

# NEWS TODAY

## Growing number of US States restricting or banning diversity programmes on University Campuses

- Previously, under “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (DEI) programs, many American universities had given special consideration to minority students for bridging inequalities.
- However, in June 2023, the Supreme Court of the US put an end to affirmative action in university admissions.
  - **Affirmative actions** are positive steps taken to increase representation of certain historically oppressed group(s) in the society in areas of education, employment, etc.



### Comparison of Affirmative Action in India and the US

	India	USA
<b>Constitutional Origin</b>	Constitution explicitly provides for affirmative action.	Equal Protection Clause of 14th Amendment has been interpreted to permit affirmative action.
<b>Provisions</b>	Articles 15 (4), 16 (4), etc., enables the state to provide for reservation.	Began through an executive order in 1961. Later, Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted to give it a legal backing.
<b>Purpose</b>	To remedy historical discrimination against groups such as ex-untouchables.	To fight discrimination against minority groups and women.
<b>Targeted Groups</b>	Socially and Educationally Backward Classes and Economically Weaker Sections.	African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, etc.
<b>System</b>	Based on the Quota System.	Based on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs
<b>Upper ceiling for reservation</b>	Upper ceiling of 50% set by the SC in Indra Sawhney judgment.	No upper legal limit.

## Appeal against CAT Order in Contempt Proceedings Lies before the Supreme Court (SC)

- Allahabad High Court held that **appeal against an order of Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)** while exercising **contempt jurisdiction** under Administrative Tribunals (AT) Act 1985 lies before SC only, not the High Courts (HCs).
- Appeals against the orders of the Tribunals**
  - In **T. Sudhakar Prasad v. Government of A.P. (2001)**, a Constitution bench of the SC held that the contempt jurisdiction is exclusively exercisable by the Tribunal.
    - ◆ It was also held that even though the HCs exercised appellate jurisdiction under Article 226/ 227 of the Constitution of India for orders issued by CAT, the orders under Section 17 (Contempt) of the AT Act were appealable before SC only.
  - Previously, in **L Chandra Kumar vs. UoI (1997)** the SC restored appellate jurisdiction of the HCs against the orders of the Tribunals.
- About CAT**
  - Established under **Article 323 A, which was introduced through 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment (1976)**.
  - **Jurisdiction:** Adjudication of disputes and complaints with respect to recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or other authorities under control of the Government.



### Tribunal System in India

- Tribunals are **quasi-judicial bodies**.
- Objective:** To reduce caseload of the judiciary and bring in subject expertise for technical matters.
- Constitutional Recognition:** Article 323A (Administrative Tribunals) and Article 323B (Tribunal for other matters).
- Article 323A empowers only Parliament** to establish Administrative Tribunals, whereas **under Article 323B appropriate legislatures can establish tribunals**.

## Arunachal Pradesh (AP) was, is and will always be a part of India: External Affairs Minister

➤ The response came after China renamed 30 places in AP which it calls 'South Tibet'.

### ➤ India-China Border Disputes

⊕ **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** is the dividing line between the two nations.

- ◆ However, border between India and China is **not formally demarcated and there is no mutually agreed LAC.**
- ◆ **India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, while China considers it to be only around 2,000 km.**

### ➤ LAC is divided into three sectors:

⊕ **Western Sector (Ladakh):** India considers the **Johnson Line** (of 1865) as the border whereas **China** claims the **McDonald Line** (of 1899) as the true border.

⊕ **Middle sector (Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand):** Largely undisputed area.

⊕ **Eastern Sector (Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim):** **China** claims the state of **AP** as part of the **Tibetan Autonomous Region.**

- ◆ LAC in this region is along the **McMahon line** drawn during the **Simla Convention of 1914 (between British India, China, and Tibet).**

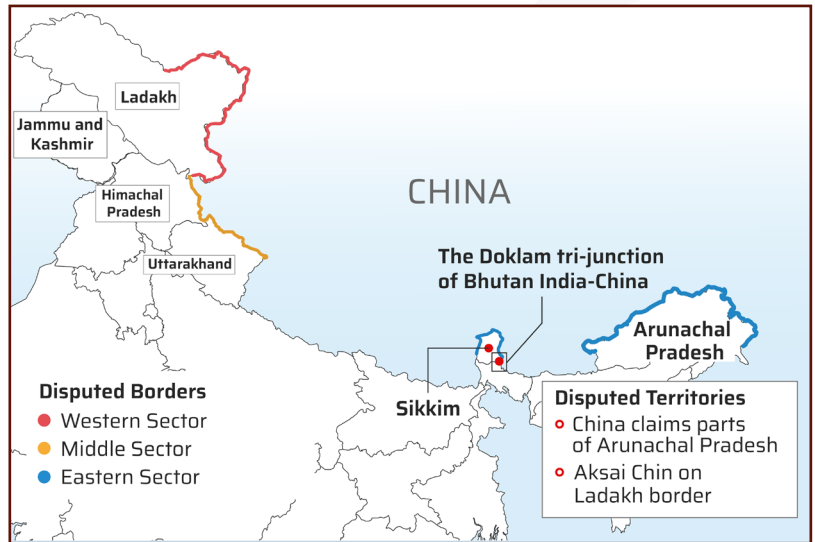
- » In 1949 when Communists took power in China, they **pulled out of various international agreements** claiming them to be unequal.

### ➤ Key dispute resolution Initiatives include

⊕ **1993 Agreement** on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the LAC.

⊕ **1996 Agreement** on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field Along the LAC

⊕ **2013 Border Defense Cooperation Agreement.**



## India's Coal and Lignite Production hits all-time high of over 1 Billion Tonnes for FY 2023-24

➤ Union Minister of Coal has informed that **coal and lignite production has grown by more than 70% over last 10 years** owing to favourable government support.

➤ **Significance of the achievement:** Energy security, saving on India's Forex reserves, achieving target to replace import of coal for power generation by 2025-26, etc.

### ➤ Current Status of Coal Sector in India

⊕ India has **5<sup>th</sup> largest geological reserves** of coal and is **2<sup>nd</sup> largest consumer** of coal across the world.

⊕ **Production:** Coal India Limited (CIL) is the largest producer (>70%) of coal in India.

⊕ **Import:** India imported 217.75 million tonnes coal in FY 2023-24 (till Jan 2024), **dominated by non-coking coal** (~77% of total imports).

### ➤ Challenges of coal sector in India

⊕ **Un-seasonal and extended rainfall** in the coal bearing areas.

⊕ **Non-payment of outstanding dues** by Power sector consumers.

⊕ Frequent **labour/ Industrial relations issues** in the coal fields.

⊕ **Land acquisition and environmental challenges.**

⊕ **Lower coal quality** with presence of high ash and sulphur content.

⊕ **Technological obsolescence** in mining techniques resulting in lower productivity, higher costs, and safety hazards.

### Key reforms undertaken in the Coal sector

➤ **Coal Mines Special Provisions Act, 2015:** To ensure transparent auction process.

➤ **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2021.** Allowed composite Prospecting Licence-cum-Mining Lease (PL-cum-ML).

➤ **Ending captive mining regime:** Facilitated commercial mining and sale of excess production.

➤ **Single Window Clearances:** To streamline and speed-up operationalization of coal mines.

## Total Asset Monetization Program of Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) crossed Rs.1 Lakh Crore

- MoRTH monetises its assets under three different modes:
  - ⊕ **Toll-operate-transfer (TOT):** Right of collection of fees for selected operational National Highway projects constructed through public funding is assigned to a concessionaire against upfront payment of a lump-sum amount to NHAI.
    - ◆ Operation and Maintenance obligation of projects is also with the concessionaire.
  - ⊕ **Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT):** InvITs are investment scheme like mutual funds that allow investment from individuals and institutional investors in infrastructure projects
  - ⊕ **Securitisation:** In this, certain types of assets are pooled so that they can be repackaged into interest-bearing securities.
- **Asset Monetisation (AM)**
  - ⊕ **Background:** The idea of AM for India was first suggested by a committee led by economist Vijay Kelkar in 2012.
  - ⊕ **Definition:** AM is the process of creating new sources of revenue for the government by unlocking the economic value of unutilised or underutilised public assets by transferring them for a limited period to a private sector entity.
    - ◆ It is also known as 'asset or capital recycling'.
    - ◆ Unlike privatisation, in AM the ownership remains with the government/ public authority.
  - ⊕ **Objectives**
    - ◆ Unlocks value from public investment in Infrastructure.
    - ◆ Taps private sector efficiencies in operations and management of infrastructure.
  - ⊕ **Initiative: National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP)** for the period FY 2022-2025.

## Amid Gaza war, the first batch of Indian construction workers leave for Israel

- The mobility of Indian workers to Israel is being facilitated by the NSDC International as part of a G2G (government-to-government) agreement.
  - ⊕ NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation) International is a not-for-profit public limited company in which the Government of India holds a 49% stake.
- Sending construction workers to war torn zone raises ethical concerns particularly when India has earlier issued advisories to Indians in Israel to move to "safe zones".
- **Ethical Issues associated with such arrangement**
  - ⊕ **Life vs Living:** Generally, recruits are from the Extremely Backward sections who are moving to Israel and putting their life at stake due to much higher wages paid by Israel (as compared to wages in India).
  - ⊕ **Exploitation of workers:** Many social activists claim that workers from outside of Israel are often mistreated.
  - ⊕ **Moral Dilemma:** Workers may suffer psychological trauma from witnessing violence and suffering and also face a dilemma of whether to intervene or report them.

### Measures Undertaken for the Safety of Indian Workers in Israel

- **Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Temporary Employment of Workers in Specific Labour Market Sectors in Israel** was initiated for the recruitment of construction workers and caregivers from India.
- **As per the agreement:**
  - ⊕ Indian workers shall enjoy equal treatment concerning labour rights as Israeli citizens.
  - ⊕ They shall be provided with proper lodging, medical insurance, and relevant social security coverage as well as wages and benefits as set out in law.

## Also in News



### BIMSTEC Charter

- Lower House of Nepal's Federal Parliament endorsed the Charter of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).
- **BIMSTEC Charter**
  - ⊕ It is a foundational document that outlines the goals, principles, and structure of BIMSTEC group.
  - ⊕ Signed and adopted in March 2022 during 5<sup>th</sup> BIMSTEC Summit.
  - ⊕ Charter has provision that it will come into force only after its endorsement by all member countries. (Except Nepal, respective parliaments of other members endorsed the charter).
- BIMSTEC was formed in 1997 to enhance regional cooperation on issues like economic prosperity, social progress etc.
- **Members:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.



### Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)

- India and EEU bloc officials held talks to formally start negotiation for Free Trade Agreement (FTA).
- **About EEU**
  - ⊕ It is an ambitious project for economic integration in the former Soviet region.
  - ⊕ **Objectives:** To create a common market much like the European Union (EU).
  - ⊕ Established by the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union signed in 2014 in Astana (now Nur-Sultan).
  - ⊕ **5 Members Countries:** Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia.
- Within EEU, Russia is India's top trading partner with a bilateral trade worth USD 49.4 billion (FY2023).





### Havana Syndrome

- Joint media investigation linked mysterious Havana Syndrome symptoms experienced by US diplomats in recent years to a Russian intelligence unit.
- **Havana Syndrome**
  - ⊕ Refers to set of **mental health symptoms** that are said to be experienced by the US intelligence and embassy officials in various countries.
  - ⊕ Symptoms involve **hearing certain sounds without any outside noise, nausea, vertigo and headaches, memory loss, and balance issues.**
  - ⊕ First detected in **2016 in Havana (Cuba).**



### Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS)

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has made it mandatory to **link CGHS beneficiary ID with the Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) ID** from April 1.
  - ⊕ The move is aimed at creating **digital health identification of CGHS beneficiaries** and storing their digital health records.
  - ⊕ **ABHA is a 14-digit Unique Health Identifier** number under Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).
- **CGHS:**
  - ⊕ **Nodal Ministry:** MoHFW
  - ⊕ It was started in **1954** to provide **comprehensive medical care to the Central Government employees and pensioners** enrolled under the scheme.



### Shallowfake

- A **shallowfake video** of the **US Vice President** has gone viral.
- Shallowfake refers to **altered media** (pictures, videos and voice clips, etc) **created with conventional and affordable technologies without the help of AI technology.**
  - ⊕ Contrary to this, **Deepfakes** are synthesized **images, videos, and other media created by the Artificial Intelligence (AI).**
- **Shallowfake** is also called as **cheapfake.**



### Katchatheevu Islet

- Debate surrounding **Katchatheevu islet** has resurfaced which has been a **flashpoint in India-Sri Lanka fishing issue.**
- **Katchatheevu islet** lies to the **northeast of Rameswaram (India)** and **southwest of Jaffna (Sri Lanka)**
- **Maritime Boundary Agreement of June 1974** on historic waters between India and Sri Lanka placed **Katchatheevu on the Sri Lankan side.**
  - ⊕ **1974 Maritime Boundary agreement** between India and Sri Lanka demarcated maritime boundary between India and Sri Lanka from **Palk Strait to Adam's Bridge.**



### Exercise 'Gagan Shakti'

- The **Indian Air Force** is conducting its biggest exercise '**Gagan Shakti**' at the Pokhran Field Firing Range in **Jaisalmer district.**
  - ⊕ In the exercise, all the major **fighter aircraft and modern helicopters** of the Air Force **will demonstrate their striking capabilities.**



### Paradip Port

- Paradip Port surpassed Kandla to emerge as the **highest cargo handling major port of the country in FY 2023-2024.**
- **About Paradip Port (in Odisha)**
  - ⊕ It was the **first major port on the East Coast** commissioned after independence.
  - ⊕ Located near **confluence of river Mahanadi and the Bay of Bengal.**
  - ⊕ Administered by a **Board of Trustees set up by the Government of India.**
  - ⊕ In 2020, the Union Cabinet approved '**Deepening and Optimization of Inner Harbour Facilities including Development of Western Dock**' to handle cape size vessels at Paradip Port'.
  - ⊕ Centre has announced to develop, **Paradip Port** along with Deendayal Port, and V.O. Chidambaranar (Tuticorin) Port as **Green Hydrogen hubs**

## Personality in News



### Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904 – 1986)

- Recently, a book titled '**Rukmini Devi Arundale: Arts Revivalist and Institution Builder**' has been published.
- **About Rukmini Devi**
  - ⊕ Born in **Madurai (Tamil Nadu)**
  - ⊕ She was an **Indian classical dancer** and active member of Theosophical movement.
- **Key contributions**
  - ⊕ Known for catalysing the **renaissance of Bharatnatyam.**
    - ◆ Earlier, Bharatanatyam was associated with temple dancers (**Devadasis**) and looked down upon by society.
  - ⊕ Founder of **Kalakshetra Foundation in Madras (Chennai)** to impart the young true spirit of Art.
  - ⊕ Played instrumental role in enactment of **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960** by the Parliament.
- **Achievements**
  - ⊕ She was the **first women nominated to Rajya Sabha in 1952.**
  - ⊕ Awarded **Padma Bhushan in 1956**, and the **Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship in 1967.**
- **Values:** Compassion, Non-violence, Rationalism, etc.

