

Standing Committee on Rural Development Released Report on “Devolution of Funds under Panchayati Raj System”

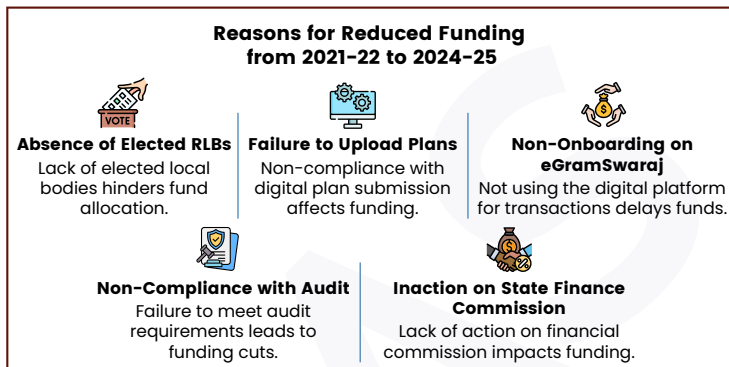
Rural Local Bodies (RLBs) receive financial devolution based on the recommendations of the Central Finance Commissions which are empowered by the **Article 280** of the Constitution of India.

Key Concerns Raised by the Parliamentary Report

- **A steady decline in the allocation of funds to RLBs:** This undermines the foundation of **fiscal decentralisation** under the **73rd Constitutional Amendment**.
- **Reduction in Untied (See box) and scheme-based transfers** limits PRIs’ development role and undermines their credibility as self-governing bodies.
- **The devolution of the 3Fs:** Functions, Funds, and Functionaries, to PRIs continues to be **partial, fragmented, & uneven** across states.
- **Delays in constitution of State Finance Commissions (SFCs):** E.g., some States have not even constituted **3rd, 4th and 5th SFC**.
- **Pace of auditing & submission of Action Taken Reports (ATRs)** continues to be sub-optimal in several States. E.g., **Arunachal Pradesh and Chhattisgarh**.

Recommendations

- **Ensure adequate, untied, and performance-linked resources** to PRIs, while developing mechanisms **to ring-fence funds**, prevent diversion, and enhance transparency.
- **Central Govt should impress upon the State Governments** to constitute SFCs regularly without any delay so that the flow of central grants is not stopped or minimised.
- **Each state must prepare and publish** a clear, **time-bound roadmap** for devolution of powers to PRIs.



Grants to RLBs under XV Finance Commission are divided into two categories:

- **Untied Grants (40%):** To be utilised for location-specific felt needs under 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- **Tied Grants (60%):** To be utilised for national priorities like drinking water supply, sanitation, solid and liquid waste management, rainwater harvesting and water recycling.

Report “Status of Small Cats in Tiger Landscape of India” released on Global Tiger Day (July 29)

Report compiled by **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** and **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** provides comprehensive assessment of **small cats’ occupancy status and dynamics**.





Key Findings:

- **Jungle Cat** is **most widespread** small cat species in India, followed by **Rusty-Spotted Cat (World’s smallest wildcat)**.
- **10 small cat species found in India** include Pallas’s cat, Eurasian lynx, Jungle cat, Fishing cat, leopard cat, custy-spotted cat, marbled cat, Asiatic golden cat, Desert cat, and Caracal.

About Small Cats

- **Small cats** are diverse group of **hyper carnivores** within subfamily Felinae, found across nearly all terrestrial biomes.
- **Difference with Big Cats:**
 - ⊕ **Big cats (Like tigers, lions etc.)** possess a flexible **hyoid bone** enabling them to **roar**. In contrast, small cats have a **rigid hyoid bone**, which allows them to **purr continuously**.

Major Small Cats in India:

 Species	 Habitat	 Characteristics	 Conservation Status
Asiatic golden cat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endemic to Indo-Malayan ecorealm i.e. Assam, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and West Bengal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Territorial and solitary (With occasional pairing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IUCN: Near Threatened Wildlife Act: Scheduled-I
Caracal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arid and semi-arid regions Reported in only three states in India (Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also called Siya Gosh (black-tufted ears) Solitary and territorial animal, nocturnal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IUCN: Least Concern, Wild Life Act: Schedule I
Fishing cat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wetland environments Sundarbans, Himalayan foothills, and parts of Northeast India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nocturnal Webbed hind feet: To propel itself in shallow water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IUCN: Vulnerable Wild Life Act: Schedule I
Eurasian lynx	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barren, relatively open, rocky mountainous plateau of Central Asia. India: some parts of Ladakh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily solitary, territorial, and nocturnal animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IUCN: Least Concern Wildlife Act: Scheduled-I

New Study Maps Flash Flood Prone Hotspots Across the Indian Subcontinent

The Study has found that flash floods are mainly centred in the **Himalayas, the west coast, and Central India**.

