

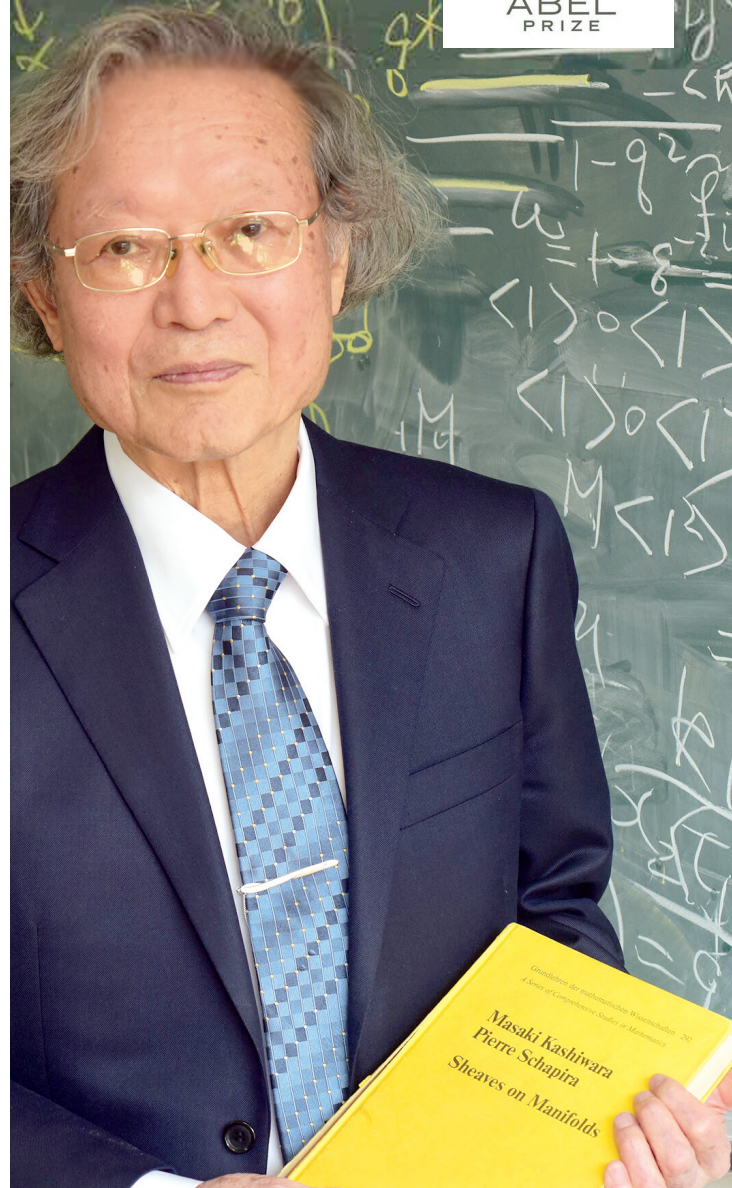
WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Coverage of

26 March - 01 April, 2025

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**UPSC ESE, PSUs,
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26th MARCH 2025

Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024

- **Context:** Parliament has passed the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024.

Key Facts

- The Bill amends the Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- **The DM Act establishes:**
 - National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA),
 - State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA),
 - and the District Disaster Management Authority.
- These authorities are responsible for disaster management at the national, state, and district level, respectively.

Key Highlights of the Bill

- **Preparation of disaster management plans:** The Bill provides that NDMA and SDMA will prepare disaster management plans, which was earlier prepared by the National a State Executive Committee.
- **Functions of NDMA and SDMA: The Bill adds these functions:**
 - taking periodic stock of disaster risks, including emerging risks from extreme climate events,
 - providing technical assistance to authorities below them,
 - recommending guidelines for minimum standards of relief,
 - and preparing national and state disaster databases, respectively.
- The Bill also empowers NDMA to make regulations under the Act with prior approval of the central government.
- **Disaster Database:** The Bill mandates the creation of a comprehensive disaster database at both national and state levels.
- **Urban Disaster Management Authorities:** It empowers the state government to constitute a separate Urban

Disaster Management Authority for state capitals and cities with a municipal corporation.

- **Formation of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF):** The Bill empowers the state government to constitute a SDRF. The state government will define the functions of SDRF and prescribe the terms of service for its members.
- **Statutory status to existing committees:** The Bill provides statutory status to existing bodies such as the National Crisis Management Committee (NCCM) and the High-Level Committee (HLC).
 - The NCCM will function as the nodal body for dealing with major disasters with serious or national ramifications.
 - The HLC will provide financial assistance to state governments during disasters.
- **Appointments to NDMA:** It empowers NDMA to specify the number and category of officers and employees, with previous approval of the central government. NDMA may also appoint experts and consultants as necessary.

