

NEWS TODAY

India and Uzbekistan signed Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)

The signing of the BIT between both nations will promote **economic cooperation** and create a more **robust** and **resilient investment environment**.

- It will increase the comfort level and boost the confidence of investors.

About BIT

- BIT is a **reciprocal agreement** for according protection to **investments** by nationals and companies of **one State** in **another State**.
- India approved new **Model BIT text in 2015**, which replaced Indian Model BIT, 1993.
 - ⊕ Since then, Model text 2015 is used for (re)negotiations of BITs and investment chapters of FTAs/ Economic Partnership Agreements.

Key Features of Model BIT

- ⊕ **National Treatment:** Similar treatment as domestic investors.
- ⊕ **Protection from expropriation:** Limiting each country's ability to take over foreign investments in its territory.
- ⊕ **Settlement of Disputes:** Exhaust local remedies before commencing international arbitration.
- ⊕ **Other:** Enterprise based definition of investment, etc.

India - Uzbekistan Relations

Uzbekistan is India's key Partner in the Central Asian Region. Different dimensions of engagement includes:

- **Economic relations:** India is among Uzbekistan's top 10 trade partners (2023-24).
- **Security and Defense cooperation:** Joint military exercises "DUSTLIK".
- **Multilateral engagement:** Both countries cooperate in various international forums like the UN, G20, BRICS, and SCO.
- **Energy Security:** Signed contract with Uzbekistan for supplying uranium ore concentrates.
- **People-to-people ties:** There's an estimated Indian community of 14,000 in Uzbekistan.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Environmental Sustainability

Recently, experts have highlighted the use of AI in tackling environmental challenges.

- AI is a set of technologies that enable computers to perform a variety of advanced functions, including the ability to understand and translate spoken and written language, analyze data, etc.

How can AI be used to tackle environmental challenges?

- **Prediction:** AI can detect patterns in data, such as anomalies and similarities, and use historic knowledge to predict future outcomes.
- **Monitoring:** Tracking and mapping air pollution, deforestation, plastics in the ocean, icebergs etc.
 - ⊕ For instance, AI has been trained to **measure changes in icebergs 10,000 times faster** than a human could do it.
 - ⊕ UNEP utilizes AI for air pollution tracking via **Global Environment Monitoring System Air Pollution Monitoring platform**.
- **Facilitating Decarbonisation:** AI is helping companies to track, trace and reduce their emissions by 20-30%.

Negative impacts of AI on environment

- **High Power Consumption:** ChatGPT, an AI-based virtual assistant, consumes 10 times the electricity of a Google Search (International Energy Agency).
- **E- waste:** Data centers hosting AI produce e-waste which often contains **hazardous substances**, like mercury and lead.
- **Over utilisation of resources:** Consume large amounts of **water**, and **rely on rare minerals** which are mostly mined in unsustainable manner.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recommendations for effective utilisation of AI

- **Countries can**
 - ⊕ establish **standardized procedures for measuring the environmental impact of AI**;
 - ⊕ **encourage companies to green their data centres** by using renewable energy
- Governments can **develop regulations** that require **companies to disclose the direct environmental consequences of AI-based products and services**.
- Tech companies can **make AI algorithms more efficient, reducing their demand for energy**, while **recycling water and reusing components** where feasible.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) completes three years

ABDM was launched in 2021 by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.

- ABDM is aligned with the objective of the **National Health Policy (2017)**.
- It also leverages **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** to enable **interoperability** in digital health transactions.

About ABDM

- **Vision:** To create a **national digital health ecosystem** that supports universal health coverage in an efficient, accessible, inclusive, affordable, timely and safe manner.
 - ⊕ It will help in **bridging existing gaps** in the **Healthcare ecosystem** through digital highways.

➤ **Implementing Agency:** National Health Authority

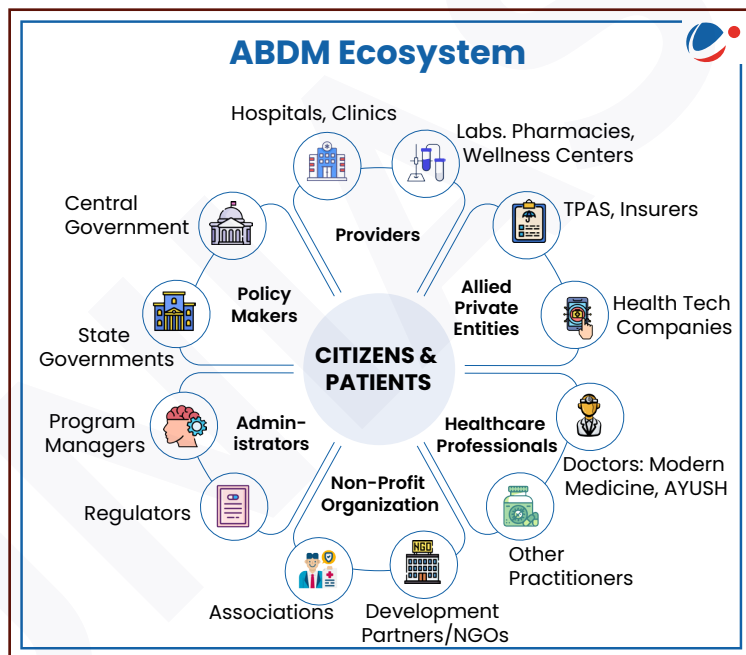
➤ **Time Period:** 2021-22 to 2025-26.

➤ Key Features:

- ⊕ **Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) ID:** A unique health identifier for citizens to **store and manage health records**.
 - ◆ **Status:** Over **67 crore ABHA** created
- ⊕ **Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR):** A repository of all health professionals.
 - ◆ **Status:** Over **4.7 lakh Doctors and Nurses** registered.
- ⊕ **Health Facility Registries (HFR):** For **public and private health facilities**.
 - ◆ **Status:** Over **3.3 lakh Health Facilities** registered under **National Healthcare Providers Registry (NHPR)**

Key Initiatives taken under ABDM

- **Digital Health Incentive Scheme (DHIS)**, financial incentives to bolster adoption of digital health practices.
- **Microsites Initiative** for Private sector adoption
- **Others:** Scan and Share (A QR-code based OPD registration service), etc.



World leaders adopt declaration to tackle growing threat of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

Global leaders have approved a **political declaration** at the 79th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) **High-Level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**.

- AMR occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites **no longer respond to medicines**, leading to infections becoming difficult or impossible to treat, increasing the risk of disease spread.

AMR Declaration

- It aims to **reduce the estimated 4.95 million human deaths** associated with bacterial AMR annually by **10% by 2030**.
- It calls for **sustainable national financing and US\$100 million in catalytic funding**, to help achieve a **target of at least 60% of countries having funded** national action plans on AMR by 2030.
 - ⊕ This goal is to be reached through diversifying funding sources and securing more contributors to **Antimicrobial Resistance Multi-Partner Trust Fund**.
- At least **70% of antibiotics** used for human health globally should belong to the **WHO Access group antibiotics** with relatively minimal side effects and lower potential to cause AMR.
 - ⊕ **Access group** is one of the groups under **WHO AWaRe classification** along with Watch and Reserve Groups.
- Meaningful **reduction** of quantity of **antimicrobial used in agri-food system** globally by 2030.
- Declaration formalizes the standing **Quadripartite** (FAO, WHO, WOA, UNEP) **Joint Secretariat on AMR** as the **central coordinating mechanism to support the global response to AMR**

Initiatives to tackle AMR

- **Adopting One Health Approach:** Integrated approach aiming at sustainably balancing and optimising health of people, animals and ecosystems.
- **WHO Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), 2020:** Inclusion of environmental aspects of manufacturing linked to waste management etc.
- **National action plan** on containment of AMR (**NAP-AMR, 2017 and NAP-AMR 2.0 in 2022**).
- **India launched the Red Line campaign** to raise awareness about the irrational use of antibiotics.

A Working Paper titled 'Agroforestry: Missing Trees for the Forest' published by EAC-PM

Economic Advisory Council to the PM (EAC-PM) highlights the untapped potential of agroforestry in India.

- **Agroforestry** is a collective name for **land-use systems and technologies** where **woody perennials** (trees, shrubs, palms, bamboo, etc.) are deliberately used on the **same land management units** as crops and/or animals.
- Only **17% of total agricultural land** is under agroforestry (defined as tree cover per cent greater than 10% of total agricultural land) which is **lower than global average** of 43%.

Significance

- **Transforming Farmers' livelihood:** Increasing farmers' income with **high-value trees like Teak**.
- **Primary source of Timber and other resources:** Agroforestry provides about 65% of small timber, 70-80% of wood for furniture and construction, about 60% of raw material for paper and pulp etc.
- **Improving Soil Organic Carbon (SOC) content:** Improving crop yields, carbon sequestration and water use efficiency.

Challenges

- **Conservation-First Policy Approach** has discouraged or prohibited tree felling, leading to declining timber production.
 - ⊕ E.g. **National Forest Policy of 1988** and **Godavarman Case (1996)** restricted tree felling leading to a **four-fold increase in imports (1996-2022)** (FAO).
- Complex procedure to obtain **felling and transit permits** discourages agroforestry adoption.
- Underutilization of **National Transit Pass System (NTPS)** for transportation of timber, bamboo, and other forest products.
- **Import dependency:** India imported **\$2.7 billion worth timber (ITTO, 2023)**.

Recommendations

- **Deregulation of high-value native timber species** like Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Gurjan and Meranti.
- **Prioritize ownership of trees** over ownership of land to reduce burden of proving land ownership with the help of technology. E.g. **TiGram (Timber Traceability Tool)**.
- **Centralized system for transit and felling permits** through a single window system.

India reaffirms commitment to Social Determinants of Health

India reiterated its commitment to enhance **Social Determinants of Health** during the G20 Joint Finance-Health Task Force High-Level Meeting held at the 79th session of UN General Assembly.

Social Determinants of Health (SDH)

- SDH are **non-medical factors** that influence health outcomes.
 - ⊕ They are the **conditions** in which people are **born, grow, work, live, and age**, and the wider set of forces and **systems shaping the conditions** of daily life.
 - ⊕ These forces and systems include **economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems**.
- **Examples of SDH:** Education, income and social protection, unemployment and job insecurity, working conditions, food insecurity, housing, early childhood development, social inclusion, etc.
- **WHO Commission on SDH** aims to achieve **three guiding targets** by 2040:
 - ⊕ **Halving life expectancy gap** between countries and social groups,
 - ⊕ **Halving adult mortality rates** in all countries, and
 - ⊕ **Achieve 90-95% reductions in child and maternal mortality**.

Role of SDH in Health outcomes

- Numerous studies suggest that SDH accounts for between **30-55% of health outcomes**.
- **Influences health inequities** - unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries.
- In countries at all levels of income, **health and illness follow a social gradient:** the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health.

India's approach for SDH

- The **whole-of-government** and **One Health** approach.
- India is emphasizing on exploring **potential of debt-for-health swaps**, a mechanism that could ease financial strain while investing in health equity.
- India called for G20 member nations to adopt a **unified approach toward data collection and analysis** to enhance health systems globally.
- **India's flagship programmes** like Ayushman Bharat, Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission, and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana etc.

Also in News



Lokayukta

Karnataka Lokayukta filed a FIR against the Karnataka Chief Minister over land allotment irregularities.

About Lokayukta

- Lokayukta is an **anti-corruption ombudsman organization** at **State-level** in India. (**Lokpal** at the Center).
- It is established under the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013** through enactment of a **law by the State legislature**.
- The **structure** of Lokayukta is not uniform across all the states.
- **Appointment:** By **Governor** (generally in **consultation** with the **Chief Justice of the State High Court**, and **Leader of Opposition** in the State Legislative Assembly).



Committee of Ten (C-10) Group

Indian External Affairs Minister participated in the **first-ever** Joint Ministerial Meeting of the **C-10** and **L.69 groupings**.

- L69 is a grouping that includes countries from Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, Pacific Island states and Asia.
- India is also member.

C-10 Group

- **Genesis:** Committee of Ten African Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors (C-10) was created in 2008.
- **Members:** Algeria, Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, the Central Bank of West African States (CBWAS), and the Central Bank of Central African States (CBCAS).
- **Mandate:** Advocating enhanced African participation in governance of international financial institutions (IFIs), etc.

India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Forum

IBSA Foreign Ministers declared a United Front against Global Terrorism.

About declaration:

- Called for stringent actions against groups listed by the UN, including notorious organizations such as Al-Qaeda, etc.
- Renewed commitment to accelerate the adoption of the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**.

About IBSA

- IBSA Trilateral Forum comprises India, Brazil and South Africa.
 - ⊕ **The Brasilia declaration** in 2003 formalised and named the IBSA Dialogue Forum.
- **Objectives:** To contribute to the construction of a **new international architecture** and bring their voice together on global issues.

Ethanol

Union Minister Food and Public Distribution highlighted that India has become the **World's third largest Producer and Consumer of Ethanol**.

- **US** is the **largest producer** followed by **Brazil**.

About Ethanol (C₂H₅OH):

- It is a **colourless** liquid with a characteristic **odour** formed primarily with **fermentation of sugars**.
 - ⊕ Also known as **Ethyl Alcohol**.
- **Renewable fuel** made from corn and other plant materials.
 - ⊕ It is used as a **fuel** either alone or in combination with other fuels, as **solvents**, for **alcoholic beverages etc**.
 - ⊕ It has **environmental** and long-term **economic advantages** over **fossil fuel**.

India's Initiative

- ⊕ Under the **Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme**, the target is to blend **20% ethanol with petrol by ESY 2025-26**.
- ⊕ **PM Ji-VAN Yojana** promotes creation of **2G Ethanol** (non-food sources) capacity.



GST Compensation Cess

Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has set up a **Group of Ministers (GoM)** to decide on the taxation of luxury, sin and demerit goods once the **compensation cess ends in March 2026**.

GST Compensation Cess

- GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017 was enacted to levy Compensation Cess for providing compensation to the States for the **loss of revenue arising on account of implementation of the GST**.
- Compensation cess at varied rates is levied on **luxury, sin and demerit goods** over and above the 28% tax.
 - ⊕ **Demerit goods** are products or services that are considered harmful to consumers and society like alcohol, gambling etc.

Thermobaric Weapons

Recently, reports suggest use of a **thermobaric weapon (ODAB-1500 bomb)** by **Russia in Ukraine**.

About Thermobaric Weapon:

- Releases a **fuel cloud on striking**, which, when **ignited**, causes a **high-temperature explosion**.
 - ⊕ Uses **atmospheric oxygen to ignite the fuel** as opposed to use of an oxidiser in conventional explosives.
- Creates a **vacuum effect** after the high pressure blast as the **oxygen is consumed**.
- Also known by names- **vacuum bombs, enhanced blast weapons**, etc.
- **High Destruction Capacity:** Can destroy structures, damage human body by rupturing organs with the **dual impact of extreme heat and pressure**.

Augmented Reality

Meta unveils Orion, a prototype of **Augmented Reality (AR) Glasses**.

About Augmented Reality (AR):

- AR refers to the **real-time integration of digital information into a user's environment**.
- AR devices are equipped with cameras, sensors and displays. They capture the physical world and then **integrate digital content**.
- In AR, images generated from a computer are projected onto real-life objects or surroundings.
 - ⊕ In **Virtual Reality (VR)**, a simulated environment is created and the physical world is completely shut out.

Place in News



Trinidad & Tobago (Capital: Port of Spain)

Trinidad & Tobago has become the first country in the Caribbean region to adopt India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) platform.

Political Features:

- Island country of the southeastern **West Indies** in the **Atlantic Ocean**.
- It lies close to the continent of South America, **northeast of Venezuela** and **northwest of Guyana**

Geographical Features

- **Mountain ranges: Northern Range**, a continuation of the coastal ranges of the Andes Mountains in Venezuela.
- **Resource: Pitch Lake** in Trinidad is the world's largest natural reservoir of asphalt
- **Highest Point:** Mount Aripo
- **Major rivers:** Ortoire and Caroni

