

# NEWS TODAY

## United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) adopted landmark resolution on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- U.S. led resolution on **promotion of safe, secure and trustworthy AI systems** will benefit sustainable development for all.
  - ⊕ It was co-sponsored or backed by **more than 120 other Member States**.
  - ⊕ This resolution helps to ensure that **benefits of AI reach countries from all regions** and at all levels of development and **focuses on capacity building and bridging digital divides**, especially for developing countries.
- **Key highlights of resolution**
  - ⊕ **Encourages Member States** from all regions and countries within their respective roles including private sector, civil society, etc. to develop and support regulatory approaches related to safe AI system.
  - ⊕ Recognizes **data is fundamental** to development and operation of AI systems.
  - ⊕ **Human rights and fundamental freedoms** must be respected, protected and promoted throughout life cycle of AI systems.
  - ⊕ Encourages continued efforts by international community to **promote inclusive research, mapping and analysis** that benefit all parties on potential applications that AI systems can have in development of existing and new and emerging technologies.
  - ⊕ Promoting AI systems that advance, protect and preserve **linguistic and cultural diversity**.
- **Other steps taken to promote AI:** European Union AI Act; Bletchley Declaration for AI; Global Partnership on AI New Delhi Declaration etc.

### United Nation General Assembly (UNGA)

- **Established in 1945 under Charter of United Nations**, it occupies central position as chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of UN.
- Comprised of all **193 Members of UN**.
- It can grant **observer status** to non-member States.
- **Inter-governmental organisations can seek observer status** in UNGA.
- Permanent Observers may participate in sessions and workings of General Assembly and **maintain missions at UN Headquarters**.

## UN World Water Development Report 2024 focused on 'Water for Prosperity and Peace' was released

- Report recognises water's **critical role in ensuring peace and prosperity** (refer to the box) but finds that there is **no conclusive evidence that the next wars will be over water**.
- **Key highlights of report**
  - ⊕ **Current Status of water resources**
    - ◆ **Agriculture** accounts for **70%** of freshwater withdrawals.
    - ◆ **Lake Chad** has **decreased** in size **by 90%** over **60 years**.
    - ◆ While cooperation over shared surface water appears to be gaining momentum, **groundwater resources remain grossly neglected**.
  - ⊕ **Attaining SDG 6** (water for all by 2030) is **challenging**
    - ◆ **50% of the world's population experiences severe water scarcity** for at least part of the year.
    - ◆ **Northwest India and North China** are among world's top three hotspots of **water-related risks to food production**.
  - ⊕ **Prevalence of Water–Prosperity Paradox**
    - ◆ **Developed water resource infrastructure can promote growth and prosperity**, however, **only richest countries can afford them**.
- **Key recommendations:** Sustainable management of water resources can be ensured by:
  - ⊕ **Transboundary agreements**.
  - ⊕ **Increased private investment** (universal access to water will require an annual investment of around US \$114 billion until 2030).
  - ⊕ **Decoupling water and production in Industries**.
    - ◆ For example, **Tata Chemicals cut the use of groundwater by 99.4%** within a year through recycling and water management.


### Linkage of water with peace and prosperity

- **Water and peace:** Water scarcity may lead to
  - ⊕ an **increase in local disputes** as being seen in the Sahel region.
  - ⊕ **Migration** that may increase **tension in settlement areas**.
  - ⊕ **heightened food insecurity**.
- **Water and prosperity:**
  - ⊕ Water helps to maintain **environmental integrity**.
  - ⊕ In low and lower-middle-income countries **around 70-80% of the jobs are water dependent**.
  - ⊕ **Water is critical for inclusivity** (Girls and women are the first victims of water scarcity as it undermines their education, economic participation and safety).

## Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded Financing Agrochemical Reduction and Management (FARM) Programme launched

### Key highlights of FARM

- ⊕ **About:** FARM, a one of the first such concerted efforts on a global scale, is a **\$379 million** initiative that will **realign financial incentives** to:
  - ◆ **Prevent the use** of harmful inputs in food production.
  - ◆ **Encourage the adoption** of **low and non-chemical alternatives**.
- ⊕ **It will support:**
  - ◆ **Government regulation to phase out persistent organic pollutants (POPs)** -containing agrochemicals and agri-plastics and adopt **better management standards**.
  - ◆ **Strengthening banking, insurance and investment criteria** to improve the availability of effective pest control, production alternatives and trade in sustainable produce.
- ⊕ **Members:** India, Ecuador, Kenya, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Uruguay and Vietnam.
- ⊕ **Implementing Agencies:** Led by **UNEP** and implemented by the ADB, UNDP, and UNIDO with execution carried out in-country by FAO.
- ⊕ **Tenure:** 5 Years
- **Significance of FARM Initiative:**
  - ⊕ **Nearly 4 billion tons of pesticides and 12 billion kg of agricultural plastics** are used every year which has a harmful impact on health and environment.
  - ⊕ **Highly hazardous pesticides and mismanaged agricultural plastics** release toxic POPs (chemicals which do not break down in the environment and contaminate air, water, and food).
    - ◆ **However, currently farmers have little incentive to adopt better practices** as these chemicals are generally cheaper than sustainable alternatives.



**Global Environment Facility (GEF)**

HQ: Washington, D.C (US)

- **Genesis:** Established during 1992 Rio Earth Summit.
- **About:** GEF is a **unique partnership of 18 agencies** – including UN agencies, multilateral development banks, national entities and international NGOs **working with member countries** to address the **world's most challenging environmental issues**.
- **Role:** Serves as **financial mechanism** for five international environmental conventions:
  - ⊕ **Minamata Convention** on Mercury,
  - ⊕ **Stockholm Convention** on POPs,
  - ⊕ UN Convention on **Biological Diversity** (UNCBD),
  - ⊕ UN Convention to **Combat Desertification** (UNCCD) and
  - ⊕ UN Framework Convention on **Climate Change** (UNFCCC)
- **GEF Trustee:** World Bank
- **Member countries:** More than 180 countries (including India)

## Supreme Court Relooks Earlier Directions, considers lifting ban on transmission lines through Great Indian Bustard (GIB) habitats

- SC constituted an **expert committee** to examine **feasibility** and extent of installing **overhead and underground powerlines** in **GIB habitats**.
  - ⊕ In April, 2021, **SC had ordered power companies in Rajasthan and Gujarat to make the high-tension power lines underground** so that GIB do not get caught in the web.
- Committee is headed by Director, **Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun** and is required to submit its report to Court on or before July 31, 2024.
- **Reasons for reconsidering the earlier direction**
  - ⊕ **Areas is critical to protection of GIB**
    - ◆ With the exception of some areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat, **90% of GIB's habitat has vanished**.
    - ◆ Due to their **lack of frontal vision**, birds are **unable to see overhead powerlines** in front of them from a distance and are **too heavy to move around them in close quarters**.
  - ⊕ Area falling in GIB habitat is also **crucial for development of solar energy sector and undergrounding power lines are difficult as:**
    - ◆ It will **put huge fiscal burden** (around ₹55,000 crore).
    - ◆ Underground cable would pass through **agricultural fields** which is a **safety concern** as the cable might get punctured due to agricultural activities.

### About Great Indian Bustard



- **Habitat include arid and semi-arid grasslands**, open country with thorn scrub, tall grass interspersed with cultivation. It avoids irrigated areas.
- **Rajasthan has the highest population** and it is endemic to Indian Sub-continent.
- **IUCN Status: Critically Endangered**
- **Important Sites:** Desert National Park Sanctuary (Rajasthan), Naliya (Gujarat), Warora (Maharashtra) and Bellary (Karnataka)

## Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) launched Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS), 2024

