

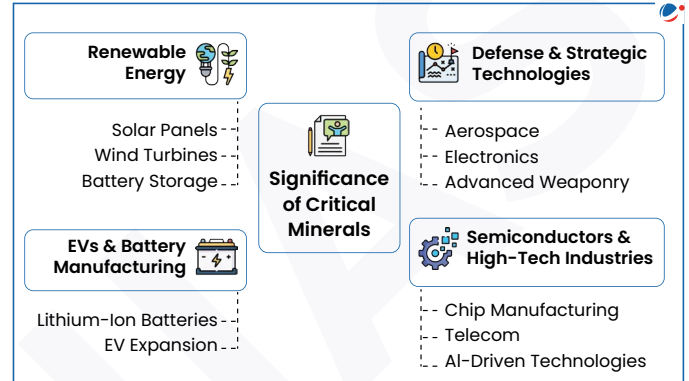
NEWS TODAY

Union Cabinet approved the launch of the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)

NCMM was announced in the **Union Budget, 2024-25**.

Key Features of NCMM

- **Aim:** Encourage Indian PSUs and private sector companies to acquire critical mineral assets abroad and enhance trade with resource-rich countries.
- **Cost:** Expenditure of Rs.16,300 crore and expected investment of Rs.18,000 crore by PSUs, etc.
- **Exploration:** Intensify exploration of critical minerals within the country and in offshore areas.
- **Encompasses:** All stages of the value chain, including mineral exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing, and recovery from end-of-life products.
- **Financial Incentives:** For critical mineral exploration.
- **Coordination:** With relevant ministries, PSUs, private companies, and research institutions, etc.
- **Others:** Setting up of mineral processing parks, centre of excellence, recycling of critical minerals, fast track regulatory approval for projects, developing stockpile of critical minerals, etc.



Need for NCMM

- Boost India's self-reliance and reduce import dependency.
- Propel Economic growth and enable Clean Energy Transition.

Critical Minerals

- **About:** Minerals that are essential for economic development and national security (Ministry of Mines).
 - ⊕ Their lack of availability or concentration of extraction or processing in a few geographical locations may lead to supply chain vulnerabilities and disruptions.
 - ⊕ Government of India released a list of 30 critical minerals for India including Cobalt, Copper, Germanium, Lithium, Tungsten, etc.

Other Measures taken

- Amendment of Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 in 2023 to boost exploration and mining of critical minerals.
- Science and Technology - Promotion of Research and Innovation in Start-ups and MSMEs (S&T PRISM) Program, 2023 for funding start-ups and MSMEs bridging the gap between research and commercialization.

Union Cabinet approved the revision of Ethanol Procurement Price for Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)

It has been done under the **Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme** for the Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2024-25 (November, 2024- October, 2025).

- As per the revision, the administered ex-mill price of ethanol derived from C Heavy Molasses (CHM) is fixed at Rs.57.97 per litre from Rs.56.58.

Significance of the Price Revision

- Offer price stability and remunerative prices for ethanol suppliers and sugarcane farmers.
- Environmental benefits and assures sufficient ethanol availability for meeting blending target.

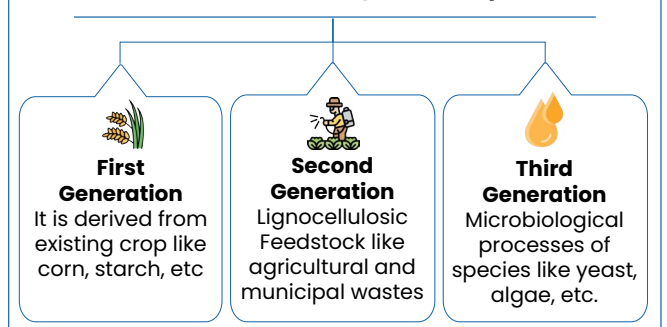
Ethanol Blended Programme (EBP)

- **About:** Requires OMCs to sell petrol blended with ethanol up to 20%.
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- **Objective:** Promote the use of alternative and environment friendly fuels and reduce import dependence, boost agriculture sector, etc.
- **Revised Target:** Target of 20% ethanol blending in petrol was revised to 2025-26 from previous 2030.

Key Achievements of EBP

- **Saving Foreign Exchange:** Approximately, 1.13 lakh crore saved during the last decade (as on 31.12.2024).
- **Increased Blending by OMCs:** From 38 crore litre in ESY, 2013-14 to 707crore litre with an average blending of 14.60% in ESY 2023-24.

Generations of Biofuels (Fuels produced from Biomass Material/Feedstock)



Other Initiatives taken for Promotion of Biofuels

- **Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN (Jaiv Indhan- Vatavaran Anukool fasal awashesh Nivaran) Yojana** provides financial support for setting up Second Generation (2G) ethanol projects using lignocellulosic biomass and other renewable feedstock.
- **National Policy on Biofuels-2018** categorises biofuels as First, Second, and Third Generation.
- **Reduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST)** on ethanol for the EBP Programme to 5%.

Extreme Climatic Conditions cause fundamental Ecological Transformation in Greenland

A new study published in **Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences** reveals that extreme weather events have turned Greenland lakes from carbon sinks into significant sources of carbon dioxide, with emissions rising by 350%.

Key Findings of the Study

- **Western Greenland Lakes Transformation:** In 2022, 7,500+ lakes in Western Greenland turned brown and emitted carbon due to extreme weather and **thawing permafrost** releasing **organic carbon**, shifting them from **carbon sinks to emitters**.
- **Drivers: Atmospheric Rivers** drove above-normal temperatures and increased rainfall in 2022.

What is an Atmospheric River?

- **Atmospheric rivers** are relatively long, narrow regions in the atmosphere – like rivers in the sky – that transport most of the **water vapor** outside of the tropics. (**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**)
- They are typically **located within low-level jet stream**, an area of strong winds in lower levels of atmosphere, ahead of **cold front in an extra-tropical cyclone**.
- **Impact of Atmospheric Rivers**
 - ⊕ **Precipitation Role:** Provide vital rainfall but can also cause **flooding** and **heat hazards**, impacting the environment.
 - ◆ E.g., Atmospheric Rivers caused **70% of major floods** in India (1985-2020), including the **2013 Uttarakhand** and **2018 Kerala** floods.

Impact of Climate Change on Atmospheric Rivers

- **Increased Frequency:** Global warming could increase ARs by **50-290%** in regions like **Greenland, North America, and East Asia** by century's end.
- **South Asian Monsoon:** Warming will boost moisture transport, increasing ARs making landfall in India.
- **Indian Ocean Warming:** Warmer sea temperatures and **Vapour Pressure Deficit (VPD)** raise evaporation, enhancing formation of Atmospheric Rivers.
- **Poleward Shift:** Atmospheric Rivers are moving **6-10 degrees** toward the poles due to sea surface temperature changes.
- **La Niña Impact:** **La Niña** strengthens **Walker circulation**, expanding the tropical rainfall belt and steering ARs poleward.

Government approves Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSME Manufacturing Sector

Government of India has recently approved introduction of Mutual Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs (MCGS-MSME) for providing **60% guarantee coverage** by **National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC)** to **Member Lending Institutions**.

- **MLIs** are Financial Institutions such as Commercial Banks, NBFCs **registered with NCGTC** under the Scheme.

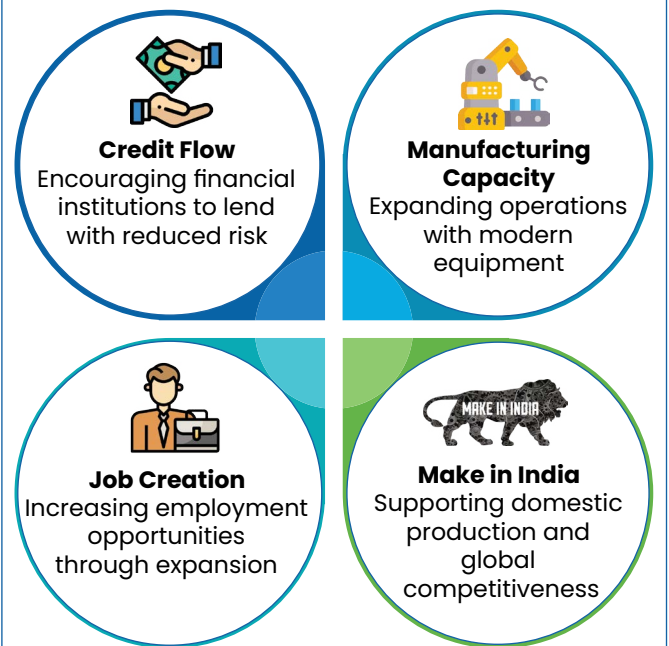
Salient Features of MCGS-MSME

- **Eligible Borrowers:** MSMEs with a valid **Udyam Registration Number**.
- **Loan Coverage:** Up to ₹100 crore per MSME for **purchasing Plant and Machinery/ Equipment**.
 - ⊕ Project Cost can exceed ₹100 crore, but **at least 75% of the cost must be for machinery/equipment**.
- **Repayment Terms:**
 - ⊕ **Loans up to ₹50 crore:** Repayment period of up to 8 years (including 2 years moratorium on principal).
 - ⊕ **Loans above ₹50 crore:** Longer repayment and moratorium can be considered.
- **Scheme Duration:** **4 years from the issue of operational guidelines** or until a cumulative guarantee of ₹7 lakh crore is issued.

Other Steps taken to ease access to Credit for MSMEs

- **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises** to provide collateral-free loans to MSEs.
- **Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) Program:** ₹6,000 crore investment over 5 years for MSME growth.
- **Priority Sector Lending (PSL) norms:** All bank loans to MSMEs conforming to the conditions prescribed therein qualify for classification under priority sector lending.

Potential Benefits of the Scheme



Union Home Minister approves Funds for Disaster Mitigation in Various States

A High-Level Committee (HLC) under the chairmanship of the Union Home Minister has recently approved ₹ 3027.86 crore for three disasters from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF).

- Previously, financial assistance from NDMF was approved for other projects like **Urban Flood Risk Mitigation, GLOF (Glacial Lake Outburst Flood) Risk Management, Landslide Risk Mitigation**, etc.

Key Highlights of the Initiatives launched

- Project for catalytic assistance to 12 most drought prone states** including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Uttar Pradesh.
- Mitigation Project on Lightning Safety** in 50 heavy lightning prone districts in 10 states including Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, etc.
- Mitigation Scheme for Forest Fire Risk Management** for implementation in **144 high-priority districts** in 19 states including Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, etc.
 - Objective:** To transform the forest fire management approach in the country to strengthen and support vital forest fire prevention and mitigation activities.
 - Mechanism:** States will submit proposals for activities focused on forest fire mitigation, response preparedness, and post-fire assessment and recovery.

National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF)

- Established:** In February 2021 by the Union Government on recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission.
- It forms the part of National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF)** comprising all the funds available for disaster management in India including the National Disaster Response Fund.
- At the state level, all states (except Telangana) have initiated the setting up of the **State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF)**.
 - Central Government contributes 75% for all States** (90% for North-Eastern and Himalayan States) as Centre's share in SDMF.

Supreme Court (SC) bans Manual Scavenging in 6 cities in a writ petition

The court directed the Chief Executive Officer of each city (**Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad**) to file an affidavit on how and when Manual Scavenging is stopped.

- SC in **Dr. Balram Singh Vs Union of India (2023)** directed the **Union Government** to take **appropriate measures** to ensure that the practice is **completely eradicated** in a **phased manner**.

Manual Scavenging in India

- Meaning:** It involves **manually** cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling human excreta from dry latrines, drains and other sanitation systems.
- Regulation:** Officially **banned** since **1993** under the **Employment of Manual Scavengers and its Prohibition Act**.
 - However, **lack of appropriate sewage management systems and avenues for alternative livelihood opportunities** remain the reason for its prevalence.
- Present Status:** Out of the 775 districts, **456 districts** no longer have manual scavenging (as on 29.01.2025).
- Issues associated**
 - Humanitarian Crisis:** Violates **basic human rights and dignity** exposing the worker to **numerous health risks, harmful gases and pathogens**.
 - Link with Caste:** Most of the manual scavengers belong to the **Dalit community**.
- Reforms Needed:** Technological interventions (robots, machines for cleaning); proper law enforcement; upgrading sanitation infrastructure, etc.

Constitutional and Legal Framework to Eradicate Manual Scavenging

- Constitution:** Guarantees rights under **Articles 14** (Equality before Law), **17** (Abolition of Untouchability), **21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), etc.
- Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavenger and their Rehabilitation Act 2013:** Bans manual scavenging.
- National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE) scheme:** Aims at formalization and rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers.

Also In News



Domicile-based Reservation

Recently, Supreme Court held that **domicile-based reservations in PG Medical seats are impermissible** as it is unconstitutional for being violative of **Article 14** of the Constitution.

Constitutional Provisions for Domicile-based Reservations

- Article 16 (2):** No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.
- Article 16 (3),** however, **allows the Parliament** to make any law prescribing residence within a State or UT in regard to a class or classes of employment under the Government of State/ UT or local authority.



Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Three countries (**Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger**) under military rule have officially left **West African regional bloc, ECOWAS**, following diplomatic tensions.

About ECOWAS (Hq: Abuja, Nigeria)

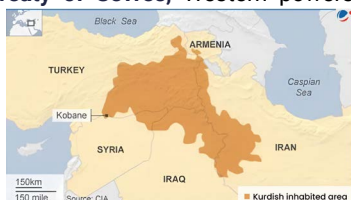
- Genesis:** 1975
- Aim:** Promote **economic cooperation** among member states in order to raise living standards and promote economic development.
 - Citizens of ECOWAS countries have the **right to live and work in all member states**, along with free circulation of goods.
- Members:** 12 (after the current withdrawal)
 - Benin, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Kurdistan Region

Recently, India has sent humanitarian assistance to support residents of the Kurdistan region in Iraq.

About Kurdistan Region

- ▶ Kurdistan is a **mountainous region** spanning parts of **eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran**, and smaller areas of northern **Syria and Armenia**.
- ▶ It is predominantly inhabited by an ethnic group called "**Kurds**".
- ▶ They are the **fourth-largest Middle Eastern ethnic group** without a nation state.
- ▶ **Post World War I**, under the **Treaty of Sèvres**, Western powers promised the Kurds their own homeland.
- ▶ However, this hope was dashed with the **Treaty of Lausanne in 1924**, which **divided the Kurds among the newly formed nations** of the Middle East.



Asteroid Bennu

According to Scientists, samples from Bennu Asteroid revealed building blocks of life.

About Asteroid Bennu

- ▶ Bennu is a **small, near-Earth asteroid** that **passes relatively close to Earth about every six years**.
- ▶ NASA's **OSIRIS-REx spacecraft** collected samples in **2020** using a robotic arm and returned them to Earth in **2023** for analysis.
- ▶ **Findings:** Essential life-building compounds, including **amino acids, nucleobases**, and minerals suggesting water once existed on **Bennu**.
- ▶ It likely was broken off from a much larger carbon-rich asteroid about **700 million to 2 billion years ago**

Quality Control Order for Solar Photovoltaic Products

Recently, Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has notified the **Solar Systems, Devices, and Components Goods Order, 2025** for Quality Control of Solar PV modules, Inverters.

- ▶ The order has been issued under the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act, 2016**.
- ▶ **BIS Act, 2016** provides for the **establishment of a national standards body (BIS)** for the harmonious development of the activities of standardisation and quality assurance of goods, articles, processes, etc.

Key Highlights of the Order

- ▶ It revises and supersedes the existing **Solar Photovoltaics, Systems, Devices, and Components Goods (Requirements for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2017**.
- ▶ **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** will oversee grant of licence and enforcement of the order.

Teesta River

Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change approved the proposal for rebuilding the **Teesta-III dam** located on the main **Teesta River**, despite design and stability concerns.

About Teesta River

- ▶ **Origin:** **Tso Lhamo Lake** in North Sikkim, flows through **India (West Bengal and Sikkim)** and **Bangladesh**.
- ▶ **Tributary:** Major right-bank tributary of the **Brahmaputra**.
 - ⊕ **River Rangit** is a **tributary of Teesta**.
- ▶ **Course:** Flows south through **Siwalik Hills**, southeast via **Sivok Khola pass**, into **West Bengal**.
- ▶ **Drains into:** Originally, it emptied directly into the **upper Padma River (Ganga)**.
 - ⊕ However, around **1787**, it changed its course to flow eastward in Bangladesh joining **Jamuna River**.

Guantánamo Bay

US President orders setting up of migrant detention centre in **Guantánamo Bay**.

About Guantánamo Bay

- ▶ **Location:** Forms an inlet of the **Caribbean Sea**, indenting **southeastern Cuba**.
- ▶ **Features:** Large and well-sheltered **bay**, has a **narrow entrance** to a harbour, and capable of accommodating **large vessels**.
- ▶ **Ports:** **Caimanera** and **Boquerón**, linked to the city of **Guantánamo**.
- ▶ **Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB):** Established in **1903**, oldest overseas military installation of **USA**.
 - ⊕ According to the United States' lease with Cuba, the **U.S. retains jurisdiction** while **Cuba maintains sovereignty**.

E-Shram Microsites & Occupational Shortage Index (OSI)

Union Minister for Labour & Employment launched the **State and Union Territory Microsites** under the e-Shram initiative and the **Occupational Shortage Index (OSI)**.

About e-Shram Microsites

- ▶ **State-specific digital platforms** seamlessly integrated with the **National e-Shram database**.
- ▶ **Benefits**
 - ⊕ **For States/UTs:** Ready-to-use digital infrastructure, real time data analytics dashboard, etc.
 - ⊕ **For Workers:** Seamless registration process, multilingual facility, etc.

About OSI

- ▶ **Purpose:** Identify **workforce demand-supply gaps** using ILO methodology and PLFS data.
- ▶ **Key Functions:** Tracks job shortages in high-demand sectors, Supports workforce planning and skill development etc.

Place in News

Oman (Capital: Muscat)

Recently, India and Oman have agreed to amend **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** to promote greater cooperation on taxation.

Political Features

- ▶ Occupies the **southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula** at the **confluence of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea**.
- ▶ Bounded by **Yemen** (Southwest), by the **Arabian Sea** (South and East), by the **Gulf of Oman** (North), by the **United Arab Emirates** (Northwest), and by **Saudi Arabia** (West).

Geographical Features

- ▶ **Climate:** Hot, humid along coast; hot, dry interior; strong southwest summer monsoon (May to September) in far south
- ▶ **Coastal Plain:** Long, narrow coastal plain known as **Al-Bāṭinah** stretches along the Gulf of Oman.
- ▶ **Desert:** **Rub al-Khali** shared with Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
- ▶ **Highest Point:** **Mount Shams** ("Sun Mountain").