Key Findings:

- **Extremely flash flood-prone sub-basins** are located in the **Brahmaputra, Narmada, Tapi, Mahanadi, Brahmani, and West Coast River basins**.
- **High flash flood susceptibility** is also observed in parts of the **Godavari, Ganga, Mahi, and Indus River basins**.

Flood Mitigation Strategies

<p>Early Warning Systems Region-specific systems should factor in soil saturation, rainfall patterns, etc.</p>	<p>Updated Risk Mapping Expand surveillance to emerging hotspots outside historic flood zones.</p>	<p>Climate-Resilient Infrastructure Build drainage, embankments, and retention structures for resilience.</p>	<p>Land-Use Planning Prevent encroachments in vulnerable zones with proper planning.</p>
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What are Flash Floods?

- **Definition:** A flash flood is a flood of short duration with a relatively high peak discharge in which the time interval between the observable causative event and the flood is less than four to six hours (WMO, 2006).
- **Flash Floods and India:**
 - ⊕ **Between 2020-2022**, the number of flash flood events increased from 132 to 184 (Jal Shakti Ministry).
 - ⊕ Every year, more **than 5,000 people die** due to Flash Floods

Key Drivers of Flash Floods

- **25% Flash floods** occur typically within **six hours** of heavy rainfall often triggered by **cloudbursts**. E.g., **Himalayan regions**.
- **Steep Topography and Narrow River Channels in Mountainous Regions:** Facilitating rapid water accumulation and downstream surge.
- **Saturated Soil** (due to concrete, roads): Water fails to percolate and results in sudden surface runoff.
- **Sudden release of dams, embankments, or check dams** due to pressure buildup from upstream rainwater.

Flash Flood Guidance System (FFGS): A Tool for Early Warning and Risk Reduction

- FFGS is a **real-time early warning tool** that provides **6–24-hour advance notice** of flash flood threats.
- **Operational since 2020**.
- **Part of a regional initiative** for South Asian countries: **India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka**.
- **Technical Features**
 - ⊕ Provides high-resolution forecasts with 4 km x 4 km spatial coverage.
 - ⊕ Operates at watershed level, focusing on vulnerable Himalayan terrain and urban flash flood zones.

India Facing Growing Threats of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)

GLOFs in the **Himalayan Region pose severe risks**, as seen in **Nepal's Lende River flash floods**. In this regard, enhanced **trans-boundary early warning systems** are crucial for effective **risk mitigation and preparedness**.

What are GLOFs?

- **Definition:** A GLOF, is sudden release of water from a lake fed by glacier melt that has formed at the side, in front, within, beneath, or on the surface of a glacier. E.g., The South Lhonak GLOF in 2023
- **The Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)** is home to **11 river basins** and **28,000 glacial lakes** (body of water that originates from a glacier). **Two primary types of glacial lakes:**
 - ⊕ **Supraglacial lakes:** Formed by meltwater in depressions on glaciers, prone to summer melting.
 - ⊕ **Moraine-dammed lakes:** Formed by meltwater at glacier toes, dammed by loose debris or ice-cores, prone to sudden failure.

Factors Increasing IHR's Susceptibility to GLOFs

- **Triggers of GLOFs:**
 - ⊕ **2/3rd** of GLOF events is triggered by **ice avalanches** or **landslides**.
 - ⊕ **Remaining** are caused by **excessive meltwater pressure** on **weak moraine dams** (Chorabari GLOF in 2013) and earthquakes.
- **Rising Temperatures and Glacial Melt:** **2023 and 2024** were the hottest years on Earth, leading to higher temperatures and increased glacial melt.
- **Challenges in Monitoring 7,500 glacial lakes** are **above 4,500 meters**, making them difficult to survey during a short summer window.

India's Mitigation Strategy for GLOF Risk

- NDMA, through its **Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction (CoDRR)**, has initiated a proactive shift from mere post-disaster response to risk reduction.
- **National Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) Risk Mitigation Project (NGRMP) is being implemented** in four states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Uttarakhand.
- The **Central Water Commission (CWC)** now monitors 902 glacial lakes and water bodies in the Himalayas via satellite imagery.
- **Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)** imagery is being used to automatically detect changes in glacial lake size even during clouded monsoon months.

