

## UNCTAD's (UN Trade and Development) Global Trade Update on Mobilising trade to curb Plastic Pollution

The update comes as the talks on the **UN Plastic Treaty** are currently underway in **Geneva**.

### Key Highlights


- **Rising Global Plastic production and Trade:** Mainly for single use, grew from **2 million metric tonnes (MMT)** in **1950** to **436 MMT** in **2022**.
  - ☉ Of this, only **10%** is **recycled** and nearly **75%** becomes waste.
- **Rising Plastic Trade:** Over **78%** plastic produced was traded internationally (2022).
- **Absence of International Agreements:** Like for **biodiversity** (Convention on Biological Diversity) and **climate change** (Paris Agreement).
- **Untapped Potential:** **Bio based** and **Compostable Plastics** though available in many countries constitute only **1.5%** of the global plastic production.
- **Policy Issues:** While **tariffs** on **plastic and rubber products** reduced from **34%** to **7.2%** over past 30 years, the same for **alternatives** like bamboo, paper, etc., **remains around 14.4%**.

### Way Forward

- **Sector Based Reforms:** Example **tackling single use plastics** through targeted bans like taxes and **plastics with long life span** (E.g., road construction) through better R&D, and product design.
- **Strengthen Plastic Data Systems:** To improve **transparency** and **comparability** across its life cycle.
- **Synergies with related Frameworks:** Like **Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm (BRS)** Conventions.

### Plastics' and Triple Planetary Crisis: Pollution, Biodiversity Loss, and Climate Change

  
**Impact on Wild-life**  
Harm over 1,400 wildlife species

  
**Greenhouse Gases**  
98% Plastics are fossil fuel-derived.

  
**Cross Border Menace**  
Plastic Wastes leaks into terrestrial and marine ecosystems crossing borders.

  
**Disproportionate Impact**  
On the Small Island Developing States and developing countries.

### Measures to curb Plastic Pollution

- **India: Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules, 2016 and its key amendments**
  - ☉ **PWM Amendment Rules, 2021:** Prohibits Single Use Plastic (SUP) (Effective from July 2022).
  - ☉ **PWM Amendment Rules, 2022:** Extended Producer Responsibility for plastic packaging.
  - ☉ **PWM Amendment Rules, 2024:** Outlines responsibilities of Urban local body and Panchayat.
- **Global Initiatives:** Annex V of **MARPOL** Convention; **Bridgetown Covenant**, etc.

## Revenue cannot be earned at the cost of Environment and Ecology: Supreme Court (SC)

Observation was made in a Special Leave Petition wherein SC upheld the **Himachal Pradesh State Government's** notification prohibiting all private construction on sites declared as **Green Area**.

### Key Issues faced by the Region: Observations of SC

- **Infrastructure development:** Driven by the twin goals of **connectivity and tourism (both Nature and Religious)** causes proliferation of projects like **four-lane highways, private infrastructure on unstable slopes**, etc.
- **Hydropower Expansion:** Coupled with **rampant construction** impacts aquatic life. E.g. **River Sutlej** stands reduced to a **rivulet**.
- **Increased Vulnerability:** Unchecked activities has **weakened soil structure** increasing vulnerability to disasters. E.g., **Kullu (2025), Mandi (2025), Shimla (2023)**.
- **Glacier Retreat:** Biggest **Bara Shigri glacier** in Lahaul Spiti has been reduced by **almost 2-2.5 kilometres**.
- **Legislative Bottlenecks:** Legislations governing municipalities for **waste collection and management**, not in sync with **Waste Management Rules 2016**.
- **Administrative Issues:** Removal of **forest guard check posts** earlier set up at various places within the State has compounded the problem of illegal felling of trees.

### Ways for Effective Resolution of Issues

- **Proper Monitoring and Government Accountability:** To check the diversion of **green tax funds** (levied on the districts accorded with special status) for unrelated purposes.
- **Addressing Illicit Operations:** Like Mining and quarrying by **offering alternative income sources** and **effective enforcement of environmental regulations**.
- **Expert Opinions:** Opinion of **Geologists, Environmental Experts and local people** to be taken before starting developmental projects.
- **Sustainable Solid Waste Management:** Localised segregation, community awareness, and decentralised processing.

## 26 tech companies sign up to EU Commission's AI Code of Practice on General-Purpose (GPAI)

26 major tech companies, including **Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and IBM**, have voluntarily signed the EU Commission's AI Code of Practice on GPAI.

- Code is voluntary, signatories may benefit from enhanced legal certainty and a smoother transition into the binding requirements of the EU AI Act slated to take effect within the next two years.
- The code has three chapters i.e. **transparency, copyright and Safety & Security**
- **About EU AI Act**
  - ⊖ **EU AI Act** is the world's **first comprehensive AI law**.
  - ⊖ The act takes a **risk-based approach to regulation, applying different rules to AI** according to the risk they pose.
  - ⊖ It ensures **clearer accountability for AI providers**, with a direct impact on businesses using generative AI through their value chains and third-party risk management.
  - ⊖ Much like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the EU AI Act is anticipated to become a **global standard**, aiming to ensure AI's positive rather than negative effects on lives worldwide.
  - ⊖ **Compliance**: Penalties for non-compliance are significant—up to 7% of global turnover.
- **Key concerns raised by companies**
  - ⊖ Code introduces **legal uncertainties for model developers** and extends beyond the scope of the forthcoming AI Act.
  - ⊖ Regulatory complexity and administrative burdens may **impact Europe's AI competitiveness**

### AI regulation in India

- India has no law for specifically regulating AI.
- Instead, it has focused its resources on a government mission designed to support the development and adoption of AI.
- The IndiaAI mission aims to foster an innovative, skilled, safe, and trustworthy AI ecosystem.

## Himalayan clouds carrying Toxic Heavy Metals: Study

Study by the **Bose Institute, Kolkata** under **Department of Science and Technology** has shattered the **myth of "clean" mountain rain**.

### Key Highlights of the Study

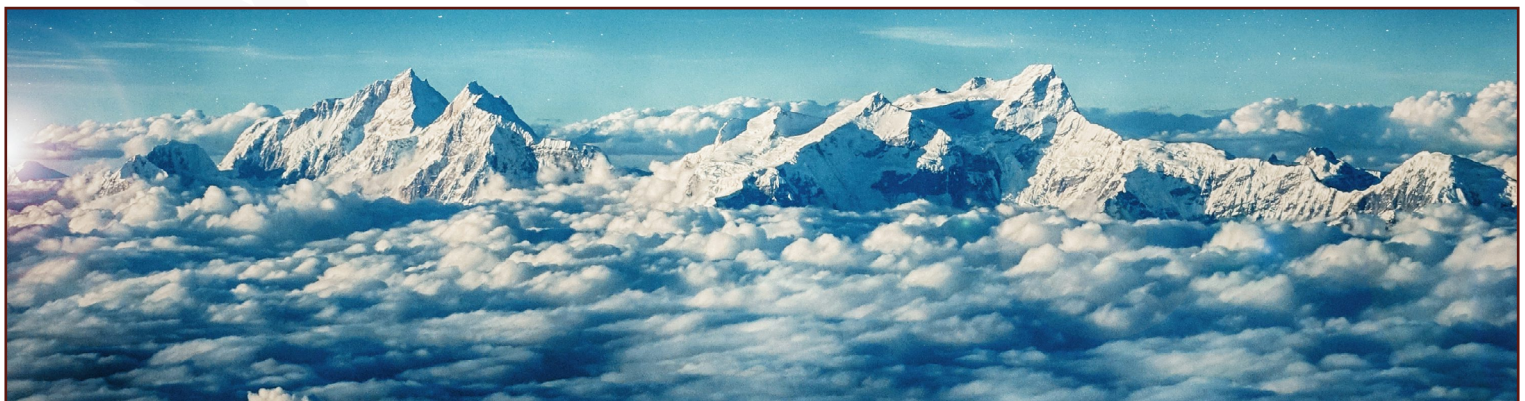
- **Toxic Heavy Metals**: **Low level clouds** are polluted with **heavy toxic metals** in India.
- **Key Contaminants**: Cadmium (Cd), copper (Cu), zinc (Zn), and chromium (Cr) detected in **non-precipitating clouds** over Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas.
- **Higher Pollution in Eastern Himalayas**: **1.5 times more pollution** with **40–60% higher toxic metal** loading.
- **Health Risks**: Children face **30% higher risk** than adults, **dissolved Cr** increases the risk of carcinogenic diseases, etc.
- **Major Causes**: **Vehicular emissions** from foothill regions, **Industrial pollution** from nearby lowlands, etc.

### About Heavy Metals (HM) and HM Pollution

- **Characteristics of HM**: High **atomic weight** ranging from **63.5 to 200.6** and a **density greater than 4000 kg/m<sup>3</sup>**. E.g., zinc, copper, cadmium, cobalt, arsenic, lead, chromium, etc.
  - ⊖ Comprise over **50 elements** on the periodic table of which about 17 are **extremely lethal**.
- **Occurrence**: **Naturally occurring** in the Earth's crust since its formation.
- **Causes of Pollution**: Anthropogenic activity, particularly **metal-based industrial activities** such as smelting, mining, foundries, and the leaching of metals, etc.

### Key Measures taken to curb Pollution in Himalayan Regions

- **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem**: To **Scientifically** assess the vulnerability of the Himalayan regions.
- **SECURE Himalaya Project**: Under "Global Partnership on Wildlife Conservation and Crime Prevention for Sustainable Development" (funded by Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- **Himalayan State Regional Council**: Established by **NITI Aayog**.



## Election to the Office of the Vice-President of India, 2025

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced the election date for the 17th Vice-Presidential Election.

### Constitutional Provisions related to Vice President:

- **Term & Vacancy:** As per Article 67, the Vice President serves for five years. Article 68(2) mandates a prompt election in case of vacancy.
- **Electoral College:** Comprises members of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha (elected + nominated).
  - ⊖ Present strength: 782 MPs.
- **Voting System:** Proportional Representation by **Single Transferable Vote** and **secret ballot** (Article 66(1)).
- **Authority:** Election Commission of India (ECI) under Article 324 and through powers under Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952.

#### Eligibility

- A person cannot be elected as Vice-President unless he –
- is a citizen of India;
  - has completed the age of 35 years, and
  - is qualified for election as a member of the Council of States (Rajya Sabha).

### Election Procedure of Vice President:

- **Nomination:** Requires 20 proposers and 20 seconders; ₹15,000 deposit is mandatory.
- **Voting:** Conducted in Parliament House using special ECI-supplied pens. First preference vote is compulsory.
- **Supervision:** ECI appoints the Returning Officer (Secretary General, Rajya Sabha) and observers.

### Key Safeguards Followed in Elections:

- **No party whip** allowed.
- Violation of **secrecy** or use of **unauthorized pen** invalidates the vote.
- **Bribery** or **undue influence** is grounds for election challenge under the **Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952**.

## Also in News



### UN-India Global Capacity-Building Initiative

India launches projects with the UN under Global Capacity Building Initiative for Asia, Africa and Caribbean countries.

#### About Global Capacity Building Initiative

- **Genesis:** India and the United Nations jointly launched it in September 2023.
- **Objective:** Share **India's development experiences**, best practices, and expertise with Global South nations through capacity-building and training programs for accelerating progress on the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- Implemented through the new **UN India SDG Country Fund** as well as the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC)**.



### Landraces

Odisha has launched a new roadmap to integrate **Landraces**, into formal seed systems.

#### About Landraces

- **Meaning:** **Traditional seed varieties** or **Landraces** are **genetically diverse crop populations**, evolved over generations with traditional farmer practices through a **combination of natural adaptation** and **human selection**.
- **Significance:** Tuned to local **agro-climatic conditions** with traits like **climate resilience**, **yield stability**, **pest tolerance**, and **nutritional richness**, etc.
- **Threat:** **Genetic Erosion** due to changes in agricultural practices, land use, use of pesticides, etc.



### New UPI rules

New UPI rules will be implemented from August 1.

- Unified Payments Interface is an **instant real-time payment system developed by NPCI** to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones.

#### About new rules

- New rules will apply to **all payment service providers like Google Pay, PhonePe, or Paytm**.
- The new rules will regulate activities like **checking bank balance**, **processing autopayments** and **accessing bank details**.
- It allows **users to find the link of accounts linked to their mobile** by a particular account provider.



### India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)

**India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)** has launched Aadhaar-Based Face Authentication.

- Developed under the framework of **UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India)**.
- Enables customers to perform banking transactions through facial recognition, **eliminating fingerprints or OTPs** causing inclusive banking, fast transactions, etc.

#### About India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)

- **Launched on:** 2018
- **Ministry:** Department of Posts, **Ministry of Communication**
- **Aim:** Leverages the **extensive postal network** to bring banking services to the doorstep of every citizen.
- **Equity:** 100% owned by Government of India.





## Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA)

IEPFA is set to launch its Integrated Portal, a unified digital platform designed to streamline claim processes and enhance accessibility for both investors and companies.

### About IEPFA:

- **Established:** in 2016, under the provisions of sub-section 5 of Section 125 of the Companies Act, 2013
- **Functioning under:** the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- **Functions:**
  - ⊕ administration of the Investor Education Protection Fund (IEPF),
  - ⊕ making refunds of shares, unclaimed dividends, matured deposits/debentures etc. to investors,
  - ⊕ promoting awareness among investors, and protecting the interests of the investors.
  - ⊕ advancing financial literacy nationwide.
- **Initiatives taken:** Niveshak Didi, Niveshak Panchayat, and Niveshak Shivir.



## Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)

Prime Ministry released the **20th instalment** of PM-KISAN.

### About PM-KISAN

- **Genesis:** 2019
- **Type:** Central Sector Scheme
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
- **Objective:** Provide income support to **all landholding farmers' families**, which have cultivable landholding in their names.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** All **institutional Land holders**; and Farmer families with members holding **former and present constitutional posts**, employees of central/state governments, professionals like Doctors, engineers, etc.
- **Financial Benefits:** **Rs.6000/- per annum** per family payable in three equal instalments of Rs.2000/- each, every four months through the **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)**.



## 71st National Film Awards

71st National Film Awards for the year 2023 were announced in different categories.

### About National film award

- **Established:** 1954
- **Aim:** To highlight films that contribute significantly to Indian cinema and culture.
- **Presented by:** President of India (annually)
- **Awards for the year 2023**
  - **Best Feature Film:** 12th Fail
  - **Best Actor:** Shah Rukh Khan (Jawan) and Vikrant Massey (12th Fail)
  - **Best Actress:** Rani Mukerji (Mrs. Chatterjee Vs Norway)
  - **Best Short Film:** Giddh The Scavenger
  - **Best Non-Feature Film:** Flowering Man



## Alpine Musk Deer

**Central Zoo Authority (CZA)** report revealed a mix-up in identifying **Alpine musk deer** for conservation breeding, mistaking it for its Himalayan counterpart.

### About Alpine Musk Deer

- **Habitat:** **Temperate climate** in alpine meadows, shrub lands, birch, blue pine and fir forests from 3,000-4,500m above sea level.
  - ⊕ Native species of **India, Nepal, Bhutan** and **China**.
- **Key Characteristics:** **Solitary and shy, herbivorous**, with a gestation period **180-200 days**.
  - ⊕ **Musk Deer** is **unique with fangs and without antlers and gall bladder**.
- **Threat:** **Poaching for muskpod** used in **perfumes** and **traditional medicines**.
- **Conservation Status:** **Endangered** (IUCN); **Schedule I** (Wildlife Protection Act, 1972).



## Centres of Excellence recognised under the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)

The Ministry of Mines has recognized **7 institutes as Centres of Excellence (CoE)** under the NCMM. They include:

- IIT Bombay
- IIT Hyderabad
- IIT - ISM Dhanbad
- IIT Roorkee
- CSIR – IMMT, Bhubaneswar
- CSIR – NML, Jamshedpur
- NFTDC, Hyderabad
- These CoEs will operate in a hub and spoke model and leverage R&D in critical minerals.
- Critical minerals are **essential for clean energy technologies** like solar panels, wind turbines, EVs, and energy storage systems. To secure these resources, India **launched the NCMM to ensure their long-term availability and processing**.

