

NEWS TODAY

Over 80 per cent of global merchandise trade is on Most-favoured-nation (MFN) basis

World Trade Organisation (WTO) has highlighted that MFN principle has retained its centrality despite the rise of preferential trade agreements (PTAs) since the 1990s.

About MFN

- This principle underlines that countries cannot **normally discriminate** between their trading partners.
 - ⊕ In simple words, if any country grants someone a **special favour** (such as a lower customs duty rate for one of their products) then it has to do the same for all other WTO members.
- The principle is embedded mainly in Article I of the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**, 1994.
 - ⊕ MFN is also a priority in **General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)** and Agreement on **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)**.
- **Mechanism for Implementation:** Member countries shall extend MFN status to each other automatically, unless otherwise specified in the agreement or schedule notified to the WTO by the member country.
 - ⊕ India has extended MFN status to many countries.
- **Exceptions to the MFN**
 - ⊕ **Trade Pacts:** It includes Regional Trade Agreements (RTA) and Preferential Trade Arrangements (PTAs).
 - ◆ E.g. Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)
 - ⊕ **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) scheme:** Under it, developed countries may grant a preferential tariff treatment to imports from developing countries and least developed countries (LDCs).
 - ⊕ **Other:** Anti-dumping duties, Countervailing duties, etc.

Key Terms

- **Anti-dumping duties:** These are additional tariffs a government **may impose on imported goods** that are considered to be entering an importing market at a price below the **price of the imported product** in the ordinary course of trade.
- **Countervailing duties:** These are additional tariffs levied on imported goods a WTO Member may impose once the presence of **subsidized imports** has demonstrated to injure a domestic industry.

10 Years of Sukanya Samridhi Yojana

Launched in January 2015 as part of the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Campaign, **over 4.1 crore** Sukanya Samridhi accounts have been opened as of November 2024, envisaging financial security and social empowerment of girls across India.

About Sukanya Samridhi Yojana

- It is a **small deposit scheme of the Government of India** meant exclusively **for a girl child to meet their education and marriage expenses**.
- **Ministry:** Union Ministry of Finance.
- **Criteria:** Account can be opened in the name of a girl child till she attains the age of 10 years in post office or commercial bank.
 - ⊕ Only one account can be opened in the name of a girl child.
 - ⊕ Parents can open a maximum of two accounts for each of their two children.
- **Deposit:** Minimum deposit ₹ 250/- Maximum deposit ₹ 1.5 Lakh in a financial year.
- **Managing the account:** The account is managed by the **guardian until the girl child reaches the age of eighteen**.
- **Interest:** Interest rate of 8.2%.
- **Withdrawal:** Allows 50% withdrawal at the age of 18 for higher education purposes.
 - ⊕ The account **can be prematurely closed** in case of marriage of a girl child after her attaining age of 18 years.
- **Maturity:** The account shall mature on completion of a **period of 21 years from the date of opening of account**.
- **Achievements:** In many villages, Sukanya Samridhi accounts for all eligible girls up to the age of ten have been opened, leading to the designation of these communities as complete **Sukanya Samridhi Gram**.

Union Cabinet approves extension of National Health Mission

National Health Mission (NHM) was launched by the government of India in 2013 subsuming National Rural Health Mission and National Urban Health Mission.

About National Health Mission

- **Objective:** Envisages achievement of **universal access to equitable, affordable & quality healthcare services** that are **accountable and responsive to people's needs.**
- **Components of the NHM and initiatives launched**
 - ⊕ **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A):** Includes **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)** and **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)** for maternal and child health.
 - ⊕ **Communicable Diseases Control:** Focus on TB, malaria, leprosy, HIV/AIDS under **National Vector-Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP)** and **Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP).**
 - ⊕ **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):** Screening and management of diabetes, hypertension, and cancer through **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS).**
 - ⊕ **Other:** Urban Health, Health System Strengthening, **Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Programme.**
- **Implementation:** By State governments with **financial and technical support from the central government.**
- ⊕ **Fund sharing: 60:40 between Central Government and States (90:10 for Northeastern states, including Sikkim).**

Key Achievements of NHM

- **MMR declined by 83% since 1990 (97 per lakh in 2018-20), surpassing the global decline of 45%.**
- **Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR) has been reduced by 75% since 1990 (32 per 1000 in 2020), compared to the global reduction of 60%.**
- **Disease elimination and control: Successfully met Kala Azar elimination targets, achieved 97.98% coverage in Measles-Rubella Vaccination Campaign, etc.**

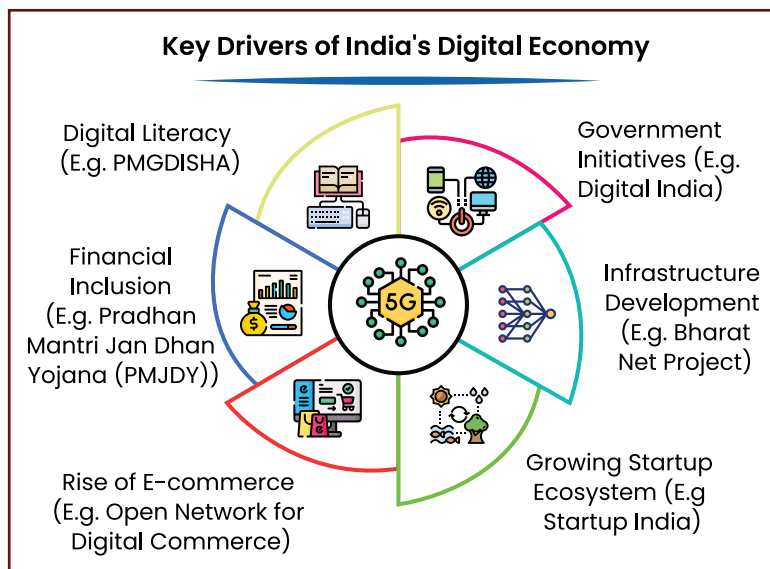
'Estimation and Measurement of India's Digital Economy' report released

Report has been released by the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY).**

- This makes India a **first among developing countries** in employing the **Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** framework for the most recent digital economy size assessment.
- The report **goes beyond the OECD approach** to also include the **digital share of traditional industries** like trade, banking, financial services, insurance (BFSI) and education.

Key findings

- **Status:** Digital economy contributed **11.74%** of the national income in 2022-23. This is expected to increase to **13.42% by 2024-25.**
 - ⊕ India is the **third-largest digitalized country globally (State of India's Digital Economy Report 2024)**
- **Key sectors/components:**
 - ⊕ **Digitally Enabling Industries** (Major contributor at 7.83% of GVA) includes ICT services, telecommunications etc.
 - ⊕ **New Digital Industries** such as big tech firms, digital platforms etc.
 - ⊕ **Digitalization of Traditional Sectors** contributed an additional 2% to the national GVA.
- **Employment:** In 2022-23, provided employment to 14.67 million workers (2.55% of the workforce)
- **Projected Growth:** By 2029-30, anticipated to account for **nearly one-fifth of India's national income**, surpassing agriculture and manufacturing.



Key Recommendations: Make high-quality broadband universal, Address data gaps by harmonizing and collecting new data, etc.

CBDT issues fresh Guidance for Principal Purpose Test under DTAA's

Recently, **Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT)** has issued updated guidance for application of the **Principal Purpose Test (PPT)** under India's **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAA's)** to curb revenue leakages.

- New guidance **exempts certain provisions** under the **India-Cyprus DTAA, India-Mauritius DTAA, and India-Singapore DTAA.**
- Guidance also recognizes and nudges tax authorities to refer to **Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) Action Plan 6** as well as the **UN Model Tax Convention** (subject to India's reservation on specific matters) for a supplementary source of guidance.
 - ⊕ **BEPS Action Plan 6 addresses treaty shopping** (use of tax treaties to reduce tax liability by routing investments through countries with favorable tax agreements) through treaty provisions.

What is PPT?

- It is a part of **international tax rules** aimed at **preventing misuse of tax treaties.**
- It is a **key provision under the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty related provisions to prevent BEPS**, which entered into force for India on **October 01, 2019.**
 - ⊕ This Convention also modified some India's DTAA's.
- Under **BEPS** framework, PPT checks **whether a business arrangement is genuinely commercial** or created mainly to **avoid taxes.**

What is DTAA?

- These are **bilateral treaties** aimed at **preventing the same income from being taxed twice.**
- Primary objective of DTAA's is to **mitigate the tax burden on taxpayers** by **clearly defining the taxing rights of each country involved**, thereby fostering cross-border trade, investment, and economic cooperation.
- **Key Provisions of DTAA** include allocation of taxing rights among member countries, prescribing tax rates, exchange of tax-related information between tax authorities, etc.

Also in News



Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion

Recently the US Administration released '**Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion**', which aims to establish export and security regulations for the **global AI market.**

- Under the framework, **certain restrictions are imposed on India for import of GPUs** unless the computing power is hosted in secure environments.

About the Framework for AI Diffusion

- It seeks to **control the spread of advanced AI technology** in a manner that promotes its potential economic and social benefits, while also **protecting U.S. interests.**
- **Built on 3-part strategy:**
 - ⊕ **Exceptions for certain allies and partners** for the export, re-export to certain set of allies;
 - ⊕ **Exceptions for supply chains** to allow export of advanced computing chips;
 - ⊕ **Low volume exceptions** to allow limited amounts of compute to flow globally, except to arms-embargoed countries.

Ministry of Commerce & Industry sets a target of 10000 Geographical Indications (GI) tags by 2030

Ministry has announced to form a Committee to oversee implementation of achieving targets from the current 605 GI tags, this will be achieved through a **whole of government approach.**

About Geographical Indications

- **Definition:** A GI is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.
- **Coverage:** It is used to identify agricultural, natural, or manufactured goods.
- **Duration:** 10 years and can be renewed.
- **Relevance:** Confers legal protection against unauthorized use, boosts exports, Conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, etc.
- **Regulation/Recognition**
 - ⊕ **Global**
 - ◆ Recognised as **Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) under the Paris Convention** for the Protection of Industrial Property.
 - ◆ Also covered under **TRIPS Agreement** (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) of WTO.
 - ⊕ **India**
 - ◆ Regulated under the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999.**
 - ◆ **Registered by:** Registrar of Geographical Indications (RGI)
 - ◆ **Nodal Department/Ministry:** Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

GI in India

- **First GI product:** Darjeeling Tea from West Bengal
- **Most GI tags:** Highest number of GI tags belongs to Uttar Pradesh followed by Tamil Nadu
- **Some Recent significant GI Tags:** **Bodo Narzi** (a semi-fermented dish made from jute leaves) of Assam, '**Tirangi Barfi**' (UP), Risa Textile (Tripura), etc.



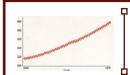
Philadelphi Corridor

Recent **ceasefire terms between Israel and Hamas** also stipulate Israel's withdrawal from the Philadelphi Corridor.

About Philadelphi Corridor

- Corridor was **originally established under the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty.**
- It is a **narrow strip of land along the Gaza-Egypt border**, ~14 km long and 100 meters wide.
- It serves as a **critical border area** between the **southern Gaza Strip** and **Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.**
- It runs from the **Mediterranean to Kerem Shalom** crossing with Israel and was designated as a **demilitarised border zone** after the **withdrawal of Israeli settlements and troops from Gaza in 2005.**





Keeling Curve

Atmospheric CO₂ levels reached a record high in 2024, driven by wildfires and human activities, as reported by the Keeling Curve.

About Keeling Curve

- It is a graph that **represents the concentration of CO₂** in the Earth's atmosphere over time, measured in parts per million (ppm).
 - ⊕ Continuous measurements **began in 1958** at the **Mauna Loa Observatory** in Hawaii.
- **Developed by:** Charles David Keeling
- **Significance:** It is one of the **most iconic indicators of global atmospheric change.**



International Year of Glaciers' Preservation

Recently, **UN has declared 2025** as the **International Year of Glaciers' Preservation.**

- It was also announced that **March 21** of each year will be celebrated as **World Day for Glaciers, starting in 2025.**

About International Year of Glaciers' Preservation

- **Co-facilitated by:** UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).
- **Objective:** To raise global awareness about the critical role of glaciers in the climate system and the hydrological cycle, and the economic, social and environmental impacts in the Earth's cryosphere.
- **Significance of Glaciers:** There are more than **275 000 glaciers in the world**, covering an area of **around 700,000 sq. kms**, which account for **~70% of the global freshwater.**



Fluoride

The US Secretary of Health nominee has suggested an end to adding fluoride to public water supplies.

