

# NEWS TODAY

## Municipal Bonds See Strong Growth Since FY2018 Due to Government Incentives: ICRA Report

According to the report, over ₹2,600 crore has been raised through municipal bonds since FY2018, up from ₹1,000 crore during FY1998-FY2005.

► For FY2025-FY2026, municipal bond issuances are projected to exceed ₹1,500 crore.

### About Municipal Bonds

- A municipal bond is a **debt instrument issued by municipal corporations with the permission of respective state governments.**
  - ⊕ **Bengaluru floated municipal bonds for first time in India in 1997 followed by Ahmedabad MC in 1998.**
- They help **Urban Local Bodies achieve financial autonomy** by reducing reliance on state and central funding.




### Persistent challenges in Municipal Bonds issuances in India

- **Grant Dependency:** ULBs rely on state grants for ~38% of revenue (RBI report).
- **Accounting Issues:** No standardized norms, causing inconsistencies.
- **Low Liquidity:** No secondary market, reducing investor interest.

► **High Compliance Costs and weak credit profile** limit market access.

To strengthen the municipal bond market, issuing **tax-free bonds** can attract retail investors, while **green bonds** can draw international funding. Offering **higher yields** under new RBI norms may encourage commercial banks to participate.

### Factors Driving Municipal Bond Growth

<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Government Incentives</b></p> <p>₹13 crore incentive for every ₹100 crore of bonds issued (up to ₹26 crore)</p> <p><b>Focus on green and pooled bonds</b></p> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Improved Transparency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Municipal Finance Portal (cityfinance.in) Centralized database for ULBS</li> <li>• Structured payment mechanism reduces risk, improves yields</li> </ul> </div>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>SEBI Regulations &amp; Reforms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SEBI's Debt Securities Regulations</li> <li>• Defined regulatory status</li> <li>• Increased investor confidence</li> </ul> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key SEBI Amendments:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expanded bond issuance eligibility</li> <li>- Mandatory structured debt-servicing</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Municipal Bond Database &amp; Repository</li> <li>• Face value reduced: 1 lakh to ₹10,000 to encourage retail investors</li> </ul>

**Foreign Investments: RBI & SEBI approval for FPIs to invest in municipal bonds**

## Satellite Images reveal disappearance of Okjökull, the first glacier to be officially declared dead due to climate change

In 2014, the **Okjökull glacier in Iceland was declared dead** after it became so thin that it stopped moving.

- Okjökull was a **dome-shaped glacier** situated around the summit crater on **Ok shield volcano**, northwest of Reykjavík (Capital of Iceland).
- **Other glaciers that disappeared** include Anderson Glacier, Clark Glacier and Glisan Glacier (USA), Baumann Glacier (New Zealand), Calderone Glacier (Italy), Martial Sur Glacier (Argentina), Pico Humboldt Glacier (Venezuela), Pizol Glacier (Switzerland), Sarenne Glacier (France), and Schneeferner Glacier (Germany).

### About Glaciers

- Glacier is a large, perennial **accumulation of snow and ice that slowly flows over land** under the influence of its own weight and gravity.
- Typically, glaciers exist in areas where **mean annual temperatures are close to freezing point** and **winter precipitation** produces significant accumulations of snow.
- **Importance of Glaciers:**
  - ⊕ **Water Reservoirs:** Glaciers store about **three-quarters of Earth's freshwater**, making them the largest freshwater reservoirs.
  - ⊕ **Food Systems:** Glaciers are source of irrigation in many regions while glacial fed **rivers make grounds fertile for agriculture.**
  - ⊕ **Biodiversity:** Glacier melt delivers nutrients into lakes, rivers, and oceans, driving blooms of **phytoplankton—the base of aquatic food chains.**

### Impact of Melting of Glaciers due to Climate Change

- **Disrupted Water Cycles:** Threaten freshwater, ecosystems, and agriculture.
- **Natural Disasters:** Increases risks of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods and Avalanches.
- **Sea Level Rise:** Causing coastal erosion, habitat loss, biodiversity loss etc.
- **Climate Feedback Loop:** Lower Earth's reflectivity, accelerating global warming.

### Initiatives to Protect Glaciers

- **Global:** Designation of 2025 as the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation by UN, UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme etc.
- **India:** Network Programme on the Himalayan Cryosphere, Centre for Cryosphere & Climate Change Studies, HIMANSH research station etc.

## North India's first nuclear power project will be established in Gorakhpur, Haryana

Gorakhpur project consists of two twin units, each with a **Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR)**, for a total capacity of **2800 MW**.

### About PHWR

- A PHWR uses **Heavy Water (D<sub>2</sub>O)** as both coolant and moderator, with **natural uranium** as fuel.
  - ⊕ Heavy water is **water that contains heavy hydrogen** (also known as deuterium) in place of regular hydrogen.
  - ⊕ Heavy water is used because it **slows down neutrons** effectively and also has a **low probability of absorption of neutrons**.
- **India's PHWR Development**
  - ⊕ Introduced through **Indo-Canadian nuclear cooperation** in the 1960s.
  - ⊕ First **220 MW reactor** built at **Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS-1)**.
  - ⊕ After **Pokhran-1 (1974)**, Canada withdrew support, leading India to **indigenously develop and standardize** the 220 MW PHWR design.

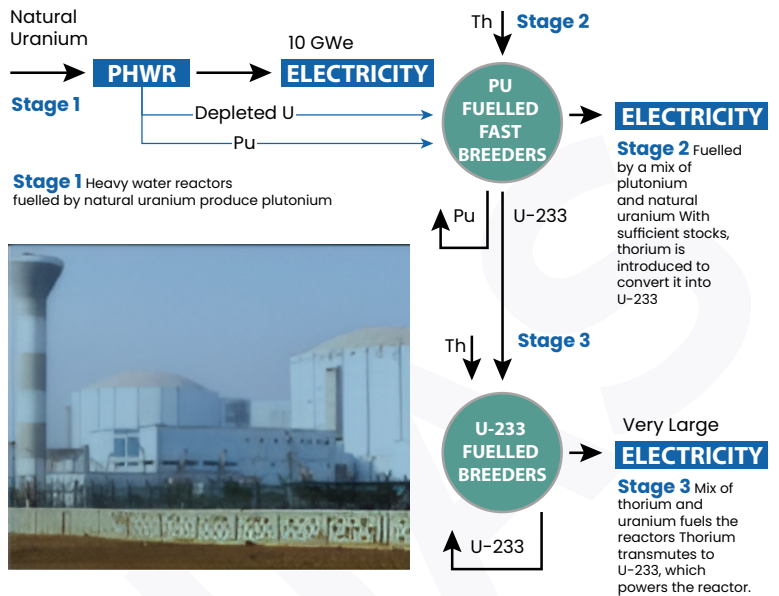
### Recent Developments in Nuclear Energy in India

- **Nuclear Energy Mission** envisages deployment of **100 GWe of nuclear energy by 2047**.
  - ⊕ India currently has about 8.1 GW installed.
- New Uranium Deposit discovered in **India's oldest Uranium Mine, the Jaduguda Mines** in Jharkhand.
- First two units of the **indigenous 700 MWe PHWR at Kakrapar, Gujarat (KAPS - 3 & 4)** have started commercial operation in FY 2023-24.
- **Country's first Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR 500 Mwe)** achieved key milestones in 2024.
- **NPCIL and NTPC formed ASHVINI**, a Joint Venture to build and operate nuclear plants including the upcoming **4x700 MWe PHWR Mahi-Banswara Rajasthan Atomic Power Project**.

**NOTE:** Please refer News Today dated 4<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2025 for more details on Nuclear Energy Mission

## INDIA'S THREE-STAGE NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

Homi Bhabha envisioned India's nuclear power programme in three stages to suit the country's low uranium resource profile

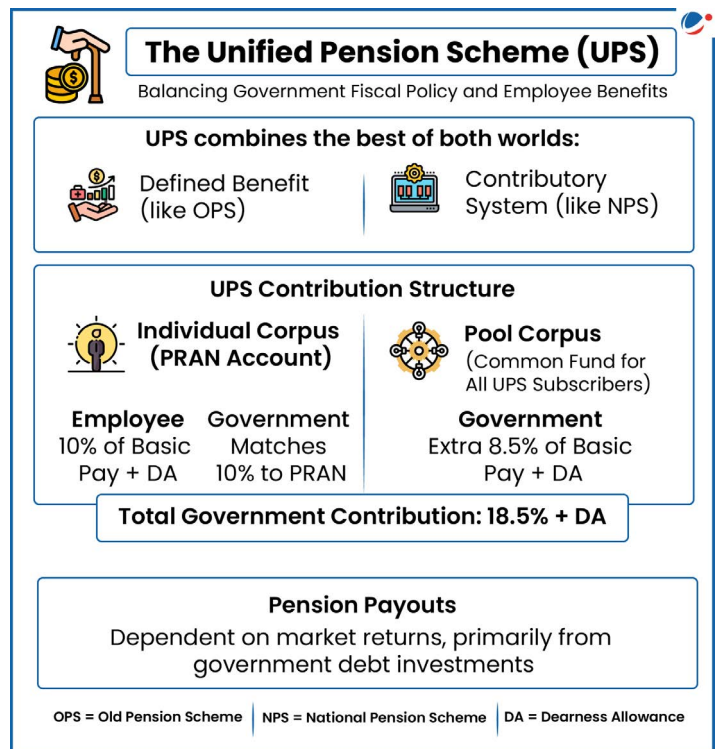


## PFRDA (Operationalisation of the UPS under NPS (National Pension System)) Regulations, 2025 Notified

The regulation provides a **detailed framework for the implementation of the UPS** (refer to the infographic).

### Key Highlights of the Regulation

- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Finance
- **Applicability:** Three categories of central government employees can opt-in (once opted for UPS, the decision is final and irreversible):
  - ⊕ **Existing NPS employees** as on April 1, 2025.
  - ⊕ **Recruits** joining on or after April 1, 2025.
  - ⊕ **Retired NPS employees** (retired on or before March 31, 2025) or their legally wedded spouses (in case of demise of subscribers).
- **Service Duration Eligibility for UPS Benefits**
  - ⊕ **Superannuation:** Available after **10 years of service**, payable from the retirement date.
  - ⊕ **Voluntary Retirement:** Requires **25 years of service**, payout starts from the notional superannuation date.
  - ⊕ **Exclusions:** No benefits for **removed, dismissed, or resigned employees**.
  - ⊕ **Proportionate Payout:** If service is **10 to 25 years**, a reduced pension is provided.
- **Investment & Fund Management**
  - ⊕ **Individual Corpus:** Employees can choose **investment patterns and pension funds**.
  - ⊕ **Pool Corpus:** Managed by **government-approved pension funds**, audited annually.



## 2025 United Nations World Water Development Report published by UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The report highlights the **vital role of mountains and alpine glaciers (water towers)** in sustaining ecosystems, economies and societies.

### Mountain Ecosystem

- **Ecosystem:** Forests cover approximately 40% of the global mountain area and at higher elevation consists of grasslands and alpine tundra.
- **Water Regulation:** An estimated two-thirds of irrigated agriculture globally depends on runoff contributions from mountains.
- **Carbon Storage:** Mountain soils with permafrost contain approximately 66 Pg of soil organic carbon, which is **4.5% of the global pool**.
- **Biodiversity:** Mountain systems host **25 of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots** containing high endemic biodiversity, preserving vital agricultural and medicinal plant gene pools etc.

### Vulnerabilities of Mountain Ecosystem:

- **Glacier Loss:** Rapid melting in Andes (30–50% since 1980s), Hindu Kush Himalayas (50% glacier loss by 2100) etc. **threatens water security**.
- **Watermelon snow (glacier blood) effect:** Red algae blooms lower surface albedo and accelerate snow melt.
- **Urbanization:** It significantly alters the hydrological cycle, results in overexploitation of resources and **disturbs ecological balance amplifying disasters**.
- **Atmospheric Pollution:** Due to long-range transport, ice cores and lake sediments have shown an **increase in black carbon**.

### Hindu Kush Himalayas (HKH)

- It is the **largest and highest alpine ecosystem** globally, averaging 4,000 m above sea level and covering 5 million km<sup>2</sup>.
- It holds **100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of glaciers**, the **largest storehouse of snow and ice outside the Arctic and Antarctic**, feeding **12,000+ lakes and 10+ major river systems**.
- HKH, Tibetan Plateau, Pamir, Hengduan, Tien Shan, and Qilian mountains collectively span 5 million km<sup>2</sup> and are known as the **Third Pole or Water Tower of Asia**.

## 2030 Global Forest Vision (GFV): Priority Actions for Governments in 2025 released by Forest Declaration Assessment

**Forest Declaration Assessment (FDA)**, established as New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) Progress Assessment in 2015, is a civil society-led effort to assess **progress towards NYDF goals**.

- NYDF was **adopted in 2014** by an alliance of governments, companies, indigenous peoples and NGOs, and was **endorsed at the 2014 Climate Summit**.
- NYDF is **voluntary in nature**, has **ten goals** and has **not been endorsed by India yet**.

### Eight Priority Actions in 2030 GFV

- **Ambition:** Integrate forest goals in **national climate and biodiversity plans** and in UNFCCC COP30 outcomes.
- **Trade:** Partner to promote legal and **deforestation-, conversion- and degradation-free trade**.
- **Finance:** Significantly scale up finance for forests in line with the **Forest & Climate Leaders' Statement on Forest Carbon Results-Based Payments and Credits**, adopted in 2024.
- **Rights:** Secure the **land rights of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Local Communities (LCs)**.
- **Supervision:** Governments and financial supervisors' mandates should ensure that **forest-related risks** are sufficiently **assessed, managed and mitigated** by financial institutions.
- **Subsidies:** **Repurpose subsidies** that harm forests towards sustainable food systems transformation, bioeconomy transition and sustainable forest management.
- **Governance:** Strengthen governance in land-use sector, aligning them with global commitments.
- **Debt:** Increase fiscal flexibility in multilateral development finance by **incorporating value of forest's natural capital as assets** in countries' debt management.



## Also In News



### International Olympic Committee

Zimbabwean former swimmer **Kirsty Coventry** becomes the first female president of the IOC.

- IOC is a **not-for-profit independent body overseeing the Olympic movement**.

### About IOC

- **Headquarters:** Lausanne (the Olympic Capital), Switzerland.
- **Genesis:** Founded at the first Olympic Congress in Paris (1894).
- **Vision:** To Build a Better World through Sport
- **Funding:** Entirely **privately funded and distributes 90% of its revenues** for the development of sports and athletes at all levels.
- **Function:**
  - ⊕ **Decides Olympic sport inclusions and host city** selections.
  - ⊕ Facilitates **collaboration** among Olympic stakeholders, including athletes, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and sports federations.
    - ◆ **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)** serves as India's NOC.

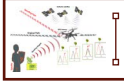


### Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)

ULIP has achieved a major milestone, recording over **100 crore Application Programming Interface (API) transactions**.

### About ULIP

- **Launched under National Logistics Policy in 2022**, it aims to create an integrated, efficient, and technology-enabled logistics sector.
- It is a digital gateway that allows industry players to access **logistics-related datasets from various Government systems through API-based integration**.
- **Conceptualized by NITI Aayog**.
- **The platform is maintained by NICDC Logistics Data Services Ltd. (NLDSL)**.
  - ⊕ NLDSL is a joint venture between **Government of India represented by National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust (NICDIT)** and Japanese IT major **NEC Corporation**.



**GPS spoofing**

As many as 465 GPS interference and spoofing incidents have been reported in Indian border region, between November 2023 and February 2025.

**About GPS spoofing**

- It is a malicious technique that **manipulates the signals transmitted by GPS.**
- Spoofing provides **false location or time information** to GPS receivers, potentially causing **undesirable effects on navigational systems, devices, and satellite-based applications.**
  - ⊕ Accurate GPS data is crucial to the performance of **modern avionic systems**, including flight computers, autopilots, and collision-avoidance systems.
- GPS spoofing typically involves **using a signal generator** or other sophisticated equipment to **transmit counterfeit GPS signals** that are stronger than the genuine satellite signals.



**World Happiness Report**

World Happiness Report 2025 was published by **Wellbeing Research Centre** at the University of Oxford, in partnership with **Gallup, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network** and an independent editorial board.

**About the Report**

- Global Happiness Ranking is based on single question derived from the **Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale (Cantril Ladder).**
  - ⊕ Top of the ladder represents best possible life while at the bottom represents worst possible life.
- **Parameters:** GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy at birth, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption.
- **Finland ranks first**, followed by Denmark and Iceland while **India is ranked 118<sup>th</sup>** out of 147 countries.



**REDD+**

Forest Declaration Assessment Special Report '**Transforming Forest Finance**' highlighted that **REDD+ has not delivered the scale of forest finance** needed.

**About REDD and REDD+**

- REDD+ is a climate change mitigation solution developed by the **UNFCCC parties** under the **Warsaw Framework 2013.**
- **REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation)** focuses on reducing deforestation in developing countries.
  - ⊕ **REDD+ expands** this by including additional forest-related activities like sustainable forest management and enhancing forest carbon stocks.
- **Under REDD+**, developing countries receive results-based payments for reducing deforestation, incentivizing their climate protection efforts.



**Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture Scheme**

**Ministry of Culture** implements a **Central Sector Scheme - Financial Assistance for Promotion of Art and Culture.**

- Scheme aims to provide financial assistance to eligible cultural organizations working in the field of art and culture across the country.
- **Scheme Components:**
  - ⊕ Financial Assistance to Cultural organizations with National Presence
  - ⊕ Cultural Function & Production Grant (CFPG)
  - ⊕ Financial Assistance for the Preservation & Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas
  - ⊕ Financial Assistance for the Preservation & Development of Buddhist/Tibetan Organization
  - ⊕ Financial Assistance for Building Grants including Studio Theatres
  - ⊕ Financial Assistance for Allied Cultural Activities
  - ⊕ Intangible Cultural Heritage
  - ⊕ Domestic Festivals and Fairs



**Mount Kilauea volcano**

**Kilauea volcano of Hawaii, US** is active again.

**Kilauea volcano**

- **Location:** Situated inside Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, neighbouring Mauna Loa (the **largest active volcano on Earth**).
  - ⊕ Mauna Loa and Kilauea are two of the **most active shield volcanoes** on Earth.
  - ⊕ Kilauea has **independent magma system** from Mauna Loa.
- **Activity:**
  - ⊕ Eruptions occur from the **rift zones** and **summit caldera.**
  - ⊕ Has erupted **frequently since 1780 CE**, except for a quiet phase (1924-1952).
  - ⊕ **The 2018 eruption** (lasted from **1983-201**) involved an outpouring of **more than one cubic kilometer of basalt.**



**Navroz**

Prime Minister, greeted everyone on the occasion of Navroz.

**About Navroz**

- Nowruz, meaning "**new day**" in **Persian**, is an ancient festival **marking spring's arrival** and the triumph of light over darkness.
- Dating back over **3,000 years to Zoroastrianism**, it falls on the **vernal equinox (usually March 20 or 21).**
- Celebrated in the **Balkans, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East** and other regions.
- **Promotes values of peace and solidarity** between generations and within families as well as reconciliation and neighborliness.
- It is inscribed on **Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of the UN.**

**Place in News**



**Suriname (Capital: Paramaribo)**

India sends \$1 million worth machinery to Suriname to boost Passion fruit industry.

- **Indian diaspora** currently constitutes over **27% of Suriname's population.**

**Political Features**

- Smallest country in **South America.**
- **Bordering Countries:** French Guiana (East), Brazil (South), Guyana (West).
- **Bordering Water Bodies:** Atlantic Ocean (North).

**Geographical Features**

- **Major mountain ranges:** Bakhuis Mountains and Van Asch Van Wijck Mountains.
- **Highest point:** **Juliana Top** in the Wilhelmina Mountains.
- **Major rivers:** Suriname River, Maroni River, Courantyne River etc.



**Errata:** In the News Today of 1st March, 2025, in the infographic of main news titled 'National Waterways (Construction Of Jetties/Terminals) Regulations, 2025 Introduced', correct version will be '95 tons/km by rail' instead of '95 tons/km by road' and '215 tons/km by inland water transport' instead of '215 tons/km by road'.