Vikramshila University

- **Context:** A decade after the modern Nalanda University was re-established near its historical site in Rajgir, efforts are now underway to revive Vikramshila University.

About Vikramshila University

- It was founded by King Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty in late 8th to early 9th century AD.
- It is present at Bhagalpur district, Bihar, India.
- Vikramshila was one of the most important Buddhist learning centres of medieval India, second only to Nalanda University.
- It was especially renowned for Tantric studies, which were popular during the Pala period in both Buddhist and Hindu traditions.
- Destroyed in the late 12th century by Bakhtiyar Khalji, a military commander under Qutb-ud-din Aibak.

- Atisa Dipankara was a renowned Buddhist master and scholar who played a significant role in the revival and reform of Buddhism in Tibet during the 11th century.

BHIM 3.0

- **Context:** NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL), a subsidiary of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), has launched BHIM 3.0.

About BHIM

- Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) is a UPI based payment interface that allows real time fund transfers using a single identity like your mobile number or name.
- It was introduced in 2016 by the Prime Minister and has played a key role in promoting digital payments in India.
- BHIM 3.0 is the latest version of the digital payment platform.
- It introduces several enhancements for a better user experience, including:
 - **Expanded language support:** Available in 15+ Indian languages.
 - **Optimised for low internet areas:** Ensures smooth transactions even in regions with poor network connectivity.
 - **Advanced money management tools:** Includes expense tracking, bill splitting, and spending analytics.
 - **Family mode:** Enables managing shared expenses and assigning payments for family members.

27th MARCH 2025

Regional Rural Banks (RRBs)

- **Context:** RRBs achieve a record 7,571 crore profit in FY 2023-24; key financial indicators like CRAR, deposits, NPAs CD Ratio show steady improvement.

About Regional Rural Banks (RRBs)

- The genesis of RRBs can be traced back to 1975, following the recommendations of the Narasimham Working Group.

- Initially created through an ordinance, RRBs were later given a statutory foundation through the Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976.
- First RRB established was Prathama Bank (sponsored by Syndicate Bank) in Uttar Pradesh.
- The primary objective of RRBs is to develop the rural economy by providing banking and financial services to: small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and small entrepreneurs.
- RRBs follow a tripartite ownership model, ensuring coordinated support from the Centre, State, and sponsoring banks:
 - Government of India – 50%
 - State Government – 15%
 - Sponsor Bank (usually a Public Sector Bank) – 35%
- They are regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and supervised by NABARD.
- RRBs have been consolidated in a phased manner based on the recommendations of Dr. K.C. Vyas Committee (2001).

United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- **Context:** India stresses the need for UNSC reform to achieve lasting peace in conflict situations.

Major Highlights

- **Security of Peacekeepers:** Peacekeepers are facing non-state actors, armed groups, terrorists, and complex threats.
 - India emphasizes the importance of safety and security for peacekeepers, calling for justice for the crimes against them.
- **Modernisation:** Advocates for integrating advanced surveillance, communication, and data analytics into peacekeeping operations.
 - India offers training courses through its Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK), addressing modern peacekeeping demands.
- **Funding:** Stresses the need for adequately funded and resourced peacekeeping missions, with resources matching the mandates.

- **Inclusion in Mandate Formation:** Calls for the inclusion of troop-contributing countries in the mandate formulation process to adapt operations to new realities.

About UNSC

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the principal organs of the United Nations, responsible for maintaining international peace and security.
- It was established in 1945 as part of the UN Charter and is composed of 15 member states, including five permanent members with veto power—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
- It is headquartered in New York City.

Need for the Reforms in the UNSC

- **Current Composition:** The current composition of the Security Council has under-representation and un-representation of key regions.
- **Inability to Address Conflicts:** The existing composition of the Council has demonstrated significant limitations in effectively addressing major international conflicts. This has undermined its credibility and hindered its core mandate of upholding international peace and security.
- **Changes in World Order:** The world has undergone significant changes since 1945 and the new realities need to be reflected in the permanent membership.
- **Veto Power:** Currently, only the five permanent members hold veto powers and through its use have stalled action in the Council to address global challenges and conflicts such as in Ukraine and Gaza.
 - The remaining 10 nations in the Council are elected to sit as non-permanent members for two-year terms and do not have veto powers.
- **Legitimacy:** The disproportionate power held by the five permanent members, particularly their veto power led to a perception of unfairness and lack of legitimacy.

Bedmap3

- **Context:** Scientists have created the most comprehensive map yet of Antarctica's landscape beneath its ice sheet, called Bedmap3.

About Bedmap3

- It extends the previous Bedmap2 dataset.
- It includes data from 84 new aero-geophysical surveys, 15 data sources, 52 million additional data points, and 1.9 million line-km of measurements.
- It fills major gaps in knowledge, including information on mountain ranges, the deep interior of East Antarctica, and the coastlines of West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula.
- Bedmap3 provides a clearer picture of Antarctica's subglacial landscape and ice distribution, offering insights into the continent's evolution and ice sheet modeling.
- It will help study how the ice sheet interacts with the bedrock and how it may behave as global warming continues, helping scientists predict future ice loss and sea-level rise.

About Antarctica

- Antarctica is a continent. It is Earth's fifth-largest continent and is covered almost completely in ice. Antarctica covers Earth's South Pole.
- Antarctica has no trees or bushes. The only plants that can survive the extreme cold are lichens, mosses and algae.
- Antarctica is the coldest continent on earth.

28th MARCH 2025

Abel Prize

- **Context:** Japanese mathematician Masaki Kashiwara was awarded this year's Abel Prize. He was honored with the Abel Prize for his groundbreaking work in algebraic analysis, representation theory, the development of D-modules, and the discovery of crystal bases.

About Abel Prize

- Named after legendary Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel (1802–1829), the prize was established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2002 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Abel's birth.
- First awarded in 2003, the Abel Prize is often regarded as the Nobel Prize equivalent in mathematics.
- Recipients are selected by a committee appointed by the Academy, in consultation with the International Mathematical Union (IMU) and the European Mathematical Society (EMS).
- The award includes a cash award and a glass plaque designed by Norwegian artist Henrik Haugan.

Black Sea

- **Context:** Russia and Ukraine agreed to halt military strikes in the Black Sea and on energy sites during talks brokered by the United States.

About Black Sea

- The Black Sea is a large inland body of water located in southeastern Europe, bordered by six countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey.
- It is connected to the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus Strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles Strait.
- The Black Sea deeper water is devoid of oxygen and rich in hydrogen sulfide, which makes it unsuitable for most marine life.
 - The Black Sea does have marine life in its upper, oxygen-rich layers.
- **Significance:** Ports like Odessa (Ukraine), Constanta (Romania), Varna (Bulgaria), and Novorossiysk (Russia) are vital for the countries bordering the sea.
 - The Black Sea is also important for fishing, energy resources (including natural gas and oil), and shipping.
 - It serves as a strategic point of control for access to the Mediterranean Sea and, historically, has been the site of many conflicts.

Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

- **Context:** The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has recommended a simplified Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime in its 19th report.

Goods and Services Tax (GST)

- The idea of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India was first proposed during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure.
 - In December 2014, the Constitution (122nd Amendment) Bill was introduced, passed in 2015, and ratified in 2016 as the 101st Constitutional Amendment, paving the way for GST.
 - GST was officially launched on 1st July 2017 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking a significant step in India's tax reform.
- It is a destination-based consumption tax levied at all stages, from manufacture to final consumption, with credit for taxes paid at previous stages.
- The tax burden is ultimately borne by the final consumer, and the revenue is allocated to the authority governing the place of consumption (place of supply).

Objectives

- GST aims to simplify India's indirect tax system by combining multiple Central and State taxes into one, reducing the cascading effect and creating a unified national market.
- It stimulates economic growth, broadens the tax base, increases trade volumes, and improves tax compliance.

Latest Recommendations

- The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) urged the Finance Ministry to review the current framework to eliminate unnecessary complexities and ease compliance.
- The Committee expressed concerns about issues in the biometric-based Aadhaar authentication process, potentially hindering the "One Nation One Tax" vision.

• Other Recommendations

- Streamlining the process by consolidating forms, reducing filing frequency, and introducing a tiered compliance approach for smaller businesses.
- Improving the portal's ease of use and providing clearer guidance for taxpayers during filing.
- Addressing the issue of harsh criminal penalties for unintentional errors in compliance, particularly for honest taxpayers.
- Using data analytics and AI tools to accurately project GST revenue, addressing the decline in indirect tax share.
- Implementing a more efficient refund system with clear timelines, regular updates, and a dedicated grievance redressal mechanism.
- Simplifying GST compliance for MSMEs by automating return filing and refund processing with reduced frequency and easier online reporting.

29th MARCH 2025

Gaia Mission

- **Context:** The European Space Agency (ESA) shut down its space observatory mission, Gaia.

About Gaia Mission

- It was launched in December 2013, and was designed to create a precise 3D map of the Milky Way galaxy. Originally named Global Astrometric Interferometer for Astrophysics (GAIA), the mission was renamed Gaia.
- It was designed for astrometry, the science of mapping the cosmos, through precise measurement of the location and movement of stars and other celestial bodies.
- It was positioned at the Lagrange point 2 (L2), 1.5 million km from Earth.
- Lagrangian Points are specific locations in space where the gravitational forces of two large celestial bodies (like the Earth and the Sun) and the centrifugal force of a smaller object (like a satellite) balance each other.

■ DO YOU KNOW: _____

- Gaia was “passivated” on March 27, 2025, meaning it was drained of energy and won't be rebooted.
- It entered its “retirement orbit” around the Sun after using its thrusters for the final time

Sagarmala Programme

- **Context:** The Sagarmala Programme which was launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Ports has revolutionized India's maritime sector.

Key Facts

- With a 7,500 km coastline, 14,500 km of potentially navigable waterways, and a strategic position on key global trade routes, India holds immense potential for port-led economic growth.
- The Sagarmala Programme is a key pillar of the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV), driving India's ambition to become a global leader in maritime affairs. Building on Maritime India Vision 2030, MAKV sets ambitious targets, including 4 million Gross Registered Tonnage (GRT) of shipbuilding capacity and 10 billion metric tons of port handling annually, aiming to position India among the top five shipbuilding nations by 2047.
- MAKV outlines over 300 strategic initiatives to develop world-class ports, expand coastal and inland waterways, and promote a sustainable Blue Economy.

About Sagarmala Programme

- **Objectives:** To streamline logistics, reduce costs, and enhance international trade competitiveness by shifting from traditional, infrastructure-heavy transport to efficient coastal and waterway networks.
- The program focuses on port modernization, industrial growth, job creation, and sustainable coastal development, ensuring minimal infrastructure investment while maximizing economic impact.

About Sagarmala Startup Innovation Initiative (S2I2)

- Launched on March 19th 2025, it is a transformative program designed to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in India's maritime sector.
- S2I2 supports startups in green shipping, smart ports, maritime logistics, shipbuilding technology, and sustainable coastal development by providing funding, mentorship, and industry partnerships.
- Anchored in the principles of RISE—Research, Innovation, Startups, and Entrepreneurship—S2I2 will drive technological advancements, enhance industry competitiveness, and accelerate economic growth.

Nag Missile System (NAMIS)

- **Context:** In a major step toward strengthening India's self-reliant defence capabilities, the Ministry of Defence has signed a contract under the Buy (Indian-Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) category for the procurement of the Nag Missile System (NAMIS).

About NAMIS

- NAMIS is a third-generation, fire-and-forget Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) system developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- It is specially designed for deployment by the Indian Army to neutralize heavily armoured enemy tanks.
- It targets tanks without needing further guidance post-launch.

30th MARCH 2025

Exercise Prachand Prahar

- **Context:** The Indian Armed Forces recently conducted a high-level tri-service integrated multi-domain exercise, Prachand Prahar, in the high-altitude terrain of Arunachal Pradesh.

About Exercise Prachand Prahar

- The exercise showcased the seamless integration of advanced surveillance, strike capabilities, and

multi-domain operational planning.

- Cutting-edge platforms such as long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft, armed helicopters, UAVs, loitering munitions, and space-based assets were employed to achieve total situational awareness and rapid target engagement.
- Prachand Prahar follows Exercise Poorvi Prahar, conducted in November 2024, which focused on the integrated application of aviation assets.

National Gene Bank (NGB)

- **Context:** The central government has announced the establishment of a second National Gene Bank (NGB) as a part of the Union Budget 2025-26 under the theme "Investing in Innovations".

About Gene Bank

- A Gene Bank is a bio-repository that preserves genetic material of plants, animals, and microbes, particularly seeds, tissues, and DNA.
- In the case of crops, this involves the storage of germplasm (viable plant material such as seeds) under controlled conditions to ensure their long-term viability.
- The goal of the new NGB is to conserve 10 lakh crop germplasm.
- These genetic resources are used for crop improvement and genetic resource management.
- The new Gene Bank will have state-of-the-art infrastructure and aims to expand India's conservation capacity.
- It is important for preserving genetic diversity and promoting sustainable agricultural practices to ensure future food security.

NOTE:

- The first National Gene Bank is located at the ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) in New Delhi.
- The first NGB is the second-largest gene bank in the world, holding 4,71,561 accessions from 2,157 species.

31st MARCH 2025

Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949

- **Context:** Buddhist monks and organisations across India and abroad have been protesting against the Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949.



Key Highlights

- They are demanding exclusive control of the Mahabodhi Temple—the holiest site in Buddhism where Lord Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment.
- Under the Bodh Gaya Temple Act (BTA), 1949, Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC) was established with the District Magistrate of Gaya as the ex-officio Chairperson.
- Buddhist Monks demand the dissolution of the current BTMC & establish a Buddhist-only management committee.

About Mahabodhi Temple

- It was built by Emperor Ashoka in 260 BCE after his conversion to Buddhism.
- The present structure of the Mahabodhi Temple dates back to the 5th or 6th century A.D., reflecting the architectural style of the Gupta period.
- Located in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, the site is believed to be where Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree.
- It has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, since 2002.
- Historically managed by Buddhists until the 13th century invasion by Bakhtiyar Khilji.
- In the late 16th century, Hindu monk Ghamandi Giri established the Bodh Gaya Math at the site.

- **Post-Independence (1949):** Bihar government enacted the Bodh Gaya Temple Act, transferring management to a joint committee.

Current Account Deficit (CAD)

- **Context:** India's current account deficit (CAD) widened to \$11.5 billion in Q3 FY25 from \$10.4 billion in the same quarter last year, primarily due to an increase in the merchandise trade deficit. However, CAD remained stable at 1.1% of GDP.

About Current Account Deficit (CAD)

- It occurs when a country's imports of goods and services exceed its exports. The current account is part of a country's balance of payments (BOP), alongside the capital account.
- To reduce a current account deficit, a country can increase exports, reduce imports through tariffs or quotas, or implement policies to boost domestic competitiveness. Currency devaluation can also help by making exports cheaper.

01st APRIL 2025

P4 Initiative

- **Context:** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister launched the 'Zero Poverty – P4' initiative under Swarnadra 2047 vision.

Key Facts

- **Aim:** To ensure poverty-free Andhra Pradesh by 2029.
- 'P4' stands for 'Public, Private, People Partnership', and achieving 'zero poverty' is one of the (10 principles) of Swarna Andhra-2047.
- **Key Benefits:**
 - House sites and house construction.
 - Sanitation facilities and 100% tap water connections.
 - LPG connections, reliable power supply, and rooftop solar incentives.

- High-speed internet for all households.
- Promotion of entrepreneurship in every family.
- **Target Beneficiaries:** Economically weaker families, termed 'Bangaru Kutumbam' (golden families).
- **Supporters:** Well-off contributors, called 'Margadarsis' (guides).
 - Priority is given to the 20 lakh most deprived families for adoption by the top 10% wealthier families.
- **Role of 'Margadarsis':**
 - Provide financial support or mentorship (e.g., education, career guidance, business support).
 - Engage in long-term support beyond financial help.
 - Contributions can include funding for education, medical expenses, and community development.
- **Expected Outcome:** Mobilize public-private participation, foster inclusive economic growth, and create a new poverty alleviation model in India.

Sarhul Festival

- **Context:** Adivasis in Jharkhand and the larger Chhotanagpur region will welcome the new year and the spring season with the Sarhul festival.

Key Facts

- Sarhul, meaning "worship of the Sal tree," celebrates the union of the Sun (male priest) and the Earth (priest's wife), symbolizing life's cycles. It marks the beginning of agricultural activities after rituals. Sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) are venerated in Adivasi tradition as the abode of Sarna Maa, the deity who protects villages from natural forces.
- The festival lasts for three days.
- The main rituals happen on day two at Sarna Sthals.
 - These communally protected "sacred groves" can be found near villages across Chhotanagpur, which includes Jharkhand, parts of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Bihar.
- Sarhul is celebrated by tribes like Oraon, Munda, Santal, Khadia, and Ho, with each having unique ways of celebrating. The festival has evolved from a hunting tradition to one focused on agriculture.
- The festival spread beyond Chhotanagpur with tribes migrating as indentured labor, now celebrated in places like Assam, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

