of no confidence motion/defection:**
 - ◆ **In case of Lok Sabha-fresh elections** to be held whose tenure will be only for the **unexpired term of the immediately preceding full term** of the Lok Sabha.
 - ◆ **In case of States-** fresh elections are held for SLA and unless sooner dissolved, shall **continue upto the end of the full term of Lok Sabha**.
 - ◆ Requires amendment in **Article 83** (Duration of Houses of Parliament) and **Article 172** (Duration of State Legislatures) (will not need states ratification)
- ⊕ **Single electoral roll and electoral identity cards:** Article 325 to be amended (will require states ratification).

About ONOE

- Means **holding elections to the House of the People, all the State Legislative Assemblies, and local bodies i.e., Municipalities and Panchayats, together**.
 - ⊕ It will enhance focus on governance and prevent policy paralysis, reduce financial burden on the government exchequer, etc.
- SE was the norm until 1967 but after that cycle was broken.
- Earlier **Law Commission** has also recommended the idea of SE in its report.

Human Development Report 2023/2024 titled “Breaking the gridlock Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world” released

- Report is released by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**.
- **Key Finding:**
 - ⊕ **Human Development Index (HDI):** 2023 HDI stands at a new high following steep decline during 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - ⊕ **Inequality in recovery:** Wealthy countries are showing signs of robust recovery, while the poorest are struggling.
 - ⊕ **Mismanaged Interdependencies:** Failure to properly manage **interdependencies (between countries)** has increased costs for **human well-being**.
 - ◆ **Due to mismanaged interdependencies** issues like conflicts, persecution or human rights violations are rising.
 - ⊕ **Rise in trend of Democracy paradox:** It refers to unwavering support for democracy but increasing support for leaders who may undermine it.
- **Key Recommendations:**
 - ⊕ Discouraging **political polarization** through **new governance approaches** focused on enhancing people's voices in **deliberation** and **tackling misinformation**.
 - ⊕ Promoting **digital global public goods**, for greater equity in harnessing new technologies for equitable human development.
 - ◆ **Public goods** are those that **are available to all** (“nonexcludable”) and that can be enjoyed over and over again by anyone **without diminishing the benefits they deliver to others** (“nonrival”).
 - ⊕ **New financial mechanisms**, along with international cooperation that complements **humanitarian assistance** and **traditional development aid to low-income countries**

HDI Performance

- In 2022, India has been ranked at **134 out of 193** countries. Its HDI value has increased to 0.644.
 - ⊕ India performed well in all Indicator of HDI namely **life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income (GNI) per capita**.
 - ⊕ It is placed in a **medium human development category**.
- **Switzerland** is placed on 1st spot, followed by Norway and Iceland.

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry attends the ministerial meeting of Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)

- **Key highlights**
 - ⊕ **Announced New effort under the Clean Economy pillar:**
 - ◆ **Four new Cooperative Work Programs** focusing on **carbon markets**, clean **electricity**, employment shifts in the move to clean energy, and **sustainable aviation fuels**.
 - ◆ **Details on the IPEF Catalytic Capital Fund:** Established in collaboration with Private Investment Development Group for climate infrastructure projects in IPEF economies.
 - ⊕ **Published detail text of key agreements**

Agreements	Highlight of the text
Agreement on IPEF	Establishes two ministerial-level bodies that will meet annually: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ IPEF Council: To consider matters affecting the collective operation of the IPEF agreements and Framework including accession of new members; and ➤ Joint Commission: To monitor the work under Pillars II-IV
Clean Economy Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Defines the scope of the agreement ➤ Calls for partnership with its Indigenous people to enhance efforts to transition to clean economies. ➤ Recognizes important role of nuclear energy and civil nuclear cooperation in ensuring energy security.
Fair Economy Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Defines scope of the agreement ➤ Clarifies that this Agreement shall not affect the rights or obligations of a Party under any other agreement including UNCAC (United Nations Convention against Corruption) and UNTOC (United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime). ➤ Calls for International Cooperation for identification, freezing, and confiscation of proceeds of crime derived from offences established as per the UNCAC.

About IPEF

- Launched in 2022 under the **leadership of US**.
- Seeks to strengthen **economic engagement** among partner countries to **advance growth, peace and prosperity** in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **structured around four pillars:** Trade (Pillar I), Supply Chains (Pillar II), Clean Economy (Pillar III), Fair Economy (Pillar IV)
- India has joined **Pillars II to IV** of IPEF while it has an **observer status** in Pillar-I.

