



# WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

*Coverage of*

**6 Mar. - 12 Mar., 2026**

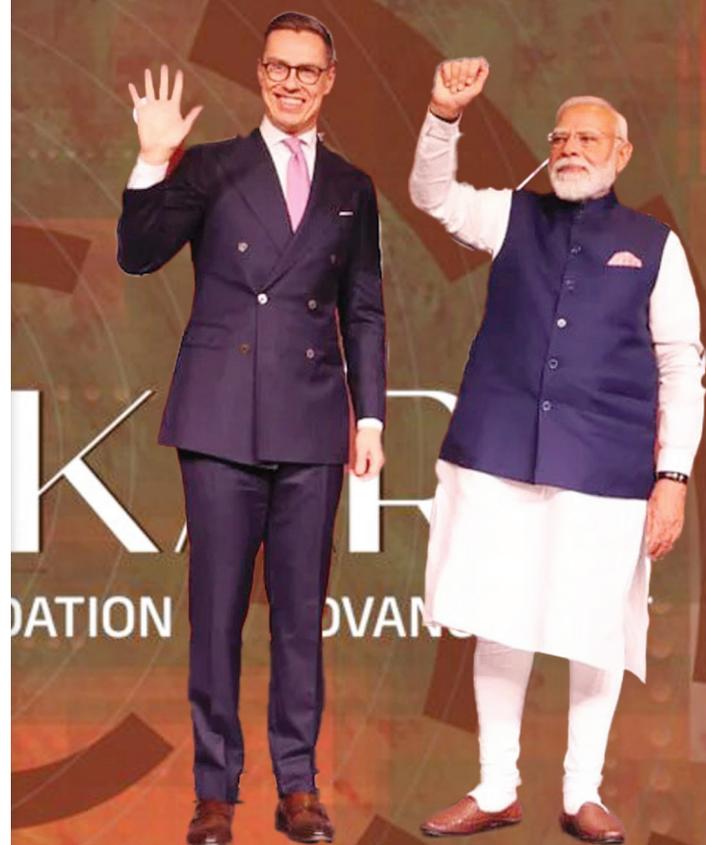
★★ Useful for ★★

**UPSC ESE, PSUs,  
RRB, SSC, Banking &  
State Services Exams**

ORF OBSERVER  
RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION

RAISINA  
DIALOGUE 2026

Ministry of External Affairs  
Government of India



**Raisina Dialogue, 2026**

PM Modi inaugurated the Raisina Dialogue 2026

 [www.madeeasy.in](http://www.madeeasy.in)

6<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

## Raisina Dialogue, 2026

- **Context:** PM Modi attended the inaugural session of the Raisina Dialogue 2026 in New Delhi. The theme for 2026 edition is “Samskara: Assertion, Accommodation, Advancement.”

### About Raisina Dialogue

- The Raisina Dialogue is India’s premier conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community.
- It brings together global leaders, policymakers, diplomats, scholars, and strategic experts to discuss major international challenges. The first session was held in 2016.
- It is hosted by the Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation, in collaboration with the External affairs ministry of India.

## IISc’s Moonshot Project

- **Context:** The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) launched a moonshot project to develop brain co-processors that combine neuromorphic hardware and AI algorithms to enhance or restore brain function.

### About Brain Co-Processors

- Brain co-processors are advanced devices designed to interact directly with the human brain.
- They decode neural signals, process them using AI algorithms, and re-encode them back into the brain through neural stimulation or neurofeedback.
- These systems function as AI-powered closed-loop devices that assist the brain in restoring or enhancing cognitive and motor functions.

### Key Objectives of the Project

- Develop implantable and non-invasive brain co-processors capable of decoding and processing brain activity.

- Use AI algorithms and neuromorphic hardware to interpret neural signals and stimulate the brain accordingly.
- Enable cognitive and motor rehabilitation, particularly for stroke survivors who lose sensorimotor abilities such as reaching and grasping objects.