About the Fluoride

- **Fluoride** is a **naturally occurring mineral** in water, soil, and air that has been demonstrated to **prevent dental cavities and tooth decay.**
- **Side effects:** Excessive Fluoride in drinking and cooking water lead to fluorosis (fluoride-induced tooth discoloration); usually in children under the age of 6 also affect fetal, infant and child neurodevelopment.
- **Prescribed standard:** **As per Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**, the desirable limit of Fluoride in water is 1ppm (parts per million) or 1 mg/L, the lesser the better.



Jute crop

Cabinet raises raw jute **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** by 6% to **₹5,650/ per quintal.**

About Jute

- Jute, popularly known as the **Golden fibre of India.**
- It is a **kharif crop.**
- **Required Climatic Condition:**
 - ⊕ Jute requires a **hot and humid climate** with temperatures fluctuating between 15 to 34 degree Celsius.
 - ⊕ Minimum rainfall required for jute cultivation is 1,000 mm.
- **Soil:** **River basins or alluvial or loamy soils** are most suitable.
- **Major jute growing states:** West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Odisha. (West Bengal accounts for over 50% of raw jute produced in India.)



Pangsau Pass

The **Pangsau Pass International Festival**, a **three-day event** celebrating border trade and cultural exchange, concluded recently in Arunachal Pradesh.

About Pangsau Pass

- **Location:** Situated at 3,727 feet (1,136 m) on the **Patkai Hills along the India-Myanmar border.**
- **Origin of Name:** Named after the nearest Burmese village, Pangsau.
- **Historical Significance:** Believed to be the route of the 13th-century Ahom invasion of Assam by the Shan tribe.
- **Connectivity:** The historic **Stilwell Road (Ledo Road)** passes through **Nampong** and the Pangsau Pass into Myanmar.



KaWaCHaM

Kerala has launched the **Kerala Warnings, Crisis, and Hazard Management System (KaWaCHaM)** for real-time disaster alerts.

About KaWaCHaM

- It is **developed** by the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) with support from the **National Disaster Management Authority and the World Bank.**
 - ⊕ It is supported under the **National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP).**
- It offers hazard assessment, alert issuance, and threat-based action planning.
 - ⊕ **Provides updates for extreme weather events** such as heavy rain etc.
- **Key features include:**
 - ⊕ A network of **siren-strobe light units.**
 - ⊕ **Emergency operation centers** connected via **Virtual Private Network (VPN).**
 - ⊕ **Decision support software** and a **large data center.**



Eurodrone

India has joined **Eurodrone programme** as an observer member.

- **Eurodrone** or **European Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (MALE RPAS)** is a twin-turboprop MALE unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).
- It can be used for long-endurance missions such as intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR), maritime surveillance, etc.

About Eurodrone programme

- **Members:** Four-nation initiative involving Germany, France, Italy, and Spain.
- **Led by:** the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR).



Mannan Community

Raman Rajamannan, the **king of the Mannan community** and the **only tribal king in Kerala**, will participate in the **Republic Day parade in Delhi.**

About Mannan community

- **Region:** Mainly inhabit **Kumily Panchayat in Idukki district.**
- **Language:** They possess a unique dialect that **blends Tamil and Malayalam.**
- **Occupation:** They are **skilled agriculturalists**, particularly adept at cultivating crops in mountainous terrains.
- **Religion:** Predominantly **follow Hinduism**, incorporating deities like Shiva, Vishnu, Bhagawati, and Sastha into their worship practices.

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released the CSE 2025 notification on January 22. Civil Services Examination (CSE) aspirants can check this year's detailed information bulletin, syllabus, and exam pattern at upsc.gov.in.