Ministry of I&B blocks 18 OTT platforms and associated social media accounts for publishing vulgar content

- Decision was taken as content of OTT platforms was in **prima facie in violation** of:
 - ⊖ **Information Technology Act, 2000:**
 - ◆ **Section 67:** Punishes transmission of **obscene materials** in electronic form
 - ◆ **67A:** Punishment for publishing or transmitting material containing **sexually explicit acts, etc.** in electronic form
 - ⊖ **Section 292 of the IPC:** Prohibits the **circulation, distribution of obscene materials**
 - ⊖ **Section 4 of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986.**
- In a related development, concerning a new web series, the Delhi High Court (HC) also said that **profanity cannot receive constitutional protection of free speech**
 - ⊖ HC asked for **stricter application of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.**
 - ◆ Under the rules, significant social media intermediaries are required to **deploy technology-based measures on a best-effort basis to identify certain types of content.**
- **Need for regulating content** on OTT and social media platforms as highlighted by (HC):
 - ⊖ The sheer enormous **power of electronic media** and its **reach to people of all ages including children** of tender age.
 - ⊖ Vulgar content does not **mirror social realities** as it does not represent values of all strata of society.
 - ⊖ The use of **profanity** is also a **moral issue.**

SIDBI's Avaana Sustainability Fund (ASF) approved by Green Climate Fund (GCF)

- ASF is first anchored fund of the **Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI).**
 - ⊖ ASF is a **venture Capital fund**
 - ⊖ **Aim:** To invest in early-stage climate technology companies
 - ⊖ **Project Value:** \$120 million
 - ⊖ **ASF's strategies include:**
 - ◆ Investing in low-carbon and climate-resilient businesses,
 - ◆ Adding value for **climate and sustainability leaders** etc.
- **About GCF**
 - ⊖ It is the **world's largest** dedicated climate fund.
 - ⊖ **Established** under the **Cancún Agreements** in **2010.**
 - ⊖ **Mandate** is to foster a paradigm shift towards low emission, climate-resilient development pathways in developing countries.
 - ⊖ **Operating entity of the financial mechanism** of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
 - ◆ It is accountable to the **United Nations.**
 - ◆ Secretariat is located in Incheon- South Korea.
 - ⊖ **Key features**
 - ◆ **Country-driven approach** i.e., developing countries lead GCF programming and implementation.
 - ◆ **Balanced allocation** i.e., GCF is mandated to **invest 50% of its resources to mitigation** and **50% to adaptation in grant equivalent.**
 - ◆ Provide **financial support through flexible combination of grant, concessional debt, guarantees or equity instrument.**

Other important Funds for Climate Finance:

- **Global Environment Facility (GEF):** It was established in **1992** Rio Earth Summit.
 - ⊖ The **GEF Trust Fund** was established to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- **Adaptation Fund:** Established in **2001**, aims to finance concrete adaptation projects and programmes in developing country Parties to the **Kyoto Protocol**
- **Climate Investment Funds (CIFs):** Established in **2008**, a multilateral climate fund

Also in News



Loan agreement between India and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for Fintech

- India and the ADB signed a \$23 million loan agreement for **Promoting Research and Innovation through Development of Fintech Institute at GIFT-City Project.**
 - ⊖ GIFT-City in Gujarat is **India's International Financial Services Centre.**
- **Highlights of project**
 - ⊖ It will establish an **International Fintech Institute (IFI)** in partnership with globally reputed institutes and universities.
 - ◆ It will strengthen **fintech education, boost start-up** success rates, and drive fintech research and innovation.
 - ⊖ Emphasis on **market-driven fintech skills programmes.**
 - ⊖ Create the enabling environment for **private sector investment.**



Agnipath scheme

- The Passing Out Parade of the third batch of **Agniveers** who are **recruited under Agnipath scheme** for serving in the **Armed forces** was held recently.
- **About scheme**
 - ⊖ **Background:** Launched in 2022.
 - ⊖ **Ministry:** Ministry of Defence
 - ⊖ **Aim:** To bring paradigm changes in the Human Resource Management of the Indian Army.
 - ⊖ **Agniveers:** 17.5-year-old to 21-year-old youth selected to serve in the Armed Forces **for 4 years.**
 - ⊖ **Selection for regular cadre:** The best among Agniveers, up to **25% in each batch**, will be selected to **serve for another 15 years.**
 - ⊖ **'Seva Nidhi' package:** To be paid to Agniveers on completion of the engagement period of four years.



Lyme disease

- A case of Lyme disease was reported in **Ernakulam district (Kerala)**
- **About Disease**
 - ⊕ **Pathogen:** Bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*, and *Borrelia mayonii*
 - ⊕ **Infects humans by:** Bite of deer ticks (or black-legged ticks).
 - ⊕ **Symptoms:** Fever, headache, multiple areas of rash (called erythema migrans), heart block, numbness or recurring episodes of arthritis.
 - ⊕ **Treatment:** Doxycycline or amoxicillin antibiotics
 - ⊕ **Regions affected:** Mainly USA, Europe and some parts of Asia.



Gulf of Tonkin

- China has delineated the **baseline in the Gulf of Tonkin**, known in Chinese as **Beibu Gulf**.
 - ⊕ Baselines, under UNCLOS 1982, are used to **determine limits to territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones.**
- Gulf of Tonkin is located **off the coast of Northern Vietnam and Southern China.**
 - ⊕ Until now both countries have maintained **friendlier relations in this Gulf despite their overlapping claims in South China Sea.**
 - ⊕ The **Red River** (which flows across China and Vietnam) empties into this gulf.



DIANA Initiative

- **DIANA (Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic)** Initiative board approved a proposal to establish an accelerator and two test centers in Finland.
- **About DIANA initiative**
 - ⊕ Established by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to find and accelerate **dual-use innovation capacity** across the Alliance.
 - ⊕ It provides companies with the resources, networks and guidance to develop deep technologies.
 - ⊕ It aims to **solve critical defence and security challenges**, from operating in denied environments to tackling threats to our collective resilience.
 - ⊕ **All NATO nations are members of DIANA.**



Geoheritage sites (GHS)

- Geological Survey of India (GSI) emphasises **preserving GHS at Pandavula Gutta** in Jayashankar Bhupalpally District (Telangana).
 - ⊕ **Older than the Himalayan hills**, Pandavula Gutta features **prehistoric rock paintings** in **Green, red, yellow and white pigments.**
 - ⊕ Paintings have **swastika symbols, circles and squares, and animals like Bison, Antelope, Tiger, Leopard**
- GHS, sites of **rare geological and geomorphologic significance**, are declared by GSI.
 - ⊕ **India** is a party to the **UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.**
- Across the world, the **parties to this convention protect GHS** through relevant legislation.



PB-SHABD Initiative

- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting launched **PB-SHABD (Prasar Bharti - Shared Audio Visuals for Broadcast and Dissemination) Initiative.**
- **About PB-SHABD**
 - ⊕ A news service launched by **Prasar Bharati to support the daily news needs of the Indian media industry.**
 - ⊕ It will be **Offering its services of cost for the first year** as an introductory offer and will provide news stories in **all major Indian languages** across fifty categories.
 - ⊕ SHABD leverages on the expansive reporter network of Akashvani and Doordarshan to produce its news.
- **Prasar Bharati** is India's public broadcaster, which has **Doordarshan and Akashvani** operating under its aegis.



Darien Gap

- Darien Gap has emerged as one of the world's most dangerous and fastest-growing border crossings for illegal immigration.
 - ⊕ This route is taken when people migrate from **South America to North America.**
- **About Darien Gap**
 - ⊕ Connects **northern Colombia and southern Panama.**
 - ⊕ Part of the **Isthmus of Panama.**
 - ◆ **Isthmus** is a narrow piece of land, with water on each side, that joins two larger pieces of land.
 - ⊕ It is a hot, humid area marked by tropical rainforests, mangrove swamps, and low mountain ranges with **cloud forest vegetation** (tropical mountainous regions).

Places in News



Belarus (Capital: Minsk)

- Foreign Minister of Belarus paid official visit to India.
- **Political features**
 - ⊕ Landlocked country of **Eastern Europe.**
 - ⊕ **Bordering countries:** Lithuania and Latvia (northwest), Russia (north and east), Ukraine (south), and Poland (west).
- **Geographical features**
 - ⊕ Much of the country consists of flat lowlands separated by low level-topped hills and uplands.
 - ◆ Topography was largely shaped by glaciation during the Pleistocene Epoch.
 - ⊕ **Major Rivers:** Pripet, Dnieper, , and Neman
 - ⊕ **Highest Point:** Dzyarzhynskaya Hill