- MHI has proposed to implement EMPS 2024 after end of tenure of Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) on 31st March 2024.
- **Key highlights of EMPS, 2024**
  - ⊕ **Nodal Ministry:** MHI.
  - ⊕ **Aim:** Faster adoption of **electric two wheeler (e-2W)** and **three wheeler (e-3W)** to provide impetus to green mobility and development of Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturing ecosystem in country.
  - ⊕ **Tenure:** 4 months (1st April 2024 till 31st July 2024).
  - ⊕ **Components of Scheme**
    - ◆ **Subsidies:** Demand incentives for **e-2W and e-3W**.
    - ◆ **Administration of Scheme** including IEC (Information, Education & Communication) activities and fee for Project Management Agency.
  - ⊕ **Conditions to avail Demand Incentives:**
    - ◆ **Original Equipment Manufacturer** is required to be **registered with MHI** and each of their EV models will need to be approved by MHI
    - ◆ Each vehicle model needs to **satisfy minimum technical eligibility criteria** with regard to vehicles efficiency.
  - ⊕ **Eligibility:** Vehicles which are **registered as Motor Vehicle as per Central Motor Vehicle Rules** as well as Vehicles **fitted with only advanced batteries**.
  - ⊕ **Project Implementation and Sanctioning Committee** headed by Secretary (Heavy Industries) constituted for **overall monitoring, sanctioning and implementation of EMPS**.

## State Visit of Prime Minister of India to Bhutan

- **Key highlights of visit**
  - ⊕ Prime Minister of India became the **first foreign government leader to receive Bhutan's highest civilian award, 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo'**.
  - ⊕ India will **provide Rs.10,000 crore as financial support** to Bhutan over next five years to bolster cooperation in areas like energy, space etc.
  - ⊕ Establishing two rail links including **Kokrajhar-Gelephu** and **Banarhat-Samtse to improve connectivity**.
  - ⊕ Both sides look forward to commissioning of **1020 MW Punatsangchhu-II hydropower project** in 2024.
- **Challenges in India-Bhutan Relationship**
  - ⊕ Issues in **Hydropower trade**, i.e. not able to fairly negotiate power tariff.
  - ⊕ Bhutan acting as **Hideout for militants in North-East**.
  - ⊕ Increased financial burden on Bhutan as India moved away from 60:40 model (60% grant, 40% loan) to 30:70 model.
  - ⊕ **Delay in completion of projects** by India e.g. Punatsangchhu II.
- **Implications of increasing China's role in Bhutan for India**
  - ⊕ Bhutan-China negotiated **Dhoklam border deal will have Security implications for India**, due to its close proximity to Siliguri Corridor.
  - ⊕ Improved relationship with China can **impose threat to India's Economic and Energy trade relationship** with Bhutan.
  - ⊕ Close ties with China can **impact traditional pro-India foreign policy of Bhutan**.

## Also in News



### Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Startup Forum

- 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the SCO Startup Forum was organized in New Delhi.
- The initiative focused on broadening
  - ⊕ **Startup interactions among the SCO Member States**,
  - ⊕ **Fostering an environment conducive to innovation**,
  - ⊕ **Promoting job creation**, and inspiring young talent to develop innovative solutions.
- The creation of a **Special Working Group for Startups and Innovation (SWG)** at the Summit of SCO Heads of State in Samarkand (Uzbekistan), in September 2022, was a **key step in the development of the SCO Startup Forum**.
  - ⊕ The SWG is **permanently chaired by India**.
  - ⊕ It is created with the vision of **promoting collaboration among SCO Member States** and accelerating regional economic development.



### Bima Sugam

- Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) approved the setting up of Bima Sugam.
- **About Bima Sugam**
  - ⊕ It is formed under **Section 8 of Companies Act, 2013** as a **not-for-profit company**.
  - ⊕ **It is an insurance e-market** with open standards and an interoperable platform.
  - ⊕ **Act as a one-stop solution for all Insurance stakeholders** vis-a-vis customers, insurers, intermediaries, or insurance intermediaries.
  - ⊕ **Available free of cost** to consumers.
  - ⊕ **Enables insurance companies to validate and authenticate data** from multiple touchpoints in real time.
  - ⊕ It aims to achieve the vision of **"Insurance for all by 2047"**.