## Core Technologies Enabling Brain Co-Processors

- **Brain–Machine Interface (BMI):** Brain co-processors rely on brain–machine interfaces, which create a communication pathway between the brain and external devices. These interfaces translate neural signals into digital commands that machines can interpret.
- **Neuromorphic Computing:** The project integrates neuromorphic hardware, which mimics the structure and functioning of biological neurons. It enables energy-efficient processing of neural signals and allows real-time interaction between AI systems and the human brain.
- **Neural Recording Technologies:** The system will utilise advanced neural recording techniques such as:
  - **Stereo EEG (sEEG):** It records deep brain electrical activity.
  - **Electrocorticography (ECoG):** It records signals directly from the brain’s cortical surface.
- **Closed-Loop Feedback:** AI algorithms analyse neural signals and identify patterns associated with motor or cognitive functions. Once decoded, the system re-encodes signals and sends them back to the brain through electrical stimulation or feedback mechanisms.

## Removal of Lok Sabha Speaker

- **Context:** The Lok Sabha is likely to take up the notice to move a resolution to remove Lok Sabha speaker from office for allegedly acting in a ‘blatantly partisan’ manner.

## About Speaker of Lok Sabha

- The Speaker of the Lok Sabha is the presiding officer of the Lok Sabha, responsible for maintaining order and conducting the proceedings of the House.
- **Election:** The Speaker is elected by the members of the Lok Sabha from among themselves.
  - The election takes place after the general elections when the new Lok Sabha meets for the first time.
  - The Speaker remains in office until the dissolution of the Lok Sabha, unless he/she resigns or is removed.
- **Removal:** The Speaker can be removed by a resolution passed by a majority of all the members of the Lok Sabha.
  - 14 days' notice is required before moving the resolution.
  - When the resolution for removal is under consideration, the Speaker cannot preside over the sitting.
  - The meeting is presided over by the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha or another member of the House.
- **Right of the Speaker:** The Speaker can participate in the debate and defend himself/herself during the discussion on the removal resolution. The Speaker can vote in the first instance on the resolution but cannot exercise a casting vote in this case.
- **Tenure:** The Speaker continues in office even after the Lok Sabha is dissolved until the new Lok Sabha elects a Speaker.

## Powers and Functions

- **Presiding Powers:** Presides over the sittings of the Lok Sabha.
  - Maintains discipline and order in the House.
  - Decides who will speak and for how long.
- **Administrative Powers:** Heads the Lok Sabha Secretariat.
  - Appoints the chairpersons of various parliamentary committees.

- **Legislative Powers:** Decides whether a bill is a Money Bill.
  - Allows motions, resolutions, and questions.
- **Disciplinary Powers:** Can suspend or expel members for disorderly conduct.
  - Can adjourn or suspend the sitting due to lack of quorum or disorder.
- **Casting Vote:** The Speaker does not vote in the first instance, but can exercise a casting vote in case of a tie.
- **Anti-Defection Role:** Decides disqualification of members under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

## Constitutional Articles

- Article 93 of the Constitution mandates that the Lok Sabha must choose two of its members to be Speaker and Deputy Speaker "as soon as may be".
- Article 94 of the Constitution outlines the procedures for the vacation, resignation, and removal of the Lok Sabha Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
- Article 95 of the Constitution ensures continuity in the Lok Sabha by empowering the Deputy Speaker to perform the Speaker's duties when that office is vacant or when the Speaker is absent.
- Article 110 of the Constitution defines a "Money Bill," restricting it to financial matters such as taxation, government borrowing, or expenditure from the Consolidated/Contingency Fund. These bills can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha with the President's recommendation, and the Speaker's certification is final.

## DO YOU KNOW: \_\_\_\_\_

Three Lok Sabha Speakers, G. V. Mavlankar (1954), Hukam Singh (1966), and Balram Jakhar (1987) faced such resolutions, though none of them passed.

7<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

## Essential Commodities Act

- **Context:** The Centre invoked the Essential Commodities Act in response to the oil crisis following Israel-U.S. strikes on Iran. It has directed oil refining companies to prioritize LPG production using propane and butane streams, supply it exclusively to domestic consumers, and not use these streams for other petrochemical products.

### About Essential Commodities Act, 1955

- It has been a tool used by the government through the years to offset rising food prices, prevent hoarding and maintain food security.
- The list of essential commodities includes drugs and medicines, fertilizers, foodstuffs (including edible oils), hank yarn, petroleum and petroleum products, raw jute and jute textiles, and various types of seeds such as those for fruits, vegetables, and cattle fodder.
- The 2020 amendment to the Essential Commodities Act limited the Centre's powers to regulate key food items only under extraordinary circumstances. It allowed stock limits on agricultural produce only if prices rose sharply—100% for horticultural goods and 50% for non-perishable foodstuffs.

## Minuteman III

- **Context:** As tensions continue to rise in the Middle East, the United States conducted a test launch of a Minuteman III missile.

### About Minuteman III

- It is nicknamed as 'doomsday' missile, and is an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).
- It reaches a top speed of Mach 23, or roughly 28,400 kilometres per hour, and can travel over 9,600 kilometres.
- Developed by Boeing in the 1950s to bolster American homeland protection, the Minuteman

III is stored and launched from a silo, a fortified underground bunker designed to protect the missile from enemy attacks.

- Notably, a Minuteman III has never been fired in actual combat, making the weapon one of the most powerful things on Earth that has never actually been used in war.

### DO YOU KNOW:

The Minuteman III was originally supposed to be replaced in the 2030s, but delays with the new Sentinel ICBM have led officials to consider keeping it in service potentially until 2050.

8<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

## International Energy Agency (IEA)

- **Context:** India is not going to join the International Energy Agency (IEA) initiative to release strategic oil reserves as part of an effort to cool oil prices.

### Key Facts

- India is the world's third-largest oil-importing and consuming nation, and has 5.33 million tonnes of underground strategic reserves. But they are only 80% filled currently.
- Due to the West Asia conflict the crude prices jumped close to USD 120 per barrel, the highest in four years. G7 nations are due to discuss the possible release of oil reserves to calm markets.
- India is not a full member of IEA and does not have an obligation to follow the mandate of the international body.

### India's Oil Imports

- India imports nearly 88% of its crude oil requirements from around 41 countries.
- Roughly half of those supplies in February passed through the Strait of Hormuz.
- In February 2026, India received 2.8 million bpd

crude, accounting for 53% of total imports, from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar.

- As of early 2026, Russia remains the largest supplier of crude oil to India, with Saudi Arabia and Iraq following closely as key suppliers.

### About International Energy Agency (IEA)

- **Established:** In 1974.
- The IEA's founding members were Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Kingdom, and the United States.
- **Reason:** It was created when major oil-exporting countries drastically reduced oil supplies, causing severe economic disruptions in industrialized nations.
- **Mandate:** IEA's original mandate was to ensure that oil supplies were kept stable, and potential disruptions in future were anticipated and prevented through timely action. It also developed an elaborate mechanism to deal with oil emergencies in future, making it mandatory for every member country to maintain certain minimum strategic stocks of oil.
- **Members:** The membership was kept open only for OECD countries. There are now 33 full members with Colombia being inducted as 33rd members recently.
- **Associate Members:** In 2015, IEA opened the doors for non-OECD countries to become associate members.
  - The associate members participate in the policy discussions and activities, but do not have decision-making rights.
  - India became an associate member in 2017. There are 13 associate members right now.

### About OECD

- The OECD is an intergovernmental organisation that promotes economic development, policy coordination, and global cooperation.

- **Motto:** "Better Policies for Better Lives."
- **Established** in 1961, succeeding the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC).
- **Headquarters:** Paris, France
- **Membership:** 38 member countries (mainly developed economies). India is not a member.

### SHINE App

- **Context:** Recently, the Indian Railways launched the Sexual Harassment Incident Notification for Empowerment (SHINE) App on International Women's Day to enhance safety and empowerment at work.

### About SHINE App

- It is mobile app for women employees to lodge complaints about sexual harassment in the workplace.
- It is designed to maintain confidentiality and ensure complaints are addressed quickly by the Internal Complaints Committee, in line with Visakha guidelines (1997) and government instructions.
- Complaints can be filed through the Human Resources Management System (HRMS) and the Employee Self Service portal.

9<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

### Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)

- **Context:** India's chairmanship of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) offers a strategic opportunity to India to strengthen the global diamond governance.

### About Conflict Diamonds

- 'Conflict diamonds', also known as blood diamonds, are the rough diamonds mined and used by rebel movements or their allies to finance armed conflicts aimed at undermining legitimate governments.

- The term was introduced in the 1990s when international attention turned to the role of diamonds in financing violence in African countries like Angola, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia, etc.
- These diamonds entered the global market through informal and illegal trade networks, making it difficult to trace their origin.

### About Kimberley Process

- The Kimberley Process is a multilateral, voluntary certification mechanism aimed at preventing the trade of conflict diamonds.
- It represents over 99% of global rough diamond trade.
- Every shipment of rough diamonds between participating countries must carry a Kimberley Process Certificate. The certificate guarantees that the diamonds are conflict-free.
- Trade with non-participants is prohibited.

### India's Diamond Industry

- India is the world's largest cutting and polishing hub.
- It is a major importer of rough diamonds & top exporter of cut and polished diamonds (\$13.3 billion in 2024–25).
- It is the second-largest diamond market after the United States.
- Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) is the nodal agency for implementing Kimberley Process Certificate. It works under the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

### Open Market Operation (OMO)

- **Context:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conducted Open Market Operation (OMO) purchase auctions of Government Securities (G-Secs) worth 50,000 crore to inject liquidity into the banking system.

### About Open Market Operations (OMO)

- Open Market Operations are monetary policy tools used by the RBI to regulate liquidity in the banking system.
- Under OMOs, the RBI buys or sells Government Securities (G-Secs) in the open market.
  - **OMO Purchase:** RBI buys government bonds from banks. This injects liquidity into the banking system.
  - **OMO Sale:** RBI sells government bonds to banks. This absorbs excess liquidity from the market.

### About Government Security (G-Sec)

- **It is a tradable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. Such securities are:** Short term (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year) or Long term (usually called Government bonds or dated securities with an original maturity of one year or more).
- In India, the Central Government issues both treasury bills and bonds or dated securities while the State Governments issue only bonds or dated securities, which are called the State Development Loans (SDLs).
- G-Secs carry practically no risk of default and, hence, are called risk-free gilt-edged instruments.

### Exercise LAMITIYE-2026

- **Context:** An Indian Armed Forces contingent participated with Seychelles in the Eleventh edition of Joint Military Exercise LAMITIYE-2026.

### Key Facts

- 'LAMITIYE' meaning 'Friendship' in the Creole language is a biennial training event and has been conducted in Seychelles since 2001.
- The exercise will enhance synergy in the domains of sub-conventional operations in a semi-urban environment and cooperation and interoperability between both sides during peacekeeping operations.

10<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

## Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026

- **Context:** Recently, the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) invoked the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 by notifying the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026 amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia and disruptions in LNG shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

### Key Points

- **Establishment of a four-tier priority system for gas allocation:** Based on the average consumption of gas from the past six-month.
- **Gas redistribution:** Lower-priority users like petrochemicals & power plants face cuts to support higher ones.
- **Pooled Mechanism:** Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) notifies pooled prices for gas diverted from non-priority to priority sectors, ensuring standardized pricing during shortages. Priority sector entities must accept these pooled prices and waive litigation rights over force majeure or supply adjustments.

### Reasons for Gas Rationing

- **Disruption of LNG Imports:** The Strait of Hormuz is a crucial global energy transit route connecting the Persian Gulf to international markets. Conflict in the region has disrupted LNG shipments. Around one-third of India's LNG imports have been affected.
- **India's Dependence on Imported Natural Gas:** India's natural gas demand continues to rise while domestic production remains limited.
- **Key Statistics:**
  - **Total gas consumption (2024–25):** 71.3 billion cubic metres (BCM);
  - **Import dependency:** about 50%;
  - **Major LNG suppliers:** Qatar, United States, Russia, Australia

- High import dependence exposes economies to geopolitical shocks and price volatility.

### Key Changes in 2020 (During COVID-19)

- The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 introduced major reforms to liberalise agricultural markets.
- It aims to encourage private investment in storage, cold chains, and supply infrastructure.
- **Removal of Several Agricultural Commodities from the List:** Certain items were deregulated except in extraordinary circumstances.
- It includes cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onions, and potatoes.
- **Stock Limits Only in Extraordinary Situations:** The government can impose stock limits only under exceptional conditions, such as war, famine, extraordinary price rise, and natural calamities.
- **Price Trigger for Stock Limits:** Stock limits can be imposed only if prices increase significantly:
  - 100% increase in price of horticultural produce
  - 50% increase in price of non-perishable food items
- **Exemption for Value Chain Participants:** Stock limits do not apply to processors or exporters if stocks are within their production or export requirements.

## Impeachment Motion Against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

- **Context:** Opposition parties are considering an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar.

### About Article 324 of Constitution

- Article 324 of the Constitution states that the Election Commission will comprise the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such number of Election Commissioners (ECs), as the President may decide.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is responsible for managing the preparation of electoral rolls and conducting elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.

- The Constitution specifies that the President will appoint the CEC and ECs, subject to the provisions of an Act of Parliament.

### Constitutional Provisions for Removal of the CEC

- Article 324(5) of the Constitution of India provides that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) can be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.
- A motion seeking the removal of the CEC may be introduced in either House of Parliament and must specify the grounds for seeking removal.
- **The motion must be supported by:**
  - At least 100 members of the Lok Sabha, or
  - At least 50 members of the Rajya Sabha.
- Once the motion is admitted, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha constitutes an inquiry committee to investigate the allegations. If the committee finds the charges proven, the motion is taken up for voting in Parliament.
- Both Houses must then pass the motion with a two thirds majority of those present and voting. After both Houses approve the motion, the President issues the final order for removal.

11<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

### Defence Forces Vision 2047

- **Context:** The Minister of Defence released the document "Defence Forces Vision 2047: A Roadmap for a Future-Ready Indian Military", prepared by the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff.

#### Objectives

- **Future Warfare Preparedness:** The vision emphasises preparing the military for multi-domain warfare, including cyber, space, artificial intelligence and information warfare.
- **Alignment with National Development Goals:** The transformation of defence capabilities is linked with India's broader objective of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

### Key Features

- **Integrated and Multi-Domain Military:** The vision proposes developing an integrated and agile military structure capable of conducting operations across land, sea, air, cyber and space domains. Enhanced joint operational planning among the three services will improve efficiency and response capabilities.
- **Greater Jointness among the Services:** A core pillar is enhanced jointness and synergy among the Army, Navy and Air Force. Improved coordination in planning, operations and capability development is expected to increase operational efficiency.
- **Strengthening Self-Reliance in Defence:** The roadmap supports the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative in defence manufacturing.
- **Technological Advancement:** It proposes the greater use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber capabilities and advanced surveillance tools.
- **Phased Implementation:** The roadmap outlines a phased approach, identifying short-term, mid-term and long-term priorities for building critical military capabilities.

### Recent Steps Taken by India

- **Creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and Department of Military Affairs:** The appointment of the CDS aims to promote jointness in operations, procurement and training.
- The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) was created under the Ministry of Defence and is headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS).
- **Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020:** It promotes indigenous design, development & manufacturing, prioritises "Make in India" categories.
- **Defence Industrial Corridors & Indigenous Production Push:** Two defence industrial corridors have been established in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh to bolster its defence manufacturing ecosystem and promote domestic defence production.

- **Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs):** Push to restructure command structure so that Army, Navy, Air Force in a region operate under unified command. It is part of the “jointness” agenda to avoid duplication and improve responsiveness.

## Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0

- **Context:** The Union Cabinet approved the extension of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) to 2028

### About Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)

- **Type:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation (DDWS), under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- **Background:** The National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) was restructured and subsumed into JJM.
- **Objective:** To ensure Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household with 55 litres per capita per day (lpcd) of potable drinking water. It also seeks to certify all Gram Panchayats as “Har Ghar Jal”.
- **Coverage and Extension:** Launched in August 2019 with the aim of achieving 100% rural tap water coverage by 2024. However, the programme reached about 81% coverage, leading to its extension till 2028 under JJM 2.0.
- **Digital Monitoring Framework:** A national digital platform called “Sujalam Bharat” will be introduced to digitally map the drinking water supply system from source to tap. Each village will be assigned a unique “Sujal Gaon / Service Area ID”.
- **Progress:** Tap water access in rural India has expanded rapidly, rising from 3.23 crore households (16.7%) to an additional 12.48 crore households connected since then.
- **Funding Pattern:** 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States, 100% for Union Territories and 50:50 - Other States.

12<sup>th</sup> MARCH, 2026

## Creamy Layer Status for Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

- **Context:** Recently, the Supreme Court of India ruled that creamy layer status for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) cannot be determined solely based on parental income, especially salary income.

### Background of the Case

- **Civil Services Examination Dispute:** The issue arose from disputes regarding candidates claiming OBC Non-Creamy Layer status in the Civil Services Examination. Several candidates argued that they were wrongly categorized as belonging to the creamy layer because their parents worked in Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), Banks, and Private sector organizations.
- Several High Courts, including the Madras High Court, Kerala High Court, and Delhi High Court, accepted these claims and ruled in favor of the candidates.
- The Union Government challenged these decisions before the Supreme Court, which ultimately upheld the High Courts’ rulings.

### Creamy Layer in OBC Reservation: Legal Framework

- **Origin of the Creamy Layer Concept:** The concept of creamy layer was introduced by the Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992). The Court held that socially advanced individuals within OBCs must be excluded from reservation benefits to ensure that benefits reach the genuinely backward sections.
- **Office Memorandum (OM), 1993:** To implement the Indra Sawhney judgment, the Government of India issued an Office Memorandum on 8 September 1993. Key provisions included:
  - Identification of creamy layer among OBCs;
  - Criteria based on social status, occupation, and income;

- Salary income and agricultural income were excluded from the income/wealth test.
- The determination of creamy layer was based on status of parents, and category of posts (Group A, B, C, D).
- **Clarificatory Letter, 2004:** It changed the interpretation. It directed that the salary income of parents employed in PSUs and the private sector should be included while determining the creamy layer. It resulted in:
  - Different treatment of similarly placed individuals;
  - Government employees' salary excluded;
  - PSU/private sector salary included

### Supreme Court's Key Observations

- **Income Alone Cannot Determine Creamy Layer:** The Court ruled that parental income from salary cannot be the sole criterion for determining creamy layer status. The determination needs to consider the status of parents, nature of employment, and category of posts. Thus, income alone is an insufficient indicator of social advancement.
- **Equality Doctrine Must Be Upheld:** The Court held that the differential treatment between government employees and PSU/private sector employees violates the equality principle under Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution. According to the Court, individuals similarly placed must be treated equally, and excluding PSU/private sector employees' children purely based on salary leads to hostile discrimination.
- **Creamy Layer Principle Should Prevent Elite Capture:** The Court reiterated the objective of the creamy layer concept:
  - To prevent socially advanced sections within OBCs from monopolizing reservation benefits.
  - Not to create artificial distinctions within the same social group.
  - Thus, the purpose is equitable distribution of reservation benefits, not administrative discrimination.

### Constitutional Principles Involved

- **Equality Before Law (Article 14):** The Constitution guarantees equal treatment of similarly situated individuals. Any arbitrary classification violates Article 14.
- **Prohibition of Discrimination (Article 15):** Article 15 allows special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes, but policies must remain non-arbitrary and rational.
- **Equality in Public Employment (Article 16):** Article 16 ensures equal opportunity in public employment, with reservations allowed for backward classes under Article 16(4).

### Significance of the Judgment

- **Clarifies Creamy Layer Determination:** The judgment reiterates that income is not the only factor; social and occupational status need to also be considered.
- **Removes Discriminatory Interpretation:** It corrects the anomaly created by the 2004 clarification, which treated PSU/private employees differently.
- **Strengthens Equality Jurisprudence:** The decision reinforces the constitutional doctrine of equality by preventing arbitrary classifications.
- **Impact on Civil Services Examinations:** The ruling directly affects OBC Non-Creamy Layer certification for UPSC aspirants, ensuring a more balanced interpretation of reservation eligibility.

### International Year of the Woman Farmer

- **Context:** The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF 2026).

### Key Facts

- **Workforce shift:** Rural men are moving to non-farm jobs leading to women replacing them in agriculture.
- **Rise in women's participation:**
  - Employment in agriculture surged by 135% in a decade.

- Women now account for 42% of the agricultural workforce.
- 2 in 3 working women are engaged in agriculture.
- This still remains lower than the rest of the world, women's work participation was in the range 57%-63% in a majority of countries.
- In 2023-24, there were at least 117.6 million women working in agriculture (of whom 21.7 million were hired workers, 95.1 million were self-employed and 0.8 million were regular workers). The estimated male workforce in agriculture was 127.5 million.
- **Economic Impact:** Women's greater participation has not translated into higher income for the economy, as agriculture's share of the national GVA fell from 15.3% in 2017-18 to 14.4% in 2024-25.

### Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture

- **Unpaid Labour:** Nearly half of the women in agriculture are unpaid family workers, with their numbers jumping 2.5 times from 23.6 million to 59.1 million in just eight years. In States such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, more than 80% of women workers are in agriculture, and over half of them receive no wages.
- **Systemic Inequities:** Women as farmers, own only 13-14% of land holdings, and earn 20-30% less than men for equivalent work. Asset ownership, decision-making power, and access to credit and government support remain male-dominated, trapping women in low-value activities.
- **Digital Divide:** Barriers in digital literacy, language, affordability of devices limits the participation in modern agri-markets.
- Therefore, the feminisation of agriculture; has, in a way, reinforced inequities rather than enabling women's economic empowerment.

### Emerging Opportunities

- **High-Value Segments:** With global demand rising for organic products and superfoods, India's value chains for tea, spices, millets and certified organic

produce are poised for expansion in sectors where women are already strongly represented.

- Geographical Indications, branding initiatives, and support for meeting export standards can help women producers shift from subsistence farming toward premium, value-added product markets.
- **Digital Innovations:** Digital innovations can play a decisive role in bridging this gap.
  - Platforms such as e-NAM, mobile-based advisory services, voice-assisted applications, and precision agriculture tools are already connecting women to markets, knowledge systems, and financial services.
  - These solutions help formalise women's labour while expanding access to schemes, credit, and fair pricing.

### Fiscal Health Index 2026

- **Context:** NITI Aayog has released the second annual edition of Fiscal Health Index (FHI 2026).



### Key Highlights

- **Overall State Rankings:**
  - Odisha remains the top-performing state, further improving its fiscal score.
  - Goa and Jharkhand also feature among the Achiever states.
  - Gujarat and Maharashtra continue to remain in the top five.
  - Haryana shows a notable improvement by gaining three ranks.
- **States Showing Recovery:** Bihar, Karnataka, and Telangana demonstrate moderate improvement in fiscal performance.
- **Low-Performing States:** Punjab, West Bengal, and Kerala continue to remain at the bottom of the rankings, reflecting persistent fiscal stress.

- **NE and Himalayan States:**
  - Evaluated separately for the first time, Arunachal Pradesh tops as Achiever (strong revenue growth), followed by Uttarakhand;
  - Himachal Pradesh and Manipur lag due to weak own-revenues (<5% GSDP) and fiscal stress from high committed expenditures.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Priorities include boosting own-tax capacity (e.g., property, excise reforms), elevating capex to 5%+ GSDP, enhancing public financial management via digitization, and curbing off-budget borrowings to ensure debt sustainability below 25-30% GSDP.

### About Fiscal Health Index (FHI)

- **FHI initiative** assesses the fiscal health of states in India.
- **Sub-Indices:** Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability.
- **Data for the index** is sourced from the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