Earthquake in Russia's Far East causes tsunami in Pacific Ocean

An earthquake of magnitude 8.8 struck **Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula** triggering **tsunami waves near Kuril Islands** in the Pacific Ocean.

About Tsunami

- It is a **series of extremely long waves** caused by a large and **sudden displacement of the ocean**, usually the result of an earthquake below or near ocean floor e.g. **Indian Ocean Tsunami (2004)**.
- Causes:** Earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions, glacier calvings, meteorites, other underwater explosions (including nuclear).
- Tsunamis are frequently observed along the **Pacific Ring of fire**.
 - Ring of Fire** is a belt of **active and dormant volcanoes** surrounding the Pacific Ocean.

Characteristics of Tsunami Waves:

- Wavelength:** Their speed & wavelength primarily depends on ocean depth, not distance from the wave's source.
 - Wavelength** in the deep ocean is approx. 200 km and near coast, it **reduces to less than 20 km due to shoaling**.
- Wave Height (Amplitude):** Not noticed by ships in deep oceans because their amplitude is negligible.
 - However when **tsunamis approach shallow water, wave amplitude increases**.

Consequences:

- Socio-Economic:** Destruction of property, Loss of lives and livelihoods.
- Environmental:** Destroying Mangroves, coral reefs, estuaries, also leads to **Soil and Water Contamination**.
- Others:** Disruption of essential services, psychological stress etc.

NDMA Guidelines for Tsunami

- Mandate a multi-tiered institutional structure** (NDMA, SDMA, DDMA) to enhance preparedness, mitigation, and emergency response.
- Developing early warning systems**, Doing hazard and vulnerability assessment
- Effective mitigation measures** e.g. Land use planning, Developing Natural buffers like bio shields, mangrove regeneration etc. & Protection of Critical Infrastructure.
- Promoting public awareness, education, and comprehensive training** across all stakeholder groups.

Central Empowered Committee (CEC) files a report regarding management of Compensatory Afforestation Funds

CEC report highlighted that India **achieved 85% of overall Compensatory Afforestation Target** between 2019-20 and 2023-24.

- CEC is a body established by the Supreme Court to oversee environmental and conservation matters.

About Compensatory afforestation (CA):

- It means **afforestation done in lieu of the diversion of forest land** for non-forestry use (Like industrial or infrastructure development) under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**.

About Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016:

- Originated from **SC's orders in TN Godavarman v. UoI (1995)**.
- Created **CA Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPa)** at National and State level.
- Provides for **establishment of CA funds** under the public accounts of India and the public accounts of each State.

Issues with Release of CA funds (Highlighted by CEC): Delay in Annual Plan of Operation (APO) submission, Multiple Approvals at State Level despite National Authority's clearance, Understaffed CAMPa Offices, Monitoring Gaps, and Misuse of Funds etc.

Recommendations of CEC

- Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms:** Governing Body, the Steering Committee, and Executive Committee of State CAMPa must meet on a regular basis.
- Enhance Monitoring & Transparency:** Geo-tagging and online disclosure of CA sites on platforms, such as e-Green Watch and PARIVESH 2.0, shall be mandated.
- Other Recommendations:** Streamline Fund Flow, Ensure Timely APO Submission etc.



Also In News



Kaziranga Tiger Reserves (KTR)

KTR has recorded the third-highest tiger density in India after Karnataka's Bandipur and Uttarakhand's Corbett National Park.

About KTR

- Declared National Park in 1974, Declared Tiger reserve in 2006.
- Declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1985**.
- Recognized as an **Important Bird Area** by BirdLife International.
- Location:** Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspots.
 - Lies between the Brahmaputra River and the Karbi (Mikir) Hills.
- Fauna:** Greater one-horned rhinoceros (**70% of its population**), elephants, wild water buffalo, swamp deer, tiger etc.
- Birds:** lesser white-fronted goose, ferruginous duck, Baer's pochard duck and lesser adjutant, greater adjutant, migrate from Central Asia during the winter season.



Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks (CGPDTM)

Patent Office (CGPDTM) releases Revised Guidelines for Examination of Computer Related Inventions (CRIs), 2025

About CGPDTM

- Ministry:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, DPIIT)
- CGPDTM Office:** Mumbai
- Functions of CGPDTM**
 - Supervises implementation of patent, design, trademark, and GI laws.
 - Advises the Government on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) matters.
 - Oversees administrative functions of all IP registries and related institutes.



Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)

RBI has issued revised guidelines capping investment by Regulated Entities at 20% of the corpus of an AIF scheme.

About Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)

- Any fund established or incorporated in India which is a **privately pooled investment vehicle** which collects funds from sophisticated investors, whether Indian or foreign, **for investing it in accordance with a defined investment policy** for the benefit of its investors.
- AIFs are **regulated by the SEBI**, as per the SEBI (Alternative Investment Funds) Regulations, 2012.

Categories of AIFs

- Category I AIF:** Invest in start-ups, early-stage ventures or sectors considered socially or economically beneficial.
 - E.g. Venture Capital Funds, Angel funds, SME Funds, Infrastructure Funds
- Category II AIF:** They do not use leverage or debts other than to cover their day-to-day operational expenses.
 - E.g. Private Equity Funds, Debt Funds, Real Estate Funds.
- Category III AIF:** It may use leverage including through investment in listed or unlisted derivatives.
 - E.g. Hedge Funds, Private investment in public equity (PIPE).



Skill Impact Bond

Minister of State for skill development and entrepreneurship cited SIB as delivering measurable social impact.

About SIBs

- SIB is the **first development impact bond** in India dedicated to skills training and job placement.
- Objective:** To benefit 50,000 young Indians over four years, with 60% of the beneficiaries being women.
- Launched: In 2021.**
- Ministry:** Ministry of skill development & entrepreneurship through the National Skill Development Corporation.



Operation Mahadev

Centre tells Lok Sabha that three Pakistani terrorists behind Pahalgam attack have been killed in Operation Mahadev.

About Operation Mahadev

- A **joint counter terror mission** of Indian Army, CRPF & J&K Police.
- Objective:** Eliminate foreign terrorists who have infiltrated into Kashmir valley with support from Pakistan-based groups like LeT.



Pralay missile

DRDO conducted two consecutive successful flight tests of the Pralay missile at Odisha coast.

About Pralay missile:

- A **surface-to-surface short range solid propellant quasi-ballistic missile** which can fly at **hypersonic speed (Above Mach 5)**.
 - Quasi ballistic missiles are a class of missiles that have low trajectory and take ballistic trajectory but **can change course and make maneuvers during the flight if required**.
- Developed indigenously by:** Hyderabad-based DRDO facility Research Centre Imarat in collaboration with other facilities
- Strike Range:** From 150 to 500 km.



Digital Payment Index (DPI)

The Indian digital payment landscape has witnessed over 65,000 crore digital transactions amounting to more than Rs. 12,000 lakh crores in the last 6 Financial years.

About DPI

- RBI has developed the DPI (**published Semi-annually**) to measure the extent of digital payment adoption across India.
- DPI comprises these broad parameters:** Payment Enablers; Payment Infrastructure – Demand-side factors & Supply-side-factors; Payment Performance; Consumer Centricity.
- The latest RBI-DPI indicates over fourfold growth in digital payment penetration since 2018.



Ratadiya Ri Dheri

A Harappan site has surfaced at Ratadiya Ri Dheri, marking the first known Indus Valley settlement in Rajasthan's arid region.

About Ratadiya Ri Dheri:

- Time – Period:** Belongs to the mature urban phase of Indus Valley civilization (**2600 to 1900 BC**).
- Location:** 4,500-year-old settlement in Jaisalmer district
- Significance:**
 - Fills a big gap on the archeological map:** connects the dots between older Harappan sites in northern Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Other Indus Valley settlements in Rajasthan:

- Kalibangan:** Located in northern Rajasthan, India, was established as a **planned city around 2900 BC** and discovered by Italian Indologist Luigi Pio Tessitori.

Place in News



Syria (Capital: Damascus)

- In India's first official outreach since the fall of the Assad regime, MEA officials met ministers in the transitional government.
- Political Features:**
 - Lies in West Asia, on the east coast of Mediterranean Sea (West), in the **Levant region**.
 - Bordering Countries:** Turkey (North), Iraq (East), Jordan (South), Israel and Lebanon (West).
- Geographical Features**
 - Major Physical Regions:** Syrian Desert, Euphrates River Valley, and Anti-Lebanon Mountains (mark Syria's border with Lebanon).
 - Major Rivers:** Euphrates, Orontes, Tigris.
 - Major Conflict Cities:** Aleppo, Homs, Idlib, **Golan Heights (Disputed territory with Israel) etc.**



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI