

NEWS TODAY

India hosted 3rd Voice of Global South Summit (VOGSS)

VOGSS aims to **bring together countries of Global South** to share their perspectives on whole range of issues aligned with the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

- **Global South** refers to various countries that are sometimes described as "developing," "less developed" or "underdeveloped." and it's separated from Global North (**rich countries**) by **Brandt line**.
- India hosted **1st and 2nd VOGSS** in January and November of **2023**.

Key highlights of 3rd VOGSS

- **Theme:** "An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future".
- **Virtual Meet:** 123 countries joined virtually (**China & Pakistan not invited**)
- **Global Development Compact (GDC):** India proposed GDC amid concerns over countries **burdened with debt** in name of **development finance**.
 - ⊕ Compact will **focus on trade for development, sustainable growth, technology sharing, etc.**
 - ⊕ India will **launch a special fund of \$2.5 million** to boost trade promotion activities & **Trade policy training fund of \$1 million** for capacity building.

Challenges faced by global south

- **Obsolete Global governance** and financial institutions.
- **Technology divides** between North and South.
- **Terrorism, extremism and separatism** remain a serious threat.

India's Advocacy For Global South

- **Social Impact Fund:** India will contribute \$25 million for accelerating Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in Global South.
- **Global South Young Diplomat Forum:** Launched to promote education and capacity building.
- **Induction of African Union into G20:** As a permanent member during India's G20 Presidency.
- **Vision of Aarogya Maitri:** One World-One Health is India's mission for health security E.g. Jan Aushadhi Kendras in African and Pacific Island countries.

Union Minister writes to Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to cancel lateral entry advertisement

Advertisement was released for the post of **joint secretaries, directors and deputy secretaries** in different central ministries.

- Till now, **63 appointments have been made through lateral entry** out of which 35 appointments have been from the private sector.

About lateral entries

- It refers to the **recruitment of individuals from outside the traditional government service** cadres, to fill mid and senior-level positions in government departments.
- It was formally introduced in 2018, on the recommendation of **NITI Aayog three-year Action Agenda**.
- It was endorsed by the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission** established in 2005.

Arguments in favour

- **Bring in domain expertise** to address complex challenges in governance and policy implementation
- **Augmenting the availability of manpower**, only 442 IAS officers are working with the Centre, against the required strength of 1,469 officers.
- **Widen the talent pool for appointment**, similar practice is also followed in RBI successfully.

Arguments against: difficult to ensure accountability as tenure is short, Lack of field experience, deter existing talent, lack of clarity about reservation, etc.

Other reforms required to strengthen bureaucracy

- **Deputation to Private Sector** to bring in domain expertise and competition.
- **Institutionalize goal setting and tracking for each department.**
- **Appraisal mechanisms** such as the government's new "360 degree" performance appraisal mechanism.
- **Setting up public administration universities** for aspiring and serving civil servants.

Report by BCG and Indiaspora highlights contributions of Indian Americans to US Society

Despite constituting only about 1.5% of U.S. population, Indian diaspora has made substantial contributions to country.

Contributions of Diaspora in USA:

- **Economic impact:** CEOs of Indian origin head 16 Fortune 500 companies.
 - ⊕ Examples of Business Leaders include **Satya Nadella, Shantanu Narayen (Adobe)** etc.
- **Cultural Influence:** Wide celebration of **Diwali and Holi**, celebrated chefs **e.g. Vikas Khanna**, Wellness practices with Indian Roots **e.g. Deepak Chopra**
- **Innovation, Research, and Development:** **13% of US scientific publications** had Indian American co-author. **Famous personalities include** Har Gobind Khorana, Abhijit Banerjee, Manjula Bhargava.
- **Government and Public Services:** Kamala Harris (first woman Vice President of Indian descent), **Bobby Jindal** (first Indian American Governor) etc.

Benefits of Indian Diaspora for India:

- **Economic:** **US is** top source of remittance (\$26B out of \$113 billion in 2022-2023), Since 2000, US companies have invested \$ 63 billion in FDI.
- **Brain Gain:** ~20% of Indian unicorns have co-founders who have leveraged US higher education. **E.g. Rahul Chari (PhonePe), Harsh Jain and Bhavin Seth (Dream11).**
- **Political: Diplomacy and Lobbying (E.g. Indo-US civil nuclear deal),** Indian diaspora in global institutions **E.g. Gita Gopinath, Raghuram Rajan, Soumya Swaminathan etc**
- **Cultural Diplomacy & Soft Power:** 1 in 10 Americans practices **yoga** (2023), spreading of Indian **cuisine & Ayurveda.**
- **Indo-US scientific collaboration:** **E.g. NISAR , iCET etc.**

Initiatives for diaspora engagement by India

- **Know India Programme (KIP):** By Ministry of External Affairs
- **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas:** celebrated on 9th January once every 2 years
- **Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF)**

New study Assesses suitability of different areas of Banni for sustainable grassland restoration

Study analyzed multiple characteristics of soil (nutrients & micronutrients) while using satellite data for grassland restoration considering **ecological value to be primary criterion.**

Findings of study

- Study categorized Banni grassland's restoration zones into **five categories.**
 - ⊕ 36% of existing grassland area was **"highly suitable"**, 28% was **"suitable"**, 27% was **"moderately suitable"**, 7% was **"marginally suitable"** while 2% was **"not suitable"** for restoration.
- First two categories (**Highly suitable and Suitable zones**) can be restored easily with **adequate water sources (Irrigation or rainwater harvesting).**
- **"Marginally suitable" and "not suitable" zones** can be managed through terracing & fertilization while protecting them from **water erosion and salt intrusion.**

About Banni Grassland (Kutch, Gujarat)

- **Asia's largest tropical grassland** spans over 2,600 sq. km. It emerged from sea due to tectonic activities.
- **Flora and Fauna:** Banni buffalo, Kankrej Cattle, Asiatic wild ass, Camel, and horse etc.
- **Cultural significance:** Home to more than 20 ethnic semi-nomadic communities. **E.g. Maldharis (silvipastoralists), Jats etc.**
- Provide ecosystem services **e.g. carbon storage, climate mitigation, pollination etc.**
- **Strange dancing light phenomena** (Chir Batti or Ghost lights) occur here at night.

Threats faced by Banni Grasslands

- Excessive pressure from **livestock grazing**
- Increased soil salinity leading to **invasion of Prosopis juliflora**
- **Water scarcity(aridity),** climate change and desertification

Steps taken for Grassland restoration In India:

- **Land degradation neutrality commitment:** Restoring 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.
- **Cheetah Introduction in India:** Major objective of the project is restoring open forest and savannah grassland.
- **Declaration of protected Areas:** E.g. National Park, wildlife reserve etc.
- **Banni Grassland Restoration Project** of 2019

Melting permafrost releasing toxic mercury into the Arctic: Study

Researchers analyzed samples from the top three meters of permafrost in the Yukon River.

- After comparing samples to satellite data, they found that **"significant" amounts of mercury** is released when riverbanks erode.

About Permafrost:

- It is any **ground that remains frozen (0°C) or colder for at least two years straight.**
- It is made up of a combination of **soil, rocks and sand, held together by ice.**
- It is common in regions of **high mountains and along Earth's higher latitudes- Arctic and Antarctica.**
- Permafrost regions are **not always covered in snow** despite the ground being frozen.

Impact of melting of Permafrost:

- **Decomposition of Soil Organic Carbon** stored in permafrost, releasing **GHGs like carbon dioxide and methane** into the atmosphere.
- Thawing permafrost **releases ancient bacteria and viruses posing health threats to humans and animals.**
- **Direct threat to over 5 million people** living in the Arctic region due to potential release of mercury.
- **Sea level rise , increased erosion and risks of landslides.**

About Mercury

- It is a **naturally occurring metal**, found in air, water and soil.
 - ⊖ Mercury is the **only metal** that is liquid at room temperature.
- **Exposure to mercury, even small amounts** may cause serious health problems.
- **Natural sources:** volcanoes, geothermal springs, geologic deposits, oceans, etc.
- **Anthropogenic source:** Burning of coal or hazardous waste, gold-mining, industrial uses etc.
- **Health hazard:** affects the nervous, digestive and immune systems, etc.
 - ⊖ **Minamata disease (neurological)** is caused due to mercury poisoning.

RBI issued framework for recognition of Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs) in Financial Markets

The Framework acknowledges that as Regulated Entities grow in number and size, there's a lack of adequate industry standards for self-regulation.

- To address this, **instead of increasing the burden on regulators like RBI and SEBI, the framework promotes self-regulation among industry members.**
- SROs can **develop, promote, and enforce industry standards and best practices**, enhancing self-regulation in financial markets.

About Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs) framework

➤ Eligibility:

- ⊕ Set up as a not-for-profit company registered under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013.
- ⊕ The applicant must have a minimum net-worth of INR 10 crore.

- **Responsibilities:** Inform the RBI about the developments in the sector on a regular basis; Carry out any work assigned to it by RBI, Submit an Annual Report to the RBI, etc.

About Regulated Entities (REs)

- REs refers to **financial institutions and organizations** that operate within **the framework of specific regulations set by regulatory authorities.**
- **Role of REs:** Maintaining Financial Stability; ensure compliance with regulations, conduct due diligence, and implement measures to prevent financial crimes, such as money laundering and fraud.
- **Examples:** Insurance Repositories under Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), Scheduled commercial banks under RBI, etc.

Also in News



Rapid Innovation and Start-up Expansion (RISE) Accelerator

Atal Innovation Mission, in collaboration with CSIRO, Australia is inviting applications from start-ups and MSMEs for the Climate Smart Agritech cohort of the India-Australia RISE Accelerator.

About RISE Accelerator

- Launched in **2023**
- The program is designed to **aid businesses aiming for international expansion** between India and Australia.
- The platform has been instrumental in **aiding start-ups and MSMEs** in validating, **adapting**, and piloting their technologies for **new markets.**
- **Focus themes:** Climate Smart Agriculture, Clean Energy, Circular Economy and Waste Management, Climate Smart Mobility.



Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)

Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying recently reviewed measures taken towards achieving goal of FMD-Mukt Bharat by 2030.

About FMD

- It is a **highly contagious viral vesicular disease of cloven-hoofed animals** such as **cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats and pigs** etc.
 - ⊖ It does not **affect horses, dogs, or cats.**
- FMD is caused by an **Aphthovirus of the family Picornaviridae.**
- **Symptoms:** Fever and **blisters** on tongue and lips, in and around mouth, on mammary glands, and around hooves
- **Impact:** Reduced **milk** yield, reduced growth rate, **infertility**, trade restrictions on animal products etc.
- **Steps taken:**
 - ⊕ **National Animal Disease Control Programme:** For eradicating FMD and Brucellosis.



Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA)

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has handed over the Authority Holding Sealed Particulars (AHSP) of 'Nipun' munition to DGQA.

➤ **NIPUN is a Soft Target Munition** designed and developed by the Armament Research & Development Establishment.

About DGQA

➤ It's an **Inter-Service Organisation** functioning under the **Department of Defence Production in the Ministry of Defence.**

➤ It's responsible for **second party Quality Assurance of all defence stores and equipment, both imported as well as indigenous.**

➤ It does quality checks for **the Army, Navy (excluding Naval Armaments) and common user items for the Air Force** procured from **Private Sector, Public Sector Undertakings and Ordnance Factories.**



Zoopharmacognosy

Recently scientist highlighted a case of Zoopharmacognosy in **Sumatran orangutan.**

➤ Orangutan treated a wound on his body by using local plant *Fibraurea tinctoria.*

About Zoopharmacognosy

➤ Process by which wild animals **use medicinal plants** for treatment of **diseases** and protection from **parasites.**

Examples of Zoopharmacognosy

➤ **Dogs:** Chew grass and vomit it to get rid of infections in the stomach.

➤ **Pregnant lemurs:** Nibble on tamarind leaves to aid milk production.

➤ **Pregnant elephants:** Eat leaves of plants of Boraginaceae family to induce delivery.



Purandar Figs

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) facilitated the export of **India's first ready-to-drink fig juice, made from Purandar Figs, to Poland.**

About Purandar Figs

➤ It was **awarded the GI Tag in 2016.**

➤ The fig is **cultivated in many villages of Purandar Taluka in Pune district.**

⊕ **Maharashtra has the highest area 2242 hectares** under fig plantation.

➤ It is **bell-shaped, larger in size** than other varieties, and has a **distinctive violet skin colour** that differentiates itself from other varieties.



Microplastic contamination in Food

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched an innovative project to tackle growing concern of microplastic contamination in food.

About Project:

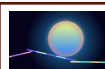
➤ Project is named **"Micro-and Nano-Plastics as Emerging Food Contaminants: Establishing Validated Methodologies and Understanding Prevalence in Different Food Matrices."**

➤ **Objectives:** Developing standard protocols for micro-plastic analysis, conducting intra- and inter-laboratory comparisons, and generating critical data on microplastic exposure levels among consumers.

About Microplastic & Nanoplastic:

➤ Small plastic pieces **less than five millimeters long** are called **microplastic** while particles less than 100 nm (1 µm) are considered **nanoplastics.**

➤ Can cause **health issues** such as endocrine disruption, weight gain, insulin resistance, decreased reproductive health, and cancer.



AI Guardrails

Media reports have raised concerns around lack of guardrails in recently launched two AI models, Grok-2 and Grok-2 mini by Elon Musk's xAI.

About AI Guardrails:

➤ These are frameworks and mechanisms designed to ensure **ethical, legal,** and technical compliance **with AI systems.**

➤ They **prevent AI from causing harm,** making biased decisions, or being misused.

➤ AI guardrails are a **critical component of AI governance** and the development, deployment and **use of responsible AI.**



Liquid water on Mars

A recent study, **"Liquid water in the Martian mid-crust,"** suggests Mars may contain oceans' worth of liquid water deep in the rocky outer crust.

➤ The liquid layer is located at **10 to 20 km in the Martian crust.**

➤ Data from NASA's **Mars Insight Lander** was used

Significance

➤ This is the **first time scientists have discovered liquid water on the planet.**

➤ Better understand the **water cycle of Mars,** which in turn could **unlock questions** related to the **evolution of the planet's climate, surface, and interior.**

Places in News



Kuwait (Capital: Kuwait City)

External affairs minister of India called Kuwaiti Prime Minister to discuss bilateral ties.

Political Features:

➤ **Location:** Country in Arabian Peninsula at northwest corner of Persian Gulf.

➤ **Bordering Nations:** Iraq (north and west), Saudi Arabia(south and west)

➤ **Maritime border:** Iran(east)

➤ **Kuwait is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Arab League, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation & OPEC.**

Geographical Features:

➤ **Climate:** Hyper arid desert climate (**Highly variable with recurrent extremes**).

➤ **Topography:** largely a desert, except for Al-Jahrā oasis, at western end of Kuwait Bay.

➤ **Rivers:** Wadi al Batin, Khor Bubiyan, Khor al Sabiyah

➤ It has **6% of the world's proven oil reserves.**



AHMEDABAD



BENGALURU



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI