

NEWS TODAY

Concerns Raised Against Green Credit Programme (GCP) rolled out by the Ministry of Environment


The GCP is a mechanism to encourage voluntary plantation, resulting in award of Green Credits and build an inventory of degraded land which can be utilised for Afforestation programmes.

➤ Despite its ambitious goals, the programme has faced legal scrutiny and environmental criticisms.


Criticism & Controversies of Green Credit Programme

- **Lack of Legal Foundation:** The Environment Protection Act, 1986 (under which the Rules were notified) **does not provide a legal framework** for tradable green credits for compensatory afforestation.
- **Environmental Criticisms**
 - ⊕ **Incentivizes forest diversion:** Companies can buy credits instead of restoring forests, weakening environmental safeguards.
 - ⊕ **Degraded lands at risk:** The GCP promotes plantations on open forests, scrublands, and wastelands, which already provide unique ecological benefits.
 - ⊕ **No real addition to forest cover:** Unlike compensatory afforestation (which requires converting non-forest land into forests), GCP allows existing degraded forest land to be used, meaning **no net gain** in forest area.
 - ◆ It contradicts the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023, which mandates land-for-land compensatory afforestation.
 - ⊕ **Evaluation and Long-term Sustainability:** The GCP methodology lacks clear criteria for evaluating plantation success, especially tree survivability, allowing failed plantations to still earn credits.

GREEN CREDIT PROGRAMME








UNVEILED BY
The Prime Minister at COP28 in December 2023




PURPOSE
To incentivize pro-environment actions and support the Mission LiFE initiative

KEY FEATURES

-  Covers **seven activities**, including tree plantation, waste management, etc
-  Credits can be **traded** on a domestic platform
-  Can be used for **compensatory afforestation**, fulfilling regulatory requirements
-  Companies can include credits in **ESG disclosures**



ADMINISTERING BODY
Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun



ELIGIBILITY
Each identified land parcel must be at least **five hectares** in size

India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (IA-ECTA) Celebrates Third Anniversary of Signing

After the agreement was signed and implemented in 2022, bilateral trade reached **USD 24 billion** in 2023-24, with India's exports to Australia growing by **14%** compared to 2022-23.

➤ The IA-ECTA is a **strategic economic agreement** that aims to increase resilience against geopolitical uncertainties.

Key Features of India-Australia ECTA

- **Tariff Elimination:** ECTA eliminates tariffs on **85% of Australian goods** shipped to India and **96% of Indian goods** sent to Australia.
- **Rules of Origin:** Strict rules of origin to prevent third-party goods from getting preferential treatment under ECTA.
- **Trade in Services:** 135 sub-sectors opened by Australia, 103 sub-sectors by India.
- **Trade Remedies:** Safeguard mechanism to protect against sudden import surges.
- **Dispute Settlement:** Consultations & negotiations as the first step. If unresolved, a three-member arbitral panel is formed.
 - ⊕ **Each country** appoints one member, and a mutually agreed Chair oversees the panel.

Issues in India-Australia Trade Relations

- **Trade and Market Access:** Prolonged Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) negotiations, Non-Trade Barriers such as sanitary & phytosanitary standards and technical barriers.
- **Pharmaceutical pricing control in Australia**, particularly on generics, hampers market access for Indian products.

India-Australia ECTA Significance

- **Bilateral Trade:** It aims to increase bilateral trade from **\$31 billion in 2021 to \$40-50 billion** within the next 5 years.
- **India's exports:** Expected to increase from US\$ 10.5 billion in 2021 to US\$ 20 billion by 2026-27 and to cross US\$ 35 billion by 2035.
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (AI-CECA):** IA-ECTA is a precursor to the AI-CECA, which would broaden economic ties beyond goods and services to cover intellectual property rights, digital trade, etc.

Lok Sabha Passes Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025 Which Seeks To Amend The Waqf Act, 1995

LS also gave approval to the **Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill 2024** which repeals Mussalman Wakf Act 1923.

Key highlights of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025

- **Focus:** Better management of waqf properties, empowerment of stakeholders, efficient survey, , etc.
- **Conditions for Creating Waqf:** Only a **lawful property owner** can create a waqf.
 - ⊕ Creation of a waqf-alal-aulad shall **not result in denial of inheritance rights of heirs**, including women heirs.
- **Mandatory Online Registration:** All waqfs must register **details of property** on online portal within six months (extension possible by Waqf Tribunal).
- **Wrongful Declaration of Waqf:** Government property shall not be deemed to be a waqf property.
 - ⊕ **If any question arises** as to whether any such property is a Government property, a **designated officer** (by the State government) shall **conduct an inquiry** and submit his report to the State Government.
- **Inspection of records:** It will be under **"section 75 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023"**.
- **Acquisition of waqf properties public purpose:** It will be under the **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013** or any other law relating to acquisition of land if such acquisition is made in consultation with the Wakf Board.
- **Central Waqf Council:** Union Minister in charge of waqf is the Chairperson (ex officio) It can **issue directives to the Boards, and also has suo motu power.**
 - ⊕ Other members to be appointed shall include, Members of Parliament, Judges of the Supreme Court or a High Court, among others.

About Waqf

- Waqf is a type of **Charitable Endowment**, where a person donates property **for religious or social welfare** such as building mosques, schools, hospitals, etc.
- **History:**
 - ⊕ **Waqf is an Arabic** and history is **linked to the Hadiths.**
 - ⊕ In **8th century CE India**, Waqf properties were managed by provincial and district officers, like the **Sadr-e Subah and Sadr-e-Sarkar**, but the central authority had ultimate control.
 - ⊕ The **contemporary meaning** of Waqf came into existence during the time of the **second caliph of Islam, Hazrat Umar.**

Supreme Court (SC) Condemns Prolonged Inaction by Speakers on Defection Petitions

The SC said **Speaker could not use his indecision** to defeat the **worthy objective of the Tenth Schedule** (anti-defection law) of the Constitution.

- **Question of Law in front of Supreme Court:** Can constitutional courts direct Speakers, acting as quasi-judicial tribunals, to decide anti-defection disqualification petitions within a specific timeframe?

Supreme Courts Observations

- **Court's Power Over Speaker's Inaction:** The SC stated that it is not "powerless" if Speaker remains "indecisive" on disqualification petitions.
- **Court's Right to Set a Reasonable Timeframe:** While courts cannot dictate the outcome of a disqualification petition, they can direct the Speaker to decide within a reasonable period.
 - ⊕ **E.g., Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly (2020).**
- **If the Speaker fails to act:** The SC can invoke its extraordinary powers under Article 142.

Other SC Observations to Improve Implementation of Anti-Defection Law

- **Judicial Review Over Speaker's Decisions:** Courts should have the authority to intervene if the Speaker delays action. **Case: Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992).**
- **Impartiality of the Speaker:** The Speaker should act as a neutral adjudicator rather than a political figure. **Case: Ravi S. Naik v. Union of India (1994).**
- **Independent Tribunal for Disqualification Cases:** Consider transferring disqualification powers from the Speaker to an independent tribunal. **Case: Karnataka MLAs' disqualification case (2020).**

ANTI-DEFECTION LAW

CONCEPT

Introduced through 52nd Amendment Act, 1985, adding the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution to prevent political defections



PURPOSE

Ensure stability in legislatures by preventing arbitrary party switching



GROUND FOR DISQUALIFICATION FOR A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE

- Voluntarily giving up party membership
- Defying party whip during voting

ROLE OF SPEAKER/CHAIRPERSON

- Acts as a quasi-judicial authority
- Decides on disqualification petitions
- Final arbiter in the disqualification process

Over 30,000 Indian Parents Are Waiting For Adoption: Centre

Minister of State for **Women and Child Development (WCD)** also informed **Rajya Sabha** that a total 62,592 children are living in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) including Open Shelter, Specialized Adoption Agency, Observation Home, etc.

Child Adoption in India

- **Nodal Ministry:** Union Ministry of **WCD**
- **Primary legislation:** Adoption in India is primarily governed by **JJ Act, 2015** (Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015) which seeks to ensure **safety, security, dignity and wellbeing of children** in need of care and protection.
- **Nodal Central Agency:** Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), established under the **JJ Act**, regulates **domestic and intercountry adoptions, and implementing the Hague Convention**.
 - ⊕ **Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993)** ensures ethical, legal, and transparent international adoptions while preventing child trafficking.
- **Responsibility of States/UTs:** states and UTs implement the JJ Act through institutions like
 - ⊕ State Adoption Resource Agencies (SARA)
 - ⊕ local Child Welfare Committees
 - ⊕ District Child Protection Units (DCPUs)

Challenges in child adoption in India

- **Bureaucratic Delays:** Average adoption waiting period **continues to be more than a year**.
- **Age/Ability Bias:** Older children and those with disabilities face lower adoption rates.
- **Prejudices and high social stigma:** Most Indians have a skewed perception of adoption as they want "their genes, blood and lineage in their child."

Measures Taken to Expedite the Adoption in India:

- **Legal Reforms:** Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Rules, 2022 have empowered the District Magistrates (DMs) on adoption-related matters.
- **CARINGS portal:** Adoption process is completely online and transparent through the designated CARINGS portal.
- **Mission Vatsalya Scheme:** Supports children living in Child Care Institutions



Also In News



Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025

The Bill is passed by the Parliament.

Key Highlights of the Bill

- **Objective:** To modernize immigration laws, enhance national security, and improve coordination among immigration authorities.
- **Bills repealed:**
 - ⊕ Passport Act, 1920
 - ⊕ Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939
 - ⊕ Foreigners Act, 1946
 - ⊕ Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000
- **Immigration Regulation:** A **Bureau of Immigration** will oversee visa issuance and entry-exit regulations.
- **Penalties:** Penalizes foreigners entering without valid passport or other travel documents with imprisonment of up to five years, fine up to five lakh rupees, or both.
- **Power of arrest:** Police officers not below the rank of a Head Constable can arrest without a warrant.

NOTE: For more details on the Bill, kindly refer News Today document dated 12th March 2025.



Fiscal Health Index (FHI)

The composite FHI has been developed using data from the **Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)**, covering the **Financial Year 2022-23**.

About FHI 2025

- Initiative by **NITI Aayog**.
- **Objective:** **Comparative analysis of fiscal health across Indian states** through standardized metric
- **Coverage:** **18 major states** that drive the Indian economy in terms of their contribution to **India's GDP, demography, total public expenditure, revenues, and overall fiscal stability**.
- **Major Sub-Indices**
 - ⊕ Quality of Expenditure
 - ⊕ Revenue Mobilization
 - ⊕ Fiscal Prudence
 - ⊕ Debt Index
 - ⊕ Debt Sustainability
- **Top Performing States:** **Odisha** leads the Index, followed by **Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand and Gujarat**



Women's role in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

A study titled, How Does Climate Change Impact Women and Children Across Agroecological Zones in India, released by the Union Ministry of Women And Child Development (WCD)

It signifies the need of Gender disaggregated data to formulate robust policies on climate-induced disasters.

Women's role in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

- **Trained as Aapda Sakhi under Aapda Mitra Scheme:** Women constitute nearly 20% of the one lakh Aapda Mitra volunteers trained so far.
- **Heat micro-insurance programme of SEWA** in Ahmedabad: Protects informal female workers during heatwave periods by replacing income lost due to extreme heat days.
- **Gender cell at Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA):** Collect gender-based data for disasters and extreme weather events.



India tightens steel procurement policy

Revised **Domestically Manufactured Iron & Steel Products Policy-2025** for providing preference to Domestically Manufactured Iron & Steel Products in Government procurement is published.

Key Provisions

- **Objective:** Prioritizes homegrown steel in government contracts, introduces a **reciprocal clause** to counter trade restrictions, and mandates domestic value addition for capital goods.
- Policy ban on **Global Tender Enquiry** for steel procurement contracts having estimated value up to Rs. 200 Crore except with the approval of competent authority.
- **Capital goods** like furnaces and rolling mills must have **50% domestic value addition.**



Sentenelese

A U.S. national was arrested in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for allegedly entering the prohibited tribal reserve area of North Sentinel Island.

Sentinel Island, **part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands** is home to the **indigenous Sentenelese people** (a negrito tribe), one of the last uncontacted tribes in the world.

About Sentenelese

- They are declared as **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups**
- **Great Andamanese, Jarawas, Onges, and Shom Pens** are other PVTGs of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- Centre issued the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956** to declare the **traditional areas occupied by the tribes as reserves.**
- It prohibited entry of all persons except those with authorisation.
- **Photographing or filming** the tribe members is also an **offence.**



National Polio Surveillance Project (NPSP)

The **Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** has indicated the potential for adapting the **National Polio Surveillance Project (NPSP)** to monitor emerging infectious diseases.

About NPSP

- The NPSP is a collaborative initiative between the Government of India and WHO.
- **Established in 1997**, the NPSP developed a robust surveillance system for acute flaccid paralysis (AFP), which is critical for detecting potential polio cases.
- **Significance:** The project played a pivotal role in planning and monitoring polio immunization campaigns, ensuring high coverage across the country.
- **India was declared polio-free in 2014.**
- In 2025, NPSP's polio surveillance was integrated into the **National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)** under the **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP).**



Heard and McDonald Island

US President announced reciprocal 10% tariffs for several US trade partners, including Heard and McDonald Island

The President called **April 2 "Liberation Day"** and declaring it "one of the most important days in American history.

About Islands

- Heard Island and McDonald Islands are **uninhabited subantarctic islands** in the Southern Ocean, **with no permanent human population.**
- They are **administered by Australia.**
- As the **only volcanically active subantarctic** islands they 'open a window into the earth', thus providing the opportunity to observe ongoing geomorphic processes and glacial dynamics.
- They are listed as **UNESCO World Heritage Sites.**



Devaraya I

Rare Copper Plates documenting **Devaraya I's coronation** unveiled in Bengaluru.

These copper plates, belonging to the Vijayanagara Empire, were written in Sanskrit and Kannada and Nāgarī characters.

About Devaraya I (1406-1422)

- He was born during the **Sangama period (1336-1485)**
- **Infrastructure:** Built a dam on the Tungabhadra River, enabling canal irrigation for cities and villages.
- **Vijayanagara's Glory and Foreign Accounts**
- In 1420, Italian traveler Niccolo de Conti (1336-1485) visited Vijayanagara.
- Described it as a **magnificent capital city with grand architecture and prosperity.**

Personality in News



Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

April 3, marks the 345th death anniversary of **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj.**

➤ Shivaji Maharaj passed away on April 3, 1680, at Raigad Fort.

About Shivaji Maharaj.

- **Shivaji was born at Shivneri Fort, Poona in 1630.**
- He was the founder of the Maratha Empire in western India.
- In 1674, he crowned himself at Raigad and a new era called the '**Rajyabhisheka Era**'.
- **Formed a council of eight ministers** popularly known as **Ashtapradhana.**
- He laid the foundation of the **Maratha naval force in 1654** near Kalyan and went on to build multiple fortified naval bases along the **western coastline.**
- He **developed guerrilla warfare tactics**, and defeated Afzal Khan in **1659.**

