

# NEWS TODAY

## World Drought Atlas 2024 report jointly published by UNCCD and European Commission Joint Research Centre

It was released during UNCCD's COP16 in Riyadh to raise global ambition and accelerate action on land and drought resilience through a people-centred approach.

- Droughts have **increased by 29% since year 2000** due to climate change and unsustainable management of land and water resources.

### About Drought

- Defined as **prolonged periods of unusually low water availability**, leading to an imbalance in water availability, quality and demand.
- **Examples of Recent droughts:** Great Plains of US, Barcelona in Spain, etc.
- **Reasons:** Exceptionally low rainfall; Unsustainable water extraction; Strong El-Nino, etc.

### Impact of Drought

- **Water supply:** Severe droughts can result in shortages of water supplies, with widespread social and economic consequences.
- **Agriculture:** Crop failures and reduced yields, leading to food shortages and economic losses.
- **Hydropower:** Decreased water levels in dams and reservoirs **reduce electricity generation can disrupt industrial activities.**
- **Navigation:** Low river levels **hinder inland waterway transport**, affecting trade and logistics.
- **Ecosystems:** Loss of biodiversity as aquatic and terrestrial species faces habitat destruction.

Reactive, Proactive and Prospective Drought Risk Management and Adaptation		
Reactive Reactive drought management	Proactive Drought Risk management and adaptation	Prospective Systemic risk management and adaptation
<b>MEASURES INCLUDE:</b> Emergency food and drinking water assistance  Subsidies for restoring crops and livestock  Relief funds	<b>MEASURES INCLUDE:</b> Early warning systems  De-stocking of livestock and adjusting cropping patterns  Introducing seasonal micro-credit and crop assurance schemes	<b>MEASURES INCLUDE:</b> Climate smart agricultural systems  Disaster resistant Water supply systems  Land-use planning to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality
<b>MANAGING IMPACTS</b>	<b>REDUCING RISKS</b>	<b>AVOIDING FUTURE RISKS</b>

### Measures taken for Drought management

- **Global:** Integrated Drought Management Programme; UNCCD's Drought Resilience, Adaptation and Management Policy (DRAMP) Framework; Global Drought Information System etc.
- **India:** National Policy on Disaster Management; National Agricultural Drought Assessment and Monitoring System etc.

## World Bank Released Annual International Debt Report (IDR) 2024

The IDR features external debt statistics and analysis for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) that report to the World Bank's Debtor Reporting System (DRS).

### Key highlights

- **Rising External Debt:** Total external debt of LMICs rose by 2.4% in 2023, reaching \$8.8 trillion.
- **Factors Driving Indebtedness**
  - ⊕ **High Interest Rates:** Tight monetary policies in high-income countries pushed interest rates to a 20-year high.
    - ◆ **Bangladesh and India** experienced over **90% increases in interest payments in 2023.**
  - ⊕ **Other Factors:** Inflation, depreciating currencies, and global economic uncertainty due to armed conflicts and trade fragmentation.
- **Impact of rising debt:** Budget strain impacted critical sectors like health, education, and environmental programs.

### Way Ahead

To promote sustainable and inclusive debt solutions, the UN Trade and Development earlier proposed the following measures:







- **Global Financial Reforms:** Comprehensive reforms to prevent a widespread debt crisis and create an inclusive financial system.
- **Mitigating Predatory Lending:** Increase **concessional financing** and **reduce information asymmetry** (between lender and borrowers) and discourage exploitative lending practices.
- **Crisis Resilience:** Implement climate-resilient debt clauses and standstill rules to pause repayments during crises.
- **Improved Restructuring Mechanisms:** Establish **automatic restructuring rules** and a **Global Debt Authority** to guide and coordinate sovereign debt management.

## Clemency Powers of President of India and USA

U.S. President Joe Biden granted an unconditional pardon to his son facing sentencing for federal tax violation and gun convictions.

- The 'royal prerogative of mercy' is a historic prerogative of British monarch, originally used to withdraw or provide alternatives to death sentences.

### Comparison between Clemency Powers of President of India and USA

Attributes	Indian President	USA President
 Source of Power	Article 72 of Constitution	Article II, Section 2 of constitution
 Scope	Power extends to not only <b>Federal/Union but also state crimes.</b>	Power extends to <b>Federal Crimes only</b> and not state crimes.
 Death Penalty	President can <b>pardon death sentences including those by states.</b>	President can pardon only <b>federal death sentences</b> and not for state crimes.
 Role of Executive Branch	<b>Supreme Court in Maru Ram v. Union of India</b> held that <b>President acts on advice of Council of Ministers</b> and cannot act on his own discretion.	<b>President can act on his own discretion.</b>
 Judicial Review	<b>Scope of Limited judicial review</b> , courts can examine the process but generally not the decision itself.	Courts can <b>review pardons</b> in cases of suspected corruption or abuse of power.
 Limitations	President <b>cannot pardon someone impeached by Parliament.</b>	President <b>cannot pardon someone impeached and convicted by Congress.</b>

## Ministry of Tourism (MoT) approves 40 Projects for Development of Lesser-known Tourism sites in 23 States

By focusing on lesser-known destinations (Rang Ghar in Sivasagar (Assam), Matsyagandha Lake in Saharsa (Bihar), etc.), MoT aims to **ease pressure on high-traffic sites and promote balanced distribution of tourists** across country.

- These projects are approved under **Special Assistance to States/Union Territories for Capital Investment (SASCI) Scheme** of Department of Expenditure.
  - ⊕ SASCI scheme aims to **infuse long term interest free loans for a period of 50 years** to States for development of iconic tourist centers in country.
  - ⊕ States have been given a **timeline of 2 years** for completing projects.

### About Over-Tourism

- It occurs when a **destination receives more tourists than it can sustainably accommodate.**
- **Causes:** Enhanced connectivity and cheap travel; Rising income and emerging middle class; Affordable accommodation due to improved hospitality sector etc.

### Impact due to Over-Tourism

- **Wear and Tear:** Heavy foot traffic erodes intricate carvings on natural and cultural sites. E.g. Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia.
- **Community Resentment:** Drive up the cost of living, making it difficult to find affordable housing and displacing residents. E.g. Tourism protests in Barcelona.
- **Environmental impact:** Pollution, littering on sites, traffic jams, improper garbage disposal, water scarcity and degradation of ecology.

### Initiatives taken for Sustainable Tourism

- **COP29 Declaration on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism:** To promote and champion sustainable tourism practices and reduce GHG emissions in tourism sector.
- **Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism, 2002:** To minimise negative economic, environmental, and social impacts.
- **National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, 2022:** To position India a global destination for responsible tourism and increase economic, social and environmental benefits to build resilient tourism sector.

## The Boilers Bill, 2024 Passed in the Rajya Sabha

The Bill replaces **Boilers Act, 1923** and incorporates the de-criminalised provisions in consonance with the **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023**.

- The Bill will ensure the **safety of life and property of persons from the dangers of explosions of steam boilers**.

### Key provisions of the Bill

- **Regulation:** Centre will constitute **Central Boilers Board** to regulate the design, manufacture, erection and use of boiler and boiler components.
- **Inspection:** Inspections can be carried out by **State-appointed Inspectors or authorized third parties**.
- **Ease of Doing Business (EoDB):** Of the 7 offences in the erstwhile Act **only 4 serious offences involving loss of life or property have been retained for criminal penalties**.
  - ⊖ For all non-criminal offences 'fine' has been converted into 'penalty' to be levied through executive mechanism instead of courts as existed earlier.

### Issues associated with Bill

- **Safety Concerns:** The state government can exempt areas from the Bill, raising doubts about ensuring safety in exempted zones.
- **Limited Judicial Recourse:** Decisions of the central government and state-appointed inspectors **cannot be challenged in regular courts**. Aggrieved individuals must file writ petitions in High Courts under Article 226 of the Constitution.
- **Hindrance to EoDB:** No timelines are set for inspections, or approvals for boiler alterations, repairs, or erection.

### About Boilers

- A boiler refers to a vessel in which steam is generated under pressure.
- As of 2024, the country has about 40 lakh steam boilers.
- Boilers **fall under the concurrent list of the Constitution**.

## First Quarterly 'Trade Watch' report by NITI Aayog highlights Trade Challenges for India

### Key Challenges faced by India

- **Limited success in capturing 'China-Plus-One' benefits:** Countries like **Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia** have gained more from the China+1 strategy.
  - ⊖ **Cheaper labor, simplified tax laws and lower tariffs** and proactive signing of **Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** are the key reasons for success of these countries.
- **CBAM Impact:** Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) will impose **carbon taxes on imports like cement, steel, and fertilizers starting in 2026**.
  - ⊖ **India's iron and steel industry**, making up **23.5% of EU exports**, faces significant risks.
- **Declining Trade Share:** India's share in global trade for labor-intensive sectors has dropped despite a strong workforce.
- **West Asia Instability:** Oil price hikes (\$10 per barrel) could worsen India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) by 0.5% of GDP, increasing inflation.
  - ⊖ Declining agricultural exports to key markets like Iran (e.g., basmati rice, tea) add to trade challenges.

The report calls for **evidence-based policy-making** to address **structural inefficiencies, enhance value addition and promote entrepreneurship** to secure a leadership position for India in international Trade.

### About China-Plus-One

- It refers to practice of **international businesses active in China coupling their investments with a second facility**, generally in another Asian economy.
- It was driven by disruption due to **China's zero-COVID policy, growing tensions between the US and China, rising labour costs in China**, etc.

## Also in News



### Aravalli Green Wall Project

India showcased its Aravalli Green Wall project for restoring degraded forest lands at CoP-16.

#### About Aravalli Green Wall Project

- Launched by **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** to green **5 km buffer area around the Aravalli Hill Range** in Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Delhi.
- It is inspired by **Africa's Great Green Wall initiative**.

#### About Aravalli range in India

- One of the **oldest fold mountain systems** in the world. It has considerably worn down due to erosion.
- Aravali Hills lie on western and northwestern margins of Peninsular plateau.
- **Tallest Point:** Guru Shikhar (Rajasthan).



### National Legal Metrology Portal (eMaap)

Department of Consumer Affairs is developing eMaap to **integrate State Legal Metrology Departments and their portals into a unified National System**.

- Presently, State Governments are using their own portals for registration of packaged commodities, issue of licenses and verification/stamping of weighing & measuring instruments

#### About eMaap

- **Aim:** Streamline processes for issuing licenses, conducting verifications and managing enforcement and compliance.
- **Benefits:**
  - ⊖ **Foster ease of doing business and Transparency in trade practices** by minimizing compliance burdens, reducing paperwork under Legal Metrology Act, 2009.
  - ⊖ **Enables data-driven decision-making**, streamlines enforcement activities, and facilitates policy formation, ensuring a robust and efficient regulatory framework.



### Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)

ESIC has been awarded **one certificate for its mobile application -Ask An Appointment (AAA+)**.

- Also awarded **three certificates for Occupational Accident and Disease, Sustainable Investment and System Resilience** at Regional Social Security Forum for Asia and Pacific (RSSF Asia-Pacific).
- **RSSF Asia-Pacific organized by International Social Security Association (ISSA) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.**

#### About ESIC and AAA+

- ESIC set up under Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 under Ministry of Labour & Employment.
- AAA+ serves insured persons, beneficiaries, staff, and ESI pensioners and **streamline healthcare services.**

#### About ISSA

- Founded in 1927, under ILO.
- Principal international organisation for social security organisations, governments and departments of social security.



### Lake-Effect Snow

Lake-effect snow warnings remain in effect across the Great Lakes (in the US and Canada).

#### About Lake-Effect Snow

- Occurs when **cold air from Canada moves over the warmer, unfrozen Great Lakes.**
  - ⊕ As the **cold air passes over the unfrozen and relatively warm waters of the Great Lakes, warmth and moisture are transferred into the lowest portion of the atmosphere.**
  - ⊕ The air rises, clouds form and grow into narrow band that produces **2 to 3 inches of snow per hour or more.**
- Common in **late fall and winter, with wind direction determining affected areas.**



### Unified Payments Interface (UPI) Lite

RBI has revised transaction limits to Rs 1,000 from Rs 500 earlier for UPI Lite to encourage use of UPI.

- RBI also raised the total limit for offline transactions on UPI Lite to Rs 5,000 from Rs 2,000.

#### About UPI Lite

- It is a **payment solution** that leverages trusted NPCI Common Library application to **process low value transactions** without utilizing a Remitter bank's core banking systems in real-time, while **providing adequate risk mitigation.**
- With the consent of its UPI registered customer, an issuing bank can create an escrow on the customer's account up to a set limit.



### GRIHA (Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment)

Inland Waterways Authority of India's **Intermodal Terminal at Kalughat in Bihar** has received **five-star SVAGRIHA rating** from GRIHA.

- Terminal is part of **World Bank funded Jal Marg Vikas Project** for capacity augmentation of **National Waterway 1 – River Ganga.**

#### About GRIHA

- **Ministry:** Joint venture of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
- **Role:** GRIHA is a **rating tool** that evaluates the **environmental performance of a building holistically over its entire life cycle**, thereby providing a definitive standard for what constitutes a **'green building'.**
- **SVAGRIHA:** SVAGRIHA (Simple Versatile Affordable GRIHA), is given to **small-scale stakeholders** (owners of projects such as bungalows and small offices).



### Brain Rot

The term "brain rot" has been named the Oxford Word of the Year 2024.

#### About Brain Rot

- It is the **result of overstimulation of human brain.**
- It refers to a **decline in mental health and cognitive abilities** due to excessive consumption of **low-quality online content**, particularly on social media.
- It has been associated with issues like **decreased attention span, reduced critical thinking, mental health issues** etc.



### Maha Kumbh Mela 2025

Maha Kumbh mela, the **world's largest spiritual gathering**, will be celebrated from January 13 to February 26, 2025 at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh.

#### About Maha Kumbh Mela

- Kumbh Mela, in Hinduism, is a religious pilgrimage that is **celebrated four times over 12 years.**
- **Key locations and rivers:**
  - ⊕ **Uttar Pradesh: Prayagraj** (confluence Ganges, Yamuna, and mythical Sarasvati)
  - ⊕ **Uttarakhand: Haridwar** (Ganga river)
  - ⊕ **Madhya Pradesh: Ujjain** (Shipra river)
  - ⊕ **Maharashtra: Nashik** (Godavaririver)
- **Key Rituals and Practices: Shahi Snan, Deep Daan, and Kalpavas** (emphasizing discipline and austerity).
- **Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2019** has been placed in the **Guinness World Record** for having the biggest sanitation and waste disposal mechanism among others.

महाकुंभ Mela 2025

### Places in News



### Kuwait (Capital: Kuwait City)

Foreign Minister of Kuwait has arrived in India.

#### Political Features:

- **Location:** A West Asian country situated in Arabian Peninsula at northwest corner of Persian Gulf.
- **Bordering Nations:** Iraq (north and west), Saudi Arabia (south and west)
- **Key organisation:** Member of the **Gulf Cooperation Council, Arab League, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation & OPEC.**
- **Persian Gulf War 1990:** It was fought by US-led coalition against Iraq in response to its invasion and annexation of Kuwait.

#### Geographical Features:

- **9 Islands:** Failaka Island, Bubiyan Island, Miskan Island etc.
- **Climate:** Hyper-arid desert climate (**Highly variable with recurrent extremes**).
- **Oil reserves:** It has **6-7% of the world's proven oil reserves.**



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI