

NEWS TODAY

India-Mauritius Elevates Ties to Enhanced Strategic Partnership

During the visit of India's Prime minister, India and Mauritius unveiled a **joint vision for an Enhanced Strategic Partnership** and inked eight pacts to boost ties in several sectors.

- ▶ PM **Narendra Modi** was also honored with **Mauritius' highest civilian award** in recognition of his contributions to India-Mauritius relations.

Key Outcomes

- ▶ **Cross Border Transactions in Local Currency:** Agreement signed for Establishment of a Framework to Promote **Use of Local Currencies** for Cross-border Transactions.
- ▶ **MAHASAGAR:** India announced a **new vision for Global South** and named it "MAHASAGAR" or "Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions."
 - ⊕ It will focus on the spirit of **trade for development, capacity building** for sustainable growth, and **mutual security** for a shared future.
- ▶ **Other:** Signed agreement on sharing of maritime data, joint work in combating money laundering etc.

India-Mauritius Relations

- ▶ **Diplomatic Relations:** India established **diplomatic relations in 1948.**
- ▶ **Trade:** India has **surplus** trade with Mauritius (total trade was USD 554.19 mn in 2022-23).
 - ⊕ India-Mauritius signed **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement** in 2021.
- ▶ **FDI:** Mauritius was the **2nd largest source of FDI** into India for FY 2023-24, after Singapore.
- ▶ **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:** Indian origin people comprise **nearly 70%** of Mauritius.
 - ⊕ Mauritius hosts **World Hindi Secretariat** to promote Hindi in the world.



Trends and Progress of Housing in India 2024 Report released by National Housing Bank (NHB)

Report presents overall housing scenario, analysis of housing schemes and role of primary lending institutions in the sector.

Key Highlights of Report

- ▶ **Banks account for 81%** whereas **Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)** account for **19%** of housing loans.
- ▶ **Distribution of loans (outstanding):** Middle Income Group(44%)> EWS & Lower Income Group(39%)> High Income Group (HIG): 17%
- ▶ **Housing loans** (as % of GDP): It has increased from **6.60% (2011-12)** to **11.29% (2023-24).**
- ▶ **Green buildings:** Only **5% of buildings** are classified as green

Challenges in Housing Sector in India:

- ▶ **Regional Disparity in Finance:** Southern (35%), Western (30%), Northern (28%), Eastern (5.4%) , North Eastern States (0.68%)
- ▶ **Climate Risks:** Increased vulnerability to floods, fires, and extreme weather calls for resilient and energy-efficient buildings.
- ▶ **Issues in Green Building:** Limited number of certification bodies, lack of standard certification framework, and high material costs.

Opportunities

- ▶ **Technological advancements:** E.g: Use of **AI, data analytics, and predictive modelling, 3D Printing** can reduce costs, speedup projects
- ▶ **Increased Liquidity:** E.g. REITs provide opportunity for smaller investors to participate in large-scale projects and offer more liquid investment options.
- ▶ **Budget Push (2025-26):** Urban Challenge Fund, National Geospatial Mission to boost housing sector growth.

About National Housing Bank

- ▶ It is a **statutory body** established under National Housing Bank Act, 1987.
- ▶ It supervises Housing Finance Companies, however **regulatory powers (including registration of HFCs) have been transferred to Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**
- ▶ **Authorised Capital:** ₹1,450 crore (Fully subscribed by Government of India)
- ▶ **Head Office:** New Delhi

India set to leapfrog USA and become largest web3 developer community by 2028

India accounted for **17% of all new developers** entering the field, the highest among all countries, according to a report by Hashed Emergent.

Key Findings of Report

- **India's rising Web3 space**
 - ⊕ **>4.7 million developers** have joined GitHub in 2024 with a YoY growth of **28%**.
- **Challenges faced:** Virtual digital assets (VDAs) acting as a 'parallel currency', lack of a pro-Web policy agenda and a dedicated regulator for the web3 sector.
- **Way Forward:** Shift from restrictive to enabling regulatory approach, Harmonize regulatory approach in lines with G20, Financial Action Task Force etc.

| Parameters | Web 1.0 | Web 2.0 | Web 3.0 |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Functionality | Mostly Read only web | Read and write web | Read, write and execute web |
| Users | Million users | Billion users | Trillion users |
| Goal | Information sharing | Interaction | Immersion |
| Platform | Common Gateway Interface Web | The Community Web | Semantic Web (for machines) |

The Semantic Web enables linked data enabling seamless data integration and knowledge sharing across webpages, applications, and files, forming a **web of interconnected data.*

What is Web3?

- It is an umbrella term for the next generation of internet technologies like blockchain that **decentralize data ownership** and **reduce reliance on intermediaries**.
- Blockchains are decentralized and distributed ledgers that store records of transactions or data across a network of nodes.
- **Properties of Block Chain:**
 - ⊕ **Smart Contracts** (Auto execution of digital contracts)
 - ⊕ **Distributed** (All Trusted participants have a copy of ledger for complete transparency)
 - ⊕ **Secured** (All records are individually encrypted)
 - ⊕ **Immutable** (Any validated records are irreversible and cannot be changed)
 - ⊕ **Trusted** (Data is decentralized and managed by multiple participants)
 - ⊕ **Consensus** (All network participants agree to the validity of each of the records)
 - ⊕ **Time-stamped** (A transaction timestamp is recorded on a block)
- **Applications: Non-fungible tokens (NFTs), decentralized finance (DeFi), and real-world assets (RWAs) etc.**

Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Report

The committee in its report points out that there is a nominal increase in the Budget Estimates (BE) allocation for 2025-26 compared to 2024-25.

Key Observations and Recommendations

| Parameters | Observation | Recommendation |
|---|--|---|
| Budget Allocation | Continuous trend of BE lower than Revised Estimates have been observed (mainly due to demand driven nature of schemes) | Ensure that States are able to submit their demand funds on time and fully utilize the allocated budget. |
| Schemes Scenario | Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996: lacks effective implementation (due to lack of public awareness and sensitization) | Focus on action oriented capacity building develop robust monitoring framework. |
| | Revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan : E.g. 14 out of 34 States/UTs have not received any funds for FY 2024-25 | Measures for timely submission of requisite documents by the States for timely release of funds. |
| Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas (SVAMITVA) scheme | Ministry could not achieve its physical targets (no work has been done in Bihar) | Develop concrete action plan for implementation and set realistic target |
| Trained Manpower | Severe shortage of support staff. E.g. only one official managing 5 to 6 Gram Panchayats in Bihar | Introduce Digital governance initiatives to reduce workload and improve service delivery |
| Type of Grants | Tied grants (60% of allocation) are restricted whereas untied grants (40%) can be used for local needs. | Merge the concept of tied and untied grants for increased flexibility. |
| Panchayat Elections | Delay in panchayat Elections in various states.E.g. Karnataka (2021) | Timely conduct of elections as per 73 rd Constitutional Amendment . |
| Revenue Generation | Heavily reliant on grants from government | Empower panchayats to generate their own revenues through property taxes, user fees, and other local levies |

Standing Committee on Agriculture Tabled Report in Parliament

Issues Highlighted

- **Continuous Decline in Allocations:** Agriculture Ministry's budget allocation as a percentage of total Central outlay continuously declined from **3.53% (2021-22) to 2.51% (2025-26)**.
- **Underutilization of Fund:** Actual utilization of funds by Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DA&FW) for 2024-25 is **59.84%** of allocated funds.
- **Crop Residue: Lack of developed markets** for crop residue utilization, such as for biofuel production or composting, which could offer farmers additional income.

Recommendations

- **Change in Nomenclature:** Rename 'DA&FW' to '**Department of Agriculture, Farmers & Farm Labourers Welfare**' to acknowledge significant role of farm labourers in agricultural.
 - ⊕ Expand PM-KISAN scheme to Farm Labourers.
- **Establish National Commission for Minimum Living Wages for Farm Labourers:** To address wage disparities and improve living standards.
- **MSP for All Organic Crops:** To incentivize farmers to transition to organic farming.
- **Free and compulsory" crop insurance scheme:** For **small farmers** with land holdings of up to 2 hectares.
- **Multifaceted Approach for Crop Residue Management:** Combination of policy interventions, farmer education, technological innovations, and financial incentives.
- **Others:** Increase budgetary allocation for agriculture; strengthen Krishi Vigyan Kendras, **effective advertisement & publicity campaigns** for promotion of agricultural schemes etc.

Standing Committee Report on Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (2024-25) Released

Key Highlights

- **Strengthening of Consumer Commissions (SCC) Scheme:** Persistent vacancies, both at State & District Consumer Commissions, are severely impacting Scheme's effectiveness.
 - ⊕ Out of total 36 sanctioned posts of President of State Commissions 18 (**50%**) **posts are vacant**.
- **Consumer Welfare Fund (CWF):** Only 71.5% of Revised Estimates (RE) for 2024-25 relating to CWF has been utilized.
 - ⊕ Disbursement of funds under Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to several states & key agencies, like NAFED, Kendriya Bhandar, has not been uniform.
- **Computerization & Computer Networking of Consumer Commissions:** Its expansion has streamlined case management, **reduced delays**, and **improved access to justice**
- **Other:** Currently, **Indian Standard Time** is not being mandatorily adopted by all Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) and Internet Service Providers (ISPs).
 - ⊕ **Lack of uniformity** in time across different systems presents significant challenges for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in investigating cybercrimes.

Key Recommendations

- **Take immediate and proactive steps** to ensure that States and UTs prioritize filling of vacant posts within a fixed time-frame.
- Steps need be taken to implement a more **streamlined fund release process** to minimize delays in disbursement and ensure the **uniform distribution of funds**.

Also In News



Oilfield (Regulatory and Development) Amendment Bill

The Oilfield (Regulatory and Development) Amendment Bill passed in Lok Sabha.

Key Features

- The Bill amends the **Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, of 1948**.
- **Aim:** To reform the legal framework to meet the current needs and market conditions and to make the sector more attractive to investors.
- **Definition of mineral oils expanded:** Bill expands the definition to include any naturally occurring hydrocarbon, coal bed methane, and shale gas/oil.
- It also introduces a **single permit system** namely, petroleum leases.



PM-YUVA 3.0

The Ministry of Education has launched **PM-YUVA 3.0 (Young, Upcoming and Versatile Authors)**.

About PM-YUVA 3.0

- It is an **Author Mentorship programme** to train young and budding authors (below 30 years of age) and aligns with National Education Policy 2020.
- **Objective:** To promote reading, writing and book culture & project Indian writings globally.
- **Implementing Agency: National Book Trust**
- **A total of 50 authors** will be selected through a contest on themes of:-
 - ⊕ Contribution of Indian Diaspora in Nation Building;
 - ⊕ Indian Knowledge System;
 - ⊕ Makers of Modern India (1950-2025)
- Selected Books will be published by NBT and translated into other Indian languages, fostering cultural and literary exchange while promoting '**Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat**'.



APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) ID

The APAAR ID system has drawn scrutiny on data privacy.

About APAAR ID

- It is a **specialized identification system** designed for all students in India.
 - ⊕ It is a **unique 12-digit code** will help students to digitally store, manage, and access all their academic credits, including Score card, marksheets, gradesheet, degrees etc.
- It is a part of the **'One Nation, One Student ID' program** launched by the government, aligning with the new **National Education Policy of 2020**.
- **Benefits:** Facilitate student mobility, Enhance academic flexibility, Empower students to choose their learning paths of their choice etc.



Mycelium Bricks

Mycelium bricks promises construction industry to reduce its carbon footprint and become more sustainable.

About Mycelium Bricks

- These bricks are **biodegradable, fire-resistant**, and insulating, made from mycelia, the branching filaments of fungi.
 - ⊕ **Mycelium** is the thin root-like fibres from fungi.
- **Mycelium bricks** offer a sustainable alternative to traditional construction materials.
- **Challenges:** Mycelium-based materials are not as strong as conventional materials like concrete or brick or steel, high cost, susceptible to moisture etc.



Geet Gawai

The Indian Prime Minister was welcomed with a traditional Bihari cultural performance **Geet Gawai** during his state visit to Mauritius.

About Geet Gawai

- It is a **pre-wedding ceremony** that combines rituals, prayer, songs, music and dance.
- It is also inscribed on **UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2016**.
- Performed mainly by **Bhojpuri-speaking communities** having Indian descent in Mauritius.
 - ⊕ **Participants:** Female family members and neighbors
- **Main-Musical Instrument:** Dholak (a two-headed drum).
- It **extends to public performances** and presently **men also participate**.



World Air Quality Report, 2024

7th annual World Air Quality Report 2024 released by IQAir.

- The Report evaluates the global state of air quality for the year 2024.

Key findings of the report

- **Seven countries met the WHO annual average PM2.5 guideline of 5 µg/m3:** Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Estonia, Grenada, Iceland, and New Zealand.
- **The five most polluted countries in 2024 were:- Chad>Bangladesh>Pakistan>Democratic Republic of Congo>India.**
 - ⊕ **Delhi remains the most polluted capital city.**
- **Byrnihat(Assam), India** was the most polluted metropolitan area of 2024.
- **Oceania** is the world's cleanest region.



ASTRA Missile

Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) has successfully conducted test-launch of ASTRA missile.

Key Features

- It is **'Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile'** (BVRAAM) designed and developed by DRDO.
- **Range:** 80 -110 km
- **Maximum Speed:** Mach 4.5
- It is equipped with advanced guidance and navigation capabilities.



Plastic Ice VII

Scientists have confirmed a fourth form of water called Plastic Ice VII using advanced neutron-scattering experiments.

About Plastic Ice VII

- It is an unusual phase of ice that forms at high temperature and high pressure and changes our understanding of water in space.
- **Formation:** >3 gigapascals(Pressure) and >450 Kelvin (Temperature).
- This phase allows water molecules to rotate freely within a rigid crystalline structure.
- **Importance of the discovery**
 - ⊕ **Planetary Science:** Behavior of Plastic Ice VII can help simulate interiors of ocean worlds and exoplanets.
 - ⊕ **Exoplanet Habitability:** Its ability to transport nutrients in deep oceans may influence the potential for alien life.
- This discovery changes our understanding of **water in space**.

Place in news

Guatemala (Capital: Guatemala City)

Fuego Volcano erupts in Guatemala, spewing incandescent material and pyroclastic flows.

Political Features:

- ⊕ **Location:** Central America.
- ⊕ **Bordering Nations:** Mexico (North), Belize (NorthEast) Honduras & El Salvador (South)
- ⊕ **Bordering Water Bodies:** Gulf of Honduras (East), Pacific Ocean (South)

Geographical Features:

- ⊕ **Highest Point:** Tajumulco Volcano (4,220 metres) – tallest peak in Central America.
- ⊕ **Major Volcanoes:** Pacaya, Fuego, Santa María.
- ⊕ **Major Plains and Regions:** Pacific coastal plain, Petén region

