

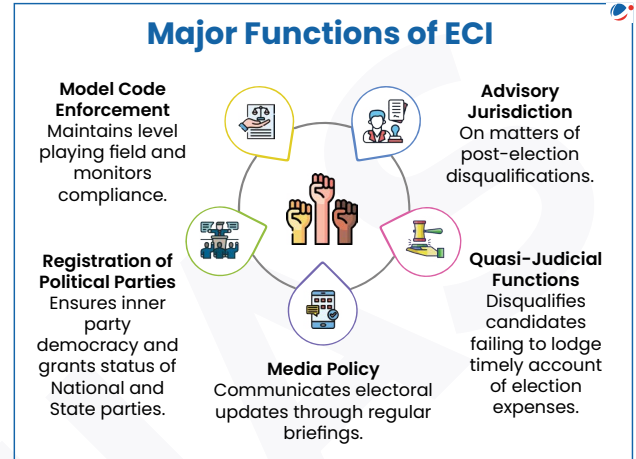
NEWS TODAY

Election Commission of India (ECI) celebrates 75th Years of its establishment

ECI was established on 25th January 1950, hence, the day is celebrated as the **National Voters' Day**.

About ECI

- **About:** It is a permanent Constitutional Body.
 - ⊕ **Article 324** has vested the power of superintendence, direction and control of elections to **Parliament, State Legislatures**, offices of **President** and **Vice-President** with the ECI.
- **Composition:** **1 Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) & such number of other Election Commissioners (ECs)**, as the **President** may fix.
 - ⊕ Currently, consists of **one CEC** and **two ECs**.
- **Appointment:** **President** appoints CEC and ECs.
- **Tenure:** **6 years** or **65 years of age** whichever is earlier.
- **Status, Salary, and Perks:** Same as the Judges of the **Supreme Court (SC)**.
- **Removal:** CEC can be removed in the manner and grounds same as the judge of the SC.



Key Achievements of ECI

- **Successful Elections:** It has a track record of conducting **18 Lok Sabha** and over **400 State Legislative Assembly Elections** successfully.
- **Elector Registration:** Achieved a milestone of **100 crore registered electors** celebrating Indian democracy.
- **Improved Gender Ratio:** The gender ratio of registered voters improved to **948 women per 1,000 men (2024)** from **928 (2019)**.
- **Check on criminalization of politics:** Introduction of **requirement to publish details of candidates with pending criminal cases**.
- **Various Initiatives:** Like **Systematic Voters' Education & Electoral Participation (SVEEP)** for voter education, **SAKSHAM app** to facilitate voting by Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

Department of Consumer Affairs notifies Draft Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2025

These landmark rules aim to **standardize and mandate use of Indian Standard Time (IST)** across all sectors in India.

About Draft Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2025

- **Mandatory time reference:** Would be IST across all sectors, including commerce, transport, public administration, legal contracts, and financial operations.
- **Prohibition:** No person/entity shall use, display, or record time other than IST for official/commercial purposes.
 - ⊕ Provided that any law/government direction/guidelines permits same.
- **Adoption of Time Synchronization Protocols:** Such as Network Time Protocol and Precision Time Protocol etc. by government offices is required.
- **Cybersecurity:** To ensure resilience, **cybersecurity measures and alternative reference mechanisms** are prescribed.
- **Authorized Deviations:** Use of alternative timescales (GMT, etc.) is permitted for specific purposes e.g. astronomy, navigation, scientific research, etc. subject to prior permission.

Significance of New Draft Rules

- **Strengthens national security** by improving the synchronization of critical infrastructure.
- Synchronization of digital devices and public services **ensures reliable and efficient services**.
- Will ensure **accurate financial transactions and consistency in record-keeping**.

About IST

- **Central meridian of country** (i.e. **82°30'E meridian** passing through Mirzapur) is taken as Standard Meridian or **IST (Maintained by CSIR-NPL)**.
- It is **5 hours 30 minutes** ahead of **Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)** (now Universal Coordinated Time (UTC)).
 - ⊕ Local time at Prime Meridian (0° longitude) is **known as GMT**.

Longitude and Time:

- Longitude of a place is **its angular distance east or west of Prime Meridian** which passes through **Greenwich, England**.
- Earth completes one full rotation (360°) on its axis in 24 hours, which means it rotates **15° per hour** or **1° in 4 minutes**.
- Countries often use a **Standard Meridian (a longitude divisible by 7° 30')** as a reference for their time zone.
 - ⊕ So that difference between its standard time zone and Greenwich Mean Time may be **expressed as multiples of an hour or half an hour**.

US President announced the suspension and review of all Foreign Aid igniting debate on its ethicality

The move aims to fulfil **America First agenda** and to promote the moral imperative on reviewing and realigning foreign assistance on behalf of taxpayers.

About Foreign Aid

➤ It refers to the **voluntary movement** of money or other resources from one nation to another, mostly from **developed countries to developing countries**.

Various Types of Foreign Aid

- **Bilateral Assistance:** To ensure welfare of poor countries.
- **Multilateral Assistance:** Towards multilateral Institutions like United Nations agencies, etc.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** For relief from natural and human-induced disasters.
- **Economic Assistance:** Through loans, grants, Official Development Assistance (ODA), etc.
- **Security Assistance:** For facilitating military contracts, etc.

Need for Richer Nations to Offer Aid

- **Obligations of Humanity and Morality:** To relieve human suffering or distress amidst rising inequalities, irrespective of state boundaries.
- **Ensuring Corrective Justice:** Developed countries have a moral obligation to transfer resources to developing countries to rectify past wrongs.
 - ⊕ Example, the **Concept of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities** in climate negotiations.
- **Ensuring Distributive Justice:** Promoting social cooperation at the level of global community.
 - ⊕ Example, **Globalisation and economic interdependence** requires sharing of benefits.

Key Ethical issues Involved in Foreign Aid

- **Motive for Aid:** Whether the aid is given for **humanitarian, out of a sense of global responsibility or self-interest**. E.g., Clinical trials in developing countries.
- **Effect of Aid:** Whether the aid is intended at **reducing poverty or promoting political interest**. E.g., China's Debt Trap Diplomacy.

Ways to Promote Ethicality of Foreign Aid

- **Clearly Outlining the Objective:** Ensuring the aid is intended towards **humanitarian obligations, achieving Sustainable Development Goals, Food Security, etc.**
- **Ensuring Transparency:** Donor to work with local agencies to ensure proper use of aid.

2025 marks 75th Anniversary of India – China Diplomatic Relations

The two countries seek to use the opportunity to **redouble public diplomacy efforts** and conduct a number of commemorative activities following the recent meeting between Foreign Secretaries.

Other Key announcements

- Resumption of the **Kailash Mansarovar Yatra** in the summer of 2025.
- Resumption of provision of **hydrological data** and other cooperation pertaining to **trans-border rivers**.
- Agreement to resume **direct air services** between the two countries.
- **Others:** People-to-people exchanges, media and think-tank interactions, etc.

Key areas of concern in India-China Relations

- **Unsettled Borders:** No mutual agreement over **Line of Actual Control (LAC)**, dispute over **Aksai Chin**, etc.
 - ⊕ Recent episodes of conflicts were witnessed in **Galwan Valley** (Ladakh, 2020), **Tawang** (Arunachal Pradesh, 2022), etc.
- **Unequal Trade:** India's trade deficit with China rose to **USD 85 billion (2023-24)** against **USD 83.2 billion (2022-23)**.
- **China-Pakistan Nexus:** China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), passes through Indian territory claimed by Pakistan.
- **China's Assertiveness:** Particularly in South Asia through strategies like **String of Pearls**, presence in Maldives, Sri Lanka, assertion over South China Sea, etc. create insecurities in Indo-Pacific.

Way forward on dealing with China

- **Addressing the Border issue:** Through agreements like the recent one on **Depsang and Demchok, along the LAC**.
- **Diplomatic Engagements:** Maintaining open channels of communication through bilateral or regional cooperations like in BRICS, SCO, etc.



Overview of India-China Relations

- **Diplomatic:** Established in 1950.
 - ⊕ **Panchasheel Agreement, 1954**, emphasized on peaceful coexistence and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- **Economic Relations:** Currently, China is the **largest trading partner of India** with bilateral trade of **USD 118.4 billion (2023- 2024)**.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) releases Payment System Report, December 2024

It is a bi-annual report which analyses the trends in payment transactions carried out using different payment systems in the last 5 calendar years (CY) up to CY-2024.

