

# NEWS TODAY

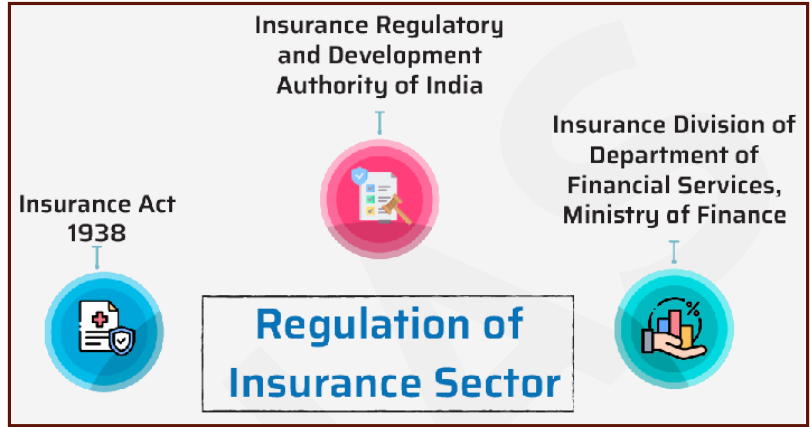
## Standing Committee on Finance released report on "Performance Review and Regulation of Insurance Sector"

### ► Status of India's Insurance Sector

- ⊕ **Insurance Penetration** (percentage of insurance premium to GDP) at **4.2% in 2021-22 (Global average: 7%)** compared to 2.71% in 2001-02.
- ⊕ **Insurance Density** (ratio of premium to population) at **\$91 in 2021-22 (Global average: \$874)** compared to \$11.5 in 2001-02.
- ⊕ India ranked **tenth in global insurance business** with market share of 1.85% in 2021.

### ► Recommendations by Committee

- ⊕ **Composite licensing:** Allow **composite licensing**, enabling an insurance company to offer both life and non-life insurance products.
  - ◆ **Benefits:** Reduce costs and compliance hassles for insurers and offer customers more choice and value.
- ⊕ **GST: Rationalize GST rate** on insurance products, especially health and term insurance, which is **18%** at present.
  - ◆ **Need:** High premium burden acting as deterrent to getting insurance policies.
- ⊕ **Open Architecture:** Introduce '**open architecture**' concept for **insurance agents**, which enables agents to associate with multiple insurance companies.
  - ◆ **Benefits:** Higher insurance penetration, financial inclusion and lower distribution costs.
- ⊕ **Unclaimed policies:** A **central portal like UDGM** (RBI portal for claiming unclaimed deposits) be created.
- ⊕ **Capital requirement:** RBI, on behalf of Government of India, can issue '**on-tap**' bonds of up to 50 years (current maximum tenure – 40 years) for investment by insurance companies.



## India to fence entire 1,643-kilometre stretch of border with Myanmar: Home Minister

► The primary aim is to **enhance surveillance capabilities** and establish a **patrol track** along the border for effective monitoring.

- ⊕ The announcement aligns with the government's dedication to **fortify national borders**.

### ► Need for border fencing

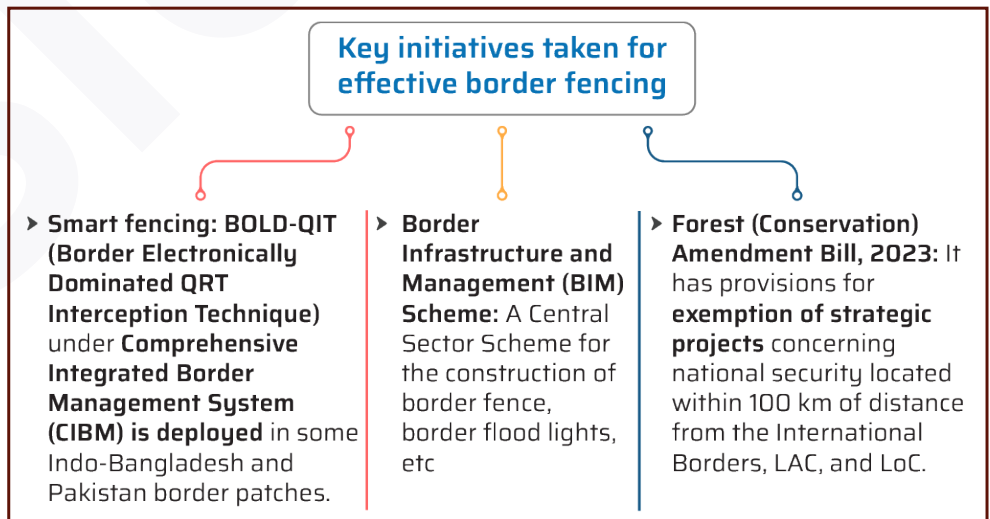
- ⊕ **Absence of natural barriers:** Except for the Himalayas, India's borders are man-made which enhances their vulnerabilities.
- ⊕ **Diplomatic issues**
  - ◆ **India's border with Nepal and Bhutan are open** (i.e., people can move across the borders without any visa restrictions).
  - ◆ **Free Movement Regime (FMR)** between India and Myanmar allows **people living on either side of the border to travel up to 16 km inside each other's country** without a visa.

⊕ **Porous borders** also persist across Pakistan and Bangladesh borders,

⊕ **Tackling cross-border threats** such as cross border terrorism, illegal migration, smuggling and trafficking.

### ► Issues in border fencing

- ⊕ **Delays in the acquisition of land** as land is a state subject. Also, locals fear loss of portions of their land.
- ⊕ **Rugged terrain** (such as marshy land, riverine borders, high mountains) and **extreme climatic conditions** (like in Siachen Glacier).
- ⊕ Some of India's borders with its neighbours are **disputed** and therefore are **not demarcated**.
- ⊕ **High cost** of construction and maintenance.



## Action taken by the Centre on 'Judicial Processes and their Reforms' report

- The report was submitted by the **Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, and Law and Justice** in August 2023.
- **Recommendations accepted by the Government**
  - ⊕ **Establishment of regional benches of Supreme Court (SC)** at four or five locations.
    - ◆ **Article 130** of Constitution provides that the SC will sit in Delhi or in such other places as the CJI may, with the approval of President appoint.
  - ⊕ **SC** Should issue **directions to all High Courts (HCs)** to **publish their annual reports** as courts are also public institutions.
    - ◆ At present, **only SC and some of the HCs** are publishing their annual reports.

### ➤ Other recommendations for reform in SC and HCs

Recommendations	Reasoning
Increase retirement age for judges	➤ It needs to be increased to <b>keep pace with advances in medical sciences</b> and increased longevity. Currently, it is <b>65</b> for SC judges and <b>62</b> for HC judges.
Law for <b>mandatory declaration of assets</b> by the judges	➤ As a general practice, <b>all constitutional functionaries and government servants must file annual returns</b> of their assets and liabilities.
<b>Memorandum of Procedure (MoP)</b> may factor aspect of social diversity	➤ To enhance the <b>representation of women, minorities, etc.</b> in the higher judiciary.
<b>Staggered vacation</b> by individual judges at different times of the year	➤ <b>Vacations</b> in judiciary is a 'colonial legacy'. ➤ <b>Staggered vacation</b> will facilitate <b>reducing pendency of cases and mitigate the inconvenience</b> faced by the litigants.

## Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS) registered around 1.1 million financial cyber fraud cases in 2023

- CFCFRMS has been setup under the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)** for **immediate reporting** of financial frauds and to stop siphoning off funds by the fraudsters.
  - ⊕ I4C has been established by **Ministry of Home Affairs** to provide an ecosystem for Law Enforcement Agencies for dealing with Cybercrime and **act as a nodal point**.
- **Financial Cyber Frauds** are intentional and illegal act of deception to deprive someone of their money using the digital means.
  - ⊕ These involve debit/credit card frauds, internet banking and UPI related frauds, and ransomware attacks etc.
- **Reasons for rise in cyber financial frauds:**
  - ⊕ Increase in **adoption of digital payments** combined with lack of financial literacy.
  - ⊕ **Mushrooming of fraudulent apps** with ability to capture financial data.
  - ⊕ Using **Dark Patterns** (interfaces to trick users into desired behaviour such as availing instant loans) for luring vulnerable consumers.
  - ⊕ **Low regulatory compliance level** by the banking sectors
- **Way forward**
  - ⊕ Bringing **all financial institutions** on CFCFRMS
  - ⊕ **Whitelisting** of digital lending apps
  - ⊕ Setting up of **Digital India Trust Agency (DIGITA)**
  - ⊕ Bringing new legislation – **Banning of Unregulated Lending Activities (BULA) Act**
  - ⊕ Building new **safeguards for digital financial transactions**

### India's Initiatives to curb financial cyber frauds

- ⊕ **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** and Toll-free Helpline Number '1930'
- ⊕ **CSIRT-Fin** (Computer Security Incident Response Team-Finance Sector) under CERT-IN
- ⊕ **Advisories and regulations by RBI** for cyber security in banking sector
- ⊕ **Restrictions on cloning of phone SIM cards**

## Standing Committee on Labour, Textiles and Skill Development presented report on 'Development of Cotton Sector'

- Cotton is an **important commercial crop** with India being **first in the world in area under cotton cultivation**.
  - ⊕ India is **second largest producer and second largest consumer** of cotton.
  - ⊕ Majorly, cotton is produced in **11 states** with Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana having major share.
- **Committee observed that cotton sector faces following challenges:**
  - ⊕ **Fluctuating production growth** due to cultivation in rainfed conditions (67%).
  - ⊕ **India's extremely low per hectare cotton yield** (447 Kgs/hectare compared to China's 1993 Kgs/hectare) due to outdated Bt seed technology, whitefly and pink bollworm infestation.
  - ⊕ **Deterioration in soil health** due to absence of crop rotation and proper crop residue management.
  - ⊕ Higher area expansion in **less efficient districts**.
- **Committee recommended that Government should:**
  - ⊕ Come up with an **umbrella policy approach for cotton sector** linking the activities in all spheres.
  - ⊕ Overhaul the **cropping system, strengthen market linkages, enhance R&D** to develop new cotton varieties, and improve **pest management practices**.
  - ⊕ Bring **more area of cotton cultivation under irrigation and increasing its productivity**.
  - ⊕ **Address the problems faced by farmers in procuring the genetically modified seeds** by measures like cap on prices, seed development by government entities etc.

### Initiatives in cotton sector

- ⊕ **PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks Scheme**
- ⊕ **Cotton development programme** under National Food Security Mission (NFSM)
- ⊕ Mobile app **Cott-Ally** to increase awareness about Minimum Support Price for Cotton
- ⊕ Branding of Indian Cotton as "**Kasturi Cotton India**"
- ⊕ Project "**Targeting technologies to agro-ecological zones**-large scale demonstrations of best practices to **enhance cotton productivity**" under NFSM

## Centre revises Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) guidelines for utilisation of fund

### About PMKKKY scheme

- ⊕ **Background:** Launched in 2015 by Centre under Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) or MMDR Act, 1957.
- ⊕ **Ministry:** Ministry of Mines
- ⊕ **Purpose:** To ensure certain **minimum provisions for development programme** by all **District Mineral Foundations (DMFs)**.
  - ◆ DMF is a **non-profit trust** under **MMDR Act** set up by the State Governments in **all mining-affected districts**.
  - ◆ **Mining companies** are required to **contribute 10% and 30% of the royalty** (depending on the date of mining lease granted) to DMFs, in addition to the royalty paid to state governments.
- ⊕ **Key objectives:** Implement various **welfare programs** in mining-affected areas, **minimize adverse impacts** of mining, etc.
- ⊕ **Beneficiaries:**
  - ◆ **Directly affected people** which incorporates
    - » **'Affected family'** as well as **'Displaced family'** as defined under **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013**.
    - » Any other as appropriately **identified by the concerned gram sabha**
  - ◆ **Directly or indirectly affected areas.**
- ⊕ **Utilisation of Funds:** **As per the recent revised guideline** 70% of the fund should go for high priority and 30% for other priority sectors (earlier this ratio was 60% and 40%).
- ⊕ **Other features**
  - ◆ Special provisions for **scheduled areas**
  - ◆ **Provides for yearly** audit of the accounts of the DMFs.

### Different sectors for utilisation of funds under PMKKKY

- ⊕ **High Priority Sectors** include drinking water supply, environment preservation and pollution control measures, health care, education, welfare of women and children, welfare of aged and differently abled, etc.
- ⊕ **Other Priority Sectors** include physical infrastructure, irrigation, energy and watershed development, and any other measures for enhancing environmental quality in the mining affected district.

## Also in News



### Dachigam National Park (DNP)

- Due to heavy snowfall, **Himalayan Black Bears** are provided a **special diet to aid them** during **hibernation period** at rehabilitation centre of DNP.
- **About DNP**
  - ⊕ Located in Jammu and Kashmir and spread in **Zabarwan mountain ranges of great Himalayas**.
  - ⊕ Occupies **almost half of catchment zone of world famous Dal Lake**.
  - ⊕ **Dagwan** is the major river in the park
  - ⊕ Holds the **last viable population of Hangul** or Kashmir stag (IUCN status: critically endangered) **in world**.
    - ◆ Poaching by **Gujjars, Bakarwals** is the main cause for Hangul decline.
  - ⊕ Also, inhabits **largest population of Asiatic black bear in Asia**.



### Payment aggregators

- **Juspay, Zoho, and Decentro** have received final authorisation from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for **Payment Aggregator (PA) licences**.
  - ⊕ PAs are entities that **facilitate e-commerce sites and merchants** to accept various payment instruments from the customers **without the need for merchants to create a separate payment integration system** of their own.
  - ⊕ In the process, they **receive payments** from customers, **pool and transfer them** on to the merchants.
- PAs are **different from Payment Gateways** as latter only provide technology infrastructure to facilitate payment transaction without any involvement in fund handling.



### Safe City Project

- **UN Women** will provide technical **assistance to Kerala** for the Safe City project and gender data hub.
  - ⊕ Established in 2010, **UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality** and empowerment of women.
- **Safe City Projects**
  - ⊕ It is an initiative of **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** under **Nirbhaya Funds Scheme**.
  - ⊕ It aims to create a **safe, secure and empowering environment for women in public places**.
  - ⊕ MHA has approved **Safe City** projects in **8 selected cities** - Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Lucknow.



### Kokborok

- Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE) has allowed both Roman and Bengali scripts for the **Kokborok** examination in Tripura.
- **About Kokborok language**
  - ⊕ It is mother tongue of **Borok people** who are geographically known as **Tripuris**.
    - ◆ Borok inhabits **Tripura** and other **North-Eastern States along with Uttarakhand**.
  - ⊕ Belonging to Tibeto-Burman family, It is the **lingua franca** (common language between speakers of different native languages) of **most of Tripura's tribal communities**.
  - ⊕ It is recognized as one of the **official state languages of Tripura**.





### PATRIOT Missile

- Russia blamed the use of **U.S.-supplied Patriot missiles** for downing the plane carrying Ukrainian prisoners of war.
- PATRIOT (Phased Array Tracking Radar for Intercept on Target), is a **theater-wide surface-to-air missile defense system**.
  - ⊕ It is considered one of the **most advanced air defense systems in the U.S. arsenal**.
    - ◆ It was also used in **1991 Gulf War** and during the **U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003**.
  - ⊕ It is usually equipped with **powerful radar, a control station, a power generator, a launch station, etc.**



### Hypervelocity Expansion Tunnel Test Facility (HETTF)

- IIT-Kanpur has successfully built and tested India's **first HETTF** (named as S2 as well as Jigarhanda).
  - ⊕ It puts **India amongst only a handful of countries** with this advanced hypersonic testing capability.
  - ⊕ This project was supported by **Fund for Improvement in S&T Infrastructure (FIST)** of Department of Science & Technology.
- It is capable of generating **flight speeds between 3-10 km/s, simulating the hypersonic conditions** encountered during atmospheric entry of vehicles, asteroid entry, scramjet flights, and ballistic missiles.
  - ⊕ This makes it a **valuable test facility** for ongoing missions of **ISRO and DRDO** including Gaganyaan, RLV, and hypersonic cruise missiles.



### Appointment of Lokpal

- Recently, the Prime Minister-led panel cleared names for chairperson of Lokpal.
  - ⊕ **Lokpal and Lokayukt Act, 2013** provide for establishment of **Lokpal for Union** and **Lokayukta for States** to inquire into allegations of **corruption against certain public functionaries**.
  - ⊕ Jurisdiction of Lokpal includes **Prime Minister, Ministers, members of Parliament, Groups A, B, C and D officers and officials of Central Government**.
- **Other members in selection committee** of Lokpal (for chairperson and members) include:
  - ⊕ **Speaker of Lok Sabha**
  - ⊕ **Leader of Opposition** in Lok Sabha
  - ⊕ **CJI or a Judge of the Supreme Court** nominated by him.
  - ⊕ **Eminent jurist** (nominated by the President)
- Such **appointment remains valid despite a vacancy in Selection Committee**.



### Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC)

- Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution launched a pilot to on-board the **Fair Price Shops (FPSs)** on the **Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC)**.
  - ⊕ FPSs have been **licensed to distribute essential commodities** to the ration card holders under the **Targeted Public Distribution System**.
- ONDC is an open network that enables location-aware, **local digital commerce stores** across industries **to be discovered** and engaged by any network-enabled applications.
  - ⊕ It enables large-scale **democratization of digital commerce** in India by providing a level playing field for large and small digital commerce platforms.



## Places in News



### Iran (Capital: Tehran)

- Iran announced **15-day visa-free policy for Indian tourists**.
- **Political features:**
  - ⊕ **Location:** Iran is a country in the **Middle East or West Asia**.
  - ⊕ **Bordering nations:** Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Iraq.
  - ⊕ **Bordering water bodies:** Caspian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf.
- **Geographical features:**
  - ⊕ **Major mountain ranges:** Zagros, Elburz,
  - ⊕ **Highest Point:** Mount Damavand (it is a dormant volcano and also the highest volcano in the Middle East)
  - ⊕ **Major deserts:** Dasht-e-Kavir and Dasht-e-Lut