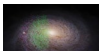
### Postal ballots

- **Election Commission has notified** Postal ballots for essential services workers.
- Postal ballots or vote by post **allow eligible voters to exercise their franchise** when they are unable to cast their votes in person.
- **Eligible voters** for Postal ballots are
  - ⊕ **Service voters** (memembr of armed forces, Armed Police Force of a State, government employees, etc.)
  - ⊕ **Absentee voters** (senior citizens, person with disability, etc.)
  - ⊕ Electors on **election duty** or under **preventive detention**.
- **Paper** used in Postal Ballot is **different** from the one used in the EVM.



### Earth Hour

- Earth Hour" is set to be observed on **March 23 from 8.30pm to 9.30pm (IST)**.
- **Earth Hour**
  - ⊕ Earth Hour was famously started as a **lights-out event in Sydney, Australia in 2007**.
  - ⊕ It is a global event observed **annually on the last Saturday of March**.
  - ⊕ It is organized by the **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)**.
  - ⊕ It is symbolic to **raise awareness about climate change** and promote energy conservation.
  - ⊕ Beyond the hour, Earth Hour **inspires people to take further action for a sustainable future**.



### Shiva and Shakti: Building blocks of Milky Way

- European Space Agency's astrometry satellite Gaia have discovered the earliest building blocks of Milky Way, named them Shiva and Shakti.
- Shiva and Shakti appear to be the **remnants of two galaxies that merged between 12 and 13 billion years ago to form Milky way**.
  - ⊕ **Shakti stars orbit a little further from Milky Way's centre** and in more circular orbits than Shiva stars.
  - ⊕ By studying these, scientists can gain insights into Milky Way's formation process.



### Conference of Parties (COP) Presidencies' Troika

- COP Presidencies' Troika announced to **cut emissions in line with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius**.
  - ⊕ It is aligned with Nationally-Determined Contributions (NDCs) under Paris Agreement by early 2025.
- **UAE, Azerbaijan, and Brazil** are the members of triokia who are the **Presidencies of COP28, COP29 and COP30 respectively**.
- **Troika will focus on** Catalyzing the mobilization and provision of technical and financial resources to further stimulate ambition in NDCs.



### Environmental Clearance (EC) for extracting earth

- SC struck down notification exempting green clearance for extraction of ordinary earth for linear projects like laying of roads and pipelines.
  - ⊕ **Exemption notification** was issued by Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change in 2020.
- **About Judgement**
  - ⊕ Exemption was termed "**Completely Unguided**" and Extraction of earth in an indiscriminate manner is wholly **arbitrary and violative of Article 14 of Constitution**.
  - ⊕ Notification was **non-compliant with Environmental Protection Rules**.
  - ⊕ SC observed that "**linear projects**" **have not been defined** and thus making it vague and exploitative.
  - ⊕ Now, projects shall require prior EC from concerned regulatory authority.



### Black Panther

- A black panther was recently spotted in **Munnar (Kerala)**.
- **About Black Panther**
  - ⊕ Black panthers are **not a distinct species**, but '**melanistic members of the genus Panthera** (lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars and snow leopards).
    - ◆ Genetic mutation is the cause of such **melanin**.
  - ⊕ In practice, the term **black panther only really applies to leopards and jaguars**, as fully black individuals don't occur in the other species.
  - ⊕ **IUCN red list:**
    - ◆ Panthera pardus (vulnerable)
    - ◆ Panthera onca (Not threatened)

## Personality in news



### Sher Singh Shah (1912-1991)

- **About Sher Singh Shah**
  - ⊕ He was a freedom fighter born in **Rudraprayag district of Uttrakhand**.
  - ⊕ His father's name is **Padam Singh Shah**, and his mother's name is **Devki Devi**.
- **Contribution**
  - ⊕ He seceretly **spreading awareness** about the freedom struggle.
  - ⊕ He took an **oath in the Lalita Mai temple** in Nala, declaring that he would serve his country for his entire life.
  - ⊕ He led Quit India movement(1942) from **Kedar Ghati(Uttrakhand)**
  - ⊕ He fought against the British regime at Kasaragod and Barmwadi
- **Awards:** Government of India honoured him with a Copper Plate in 1972.
- **Values:** Courage,Patriotism,Perseverance etc.