Key findings:

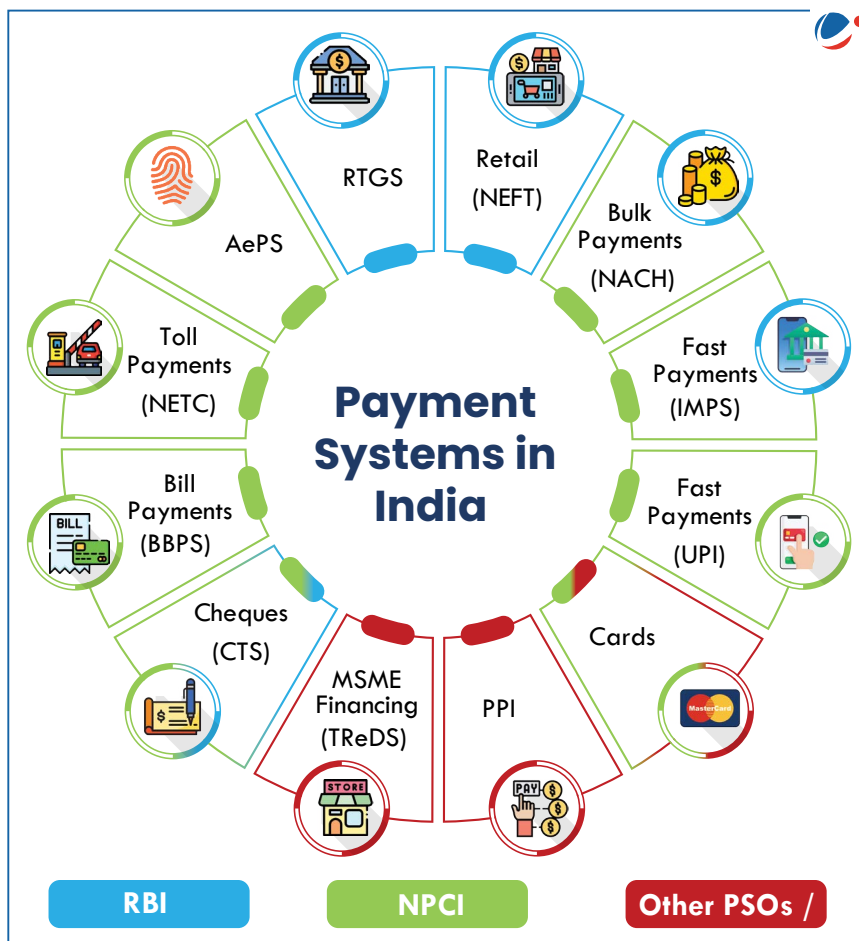
- **Digital payment transactions:** In 2013 there were 222 crore digital transactions valued at Rs 772 lakh crore, it has increased 94 times in volume and more than 3.5 times in value in CY-2024.
- **Unified Payment Interface (UPI):** Volume of UPI transactions reflects a CAGR of 74.03 %, value of the transactions represented a CAGR of 68.14% in last 5 years.
- **Credit cards & Debit cards:** Number of credit cards has more than doubled in five years whereas debit cards have remained relatively stable in last 5 years. .
- **Global trends: India joined Project Nexus,** facilitating multilateral linkage of fast payment systems (FPS) of four ASEAN Nations (Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) and India.
 - ⊕ **Project Nexus,** conceptualized by Bank for International Settlements (BIS), enables instant cross-border retail payments by interlinking domestic FPSs.

Payment Systems in India

- **Payment systems are mechanisms established to facilitate the clearing and settlement of monetary and other financial transactions.**

Regulation of Payment Systems in India

- **Payments and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 (PSS Act)**
 - ⊕ It authorizes RBI to regulate & supervise payment systems in India.
 - ⊕ Empowers RBI to issue licenses /authorizations to payment system operators such as Clearing Corporation of India Ltd, NPCI, card payment networks, ATM networks etc.
- **Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems (BPSS)**
 - ⊕ Highest policy making body on payment systems established by RBI under PSS Act.
 - ⊕ Its chairman is RBI Governor, while Deputy Governor in charge of the DPSS is Vice-Chairperson.



Also In News



Rythu Bharosa Scheme

Telangana Government disbursed funds under the Rythu Bharosa scheme, which was launched on January 26, 2025, Republic Day.

- The scheme provides financial assistance of Rs 6,000 per acre per season as crop investment support.
- The scheme releases funds based on revenue villages.

Other Similar Agricultural Welfare Schemes

- **PM-KISAN (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi):** Centre sector scheme, to provide income support of ₹6,000 annually to small and marginal farmers across India.
- **KALIA Scheme (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation):** To provide financial assistance to farmers and landless laborers in Odisha.



Darfur Crisis

Recently, the Prosecutor of International Criminal Court (ICC) called on the UN Security Council to act on the worsening atrocities in Sudan's Darfur region.

About Darfur Crisis

- **About:** Darfur is a region in western Sudan and is home to approximately 80 tribes and ethnic groups witnessing tribal and ethnic conflicts.
- **Background:** The conflict escalated in 2003 when rebels (Sudan Liberation Army and Justice and Equality Movement) took up arms against the Sudanese Government against the unequal distribution of economic resources leading to loss and displacement of numerous lives.



Operation Sankalp

Recently, **Vayu Sena Medal** was awarded to officers for executing **Operation Sankalp**.

About Operation Sankalp

- It was launched by **Indian Navy** to protect the **maritime community** from various **non-traditional threats** in the backdrop of **Israel-Hamas conflict**.
- It included **three areas of operations: Gulf of Aden** and adjoining areas, **Arabian Sea** and off the **East Coast of Somalia**.
- During the operation, the Navy responded to a number of incidents **saving lives, seizing narcotics, rescuing the hijack of merchant vessels**, etc.



Report on Highways by IIM Bangalore

Highway development since 2013 has had a **multiplier effect** with each unit of expenditure made on highway construction resulting in a **3.21 unit increase in GDP growth**.

- Multiplier effect refers to **increase in national income** resulting from increase in government expenditure, **particularly on infrastructure projects**.

Other Findings of Report:

- Between 2013 and 2022, national highway development has led to a **9 per cent rise in household incomes**.
- Besides, there has been a **2.94% and 1.33% decrease in cost of transportation** between factory and supplier.
- National Highway (NH) network** increased by 60% from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,145 km in year 2024.



Bomb cyclone

Storm Éowyn formed over **Ireland** and **Scotland** has been termed a **bomb cyclone** because its pressure dropped by 50 millibars in 24 hours.

About Bomb Cyclone

- A storm can be called a "**bomb cyclone**" when its central air pressure drops by **at least 24 millibars in 24 hours**.
- Bomb cyclones get their name from the meteorological term '**bombogenesis**', which refers to when a **mid-latitude cyclone** intensifies over a 24-hour period.
- This is often **caused by cold and warm air masses** colliding, an event that leads to pressure to drop.
- Majority of these **occur over the ocean throughout the year** and can be tropical or non-tropical in nature.



Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)

Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) outbreak has been reported in Pune, Maharashtra

- Campylobacter**, a **bacterial gut infection** that spreads through contaminated food and water, has been linked to the outbreak.

About Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)

- It is a very rare but **potentially paralyzing nerve disorder** caused by the immune system mistakenly **attacking the body's own nerves**.
- It is often triggered by **gastrointestinal or respiratory infection**.
- Symptoms:** weakness, sensation changes, sometimes paralysis etc.



Enhanced Certificate of Origin (eCoO) 2.0 System

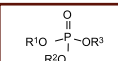
The **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** has launched the **enhanced Certificate of Origin (eCoO) 2.0 System**.

About eCoO 2.0

- It is a **significant upgrade** to simplify the **certification process** for exporters and enhance trade efficiency.
- Offers several **user-friendly features**, such as **multi-user access**, which enables exporters to authorize multiple users under a **single Importer Exporter Code (IEC)**.
- Supports **Aadhaar-based e-signing alongside digital signature tokens**, providing greater flexibility.

About Certificate of Origin:

- It is a **document used in international trade** to certify that the goods being exported **originated in a specific country**.



Organophosphate

Doctors in Jammu & Kashmir expressed the likelihood of **Organophosphates**, used in pesticides, behind the death of 17 villagers.

About Organophosphates

- Formation:** Chemical compounds formed through the **esterification process involving phosphoric acid and alcohol**.
 - Esterification is a **chemical reaction** where two reactants like **alcohol and acid** combine to create an ester as the reaction product.
- Applications:** **Herbicides, Pesticides, Insecticides, Nerve agents** in chemical warfare (disrupts the transmission of nerve signals or neuromuscular transmission in exposed organisms), etc.

Place in News



Lao PDR (People's Democratic Republic) (Capital: Vientiane)

Recently, **Indian embassy rescued 67 Indians from cyber scam centres** in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) of Lao PDR.

Political Features

- Location:** Landlocked country of **Southeast Asia**.
- Part of **Golden Triangle** (Opium producing regions) along with **Thailand** and **Myanmar**.
- Land Boundaries:** **China** (North), **Vietnam** (Northeast and East), **Cambodia** (South), **Thailand** (West), **Myanmar** (Northwest).
- Member of **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**.

Geographical Features

- Plateaus:** Xiangkhiang, Bolovens and Khammouan.
- Mountain Ranges:** Annamite Range, Luang Prabang Range.
- Highest Peak:** Phu Bia.
- Major Rivers:** Mekong (Bordering Myanmar and Thailand, capital Vientiane located on this river).



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI