

- A Chinese research vessel “Xiang Yang Hong 03” on its way to Maldives could be **latest flashpoint in diplomatic tussle between India and Maldives**.
- **This development raises concerns in India**, as India has previously viewed presence of such vessels near its shores, **including in Sri Lanka in 2022**, as problematic.
- **Indian Concerns and Objections**
 - ⊕ **Strategic competition: Indian Ocean** is strategically significant, and both India and China have interests in the region.
 - ◆ Movement of Chinese ships in this area might be seen as part of **China's broader maritime strategy** and its efforts to expand its influence.
 - ⊕ **Regional Balance of Power:** China's increasing presence in the area could alter the regional balance of power and challenge India's influence.
 - ◆ China has set up a military base in **Djibouti** and has developed several dual use ports in **Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Pakistan** among other countries.
 - ⊕ **China's String of Pearls:** This strategy involves establishing a network of naval bases and infrastructure in **Indian Ocean, encircling India**.
 - ◆ Any Chinese presence in the Maldives could be viewed with suspicion by India.
 - ⊕ **China's Expanding Economic Influence:** Recently, **Maldives signed several new agreements** with China including ones on climate, agriculture and infrastructure.

Steps Taken by India to Counter China's Influence in Indian Ocean region

- **Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthening alliances with like-minded countries, including the **United States, Japan, Australia**, and other regional partners.
- **Multilateral Engagement:** Such as Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- **Enhanced Surveillance and Intelligence:** To monitor and respond effectively to **maritime threats and developments**.
- **Diplomatic Outreach:** Actively participating in regional and international forums to **voice concerns about China's expanding influence**.

Cabinet approves protocol for establishment of Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) between India and the Dominican Republic

- Protocol was signed between **the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs** of the Dominican Republic.
 - ⊕ **It will strengthen economic ties**, providing a vital platform for discussions, knowledge exchange, and idea-sharing. It will
 - ⊕ provide an effective gateway to the larger **Latin American and Caribbean (LAC)** markets.
- **Significance of India-LAC relations**
 - ⊕ **Energy security:** Latin America has huge reserves of crude oil (**20% of global reserves**).
 - ⊕ **Trade:** Bilateral trade has increased to **\$50 billion** during the financial year 2022-23.
 - ⊕ **Critical minerals:** The region is very rich in minerals such as **copper, lithium, iron ore, gold**, and silver.
 - ⊕ **Strategic:** The region is critical to multilateral diplomacy and for **reforming the global governance architecture** like the UN Security Council.
- **Indian steps for engagement with LAC**
 - ⊕ **Preferential Trade Agreement** with **MERCOSUR countries** in Latin America.
 - ⊕ **FOCUS LAC Programme** to enhance trade with countries in the region.
 - ⊕ **Investment:** Indian companies in the LAC region have invested **around \$15 billion**.
- **Issues:** Political diversity, **varying economic abilities**, lack of adequate **human resources** and institutional presence, poor **connectivity** due to larger distance, and language issues.

Ministry of Education releases All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022

- Initiated in 2011, AISHE is the **main source of comprehensive statistics on the Higher Education** scenario in India.
 - ⊕ For the first time **all the major Stakeholders in Higher Education participated** in data collection exercise through electronic mode.
 - ⊕ It utilized **online data collection platform through the Web Data Capture Format (Web DCF)** format.
 - ⊕ Web DCF has been developed by the **Department of Higher Education and the National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.

Parameters	2021-2022	Trend with respect to 2014-15
Total Student Enrolment: Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan are top 6 states.	4.33 crore	26.5% increase
Female Enrolment	2.07 crore	32% increase
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): Percentage of students in 18-23 age group enrolled in higher education.	28.4	Increase from 23.7
Female GER	28.5	Increase from 22.9
Gender Parity Index (GPI): Ratio of female GER to male GER	1.01	Above 1 since 2017-18 indicating more female GER compared to male GER since 2017-18
Female per 100 male faculty	77	Increase from 75 in 2020-21

Nitrogen Gas Used for Execution for the First Time in the US

- **UN human rights chief** expressed concern about the manner of execution, which has reignited debate about the **use of capital punishment**.
 - ⊕ **Capital punishment or death penalty** is an institutionalised form of punishment that involves **deliberately executing persons for their alleged misconduct**.
- **Arguments in Favour of use of capital punishment**
 - ⊕ **Deterrence Effect:** The fear of facing the ultimate punishment may discourage individuals from committing heinous crimes.
 - ⊕ **Retributive Justice:** Death penalty is seen as a just response to certain crimes.
 - ⊕ **A Moral Imperative:** Providing a sense of closure and satisfaction to victims and their families.
- **Arguments Against (Ethical concerns)**
 - ⊕ **Human Rights and Morality:** It is cruel and immoral. It is a violation of **individual's right to his life** and thereby a violation of human rights.
 - ⊕ **Unproven Deterrent:** Inflicting capital punishment has **not demonstrated** that there is a **reduction in crime** or related activities.
 - ⊕ **Irreversibility:** If a wrong verdict is given and an innocent person gets executed then there is **no way of undoing** that gross injustice.
 - ⊕ **Possibility of Rehabilitation:** **Possibility of reforming individuals** should take precedence over **punitive measures**.

Capital Punishment in India

- In **Jagmohan Singh vs State of Uttar Pradesh (1973)**, **Rajendra Prasad vs State of Uttar Pradesh (1979)**, and in **Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980)**, Supreme Court affirmed the constitutional validity of death penalty.
- **Doctrine of Rarest of Rare** was established in **Bacchan Singh Case**.
- **Law Commission of India in its 262nd Report (August 2015)** recommended that death penalty be abolished for all crimes other than terrorism related offences and waging war.

State visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India as Republic Day Chief Guest

Key outcomes from the visit:

- ⊕ **Defence Cooperation:** Finalized Roadmap for **India- France Defence Industrial Partnership** and signed letter of intent for **Defence Space Partnership**.
- ⊕ **Space:** MoU between NewSpace India Limited and Arianespace S.A.S for **satellite launches**.
- ⊕ **Aviation:** MoU between TATA Advanced Systems Limited and Airbus to setup **assembly line for H125 Helicopters**.
- ⊕ **Scientific cooperation:** Agreements for **joint research** in clean energy, mainly de-carbonized hydrogen, applied mathematics, digital technologies, and precision agriculture.

Other Key Announcements:

- ⊕ **Year 2026 as "India-France Year of Innovation".**
- ⊕ Operationalization of **UPI at Eiffel Tower**
- ⊕ Setting up of **Solar Academy in Senegal under STAR-C Program** of International Solar Alliance.
- ⊕ Operationalisation of **Young Professional Scheme** under the Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement to promote exchange of professionals.

India-France Relationship:

- ⊕ **Strategic Partnership:** Diplomatic relations established in 1948 and elevated to Strategic Partnership in 1998.
- ⊕ **Defence:** France is **second-largest defence equipment supplier to India** which includes Rafale aircrafts and P-75 Scorpene submarines.
 - ◆ **Joint military exercises:** Varuna, FRINJEX, Garuda.
- ⊕ **Space:** Joint research programmes, satellite launches (GSAT-30, GSAT-24), cooperation in Gaganyaan etc.
- ⊕ **Civil Nuclear Cooperation:** Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project and cooperation in ITER.

Roadmap for India-France Defence Industrial Partnership

Prioritize **co-designing, co-development, co-production**, and building the **defence supply chains** between two countries.

Domains will include space technologies, maritime technology, robotics and artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles and platforms, and cyber defence.

Investment Forum for Advancing Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems in India Launched

About Investment Forum

- ⊕ **Genesis:** A joint initiative of **NITI Aayog, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**, and **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** of the United Nations.
- ⊕ **Aim:** To develop an **investment and partnership strategy** to advance **climate resilient agrifood systems** among government, private sectors, and farmers' organizations and financial institutions in India.

Significance of Investment Forum

- ◆ **Diversifying Investments:** Forum identified priorities for financing climate-resilient agrifood systems through diverse investments like **equity, grants, bonds, and other financing options**.

Climate Change Challenges: India faces challenges related to climate change, including unpredictable **weather patterns, extreme events, etc.**

- ◆ **Investing in climate-resilient agrifood systems** is crucial for adapting to these changes.

Enhanced Food Security: Food demand predicted to **grow by at least 50% by 2050**.

- ⊕ **Empowering Farmers:** Incentives for farmers, particularly focusing on **small and marginal farmers**, who constitute **85% of India's farming population**.

About Agrifood Systems

- ◆ **Agrifood system** refers to **entire process of food production**, from planting and growing to harvesting, processing, packaging, transportation, distribution, trade, purchase, consumption, and disposal.

◆ **It also includes non-food aspects** like forestry, animal rearing, and the use of resources for biofuels.

Also in News



Gallantry Awards

- ◆ On **75th Republic Day**, President approves Gallantry awards to **Armed Forces personnel**.
- ◆ **About Awards**
 - ⊕ Gallantry awards are **announced twice in a year** (on **Republic Day and Independence Day**).
 - ⊕ **Gallantry Awards are classified into two Categories**
 - ◆ **Gallantry in the Face of Enemy:** Param Vir Chakra, Mahavir Chakra, Vir Chakra.
 - ◆ **Gallantry Other than in the Face of Enemy:** Ashok Chakra, Kirti Chakra, Shaurya Chakra.
 - ⊕ **Order of precedence of these awards**
 - ◆ Param Vir Chakra, Ashoka Chakra, Mahavir Chakra, Kirti Chakra, Vir Chakra and Shaurya Chakra.



Kutia Kondh Tribe

- ◆ Two persons from **Kutia Kondh Tribe** attended **Republic Day parade** in New Delhi as special guests.
- ◆ **About Kutia Kondh (Kutia Kandha)**
 - ⊕ They are **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** from **Odisha**.
 - ◆ Currently, **75 tribes** are given status of PVTGs in India. ⊕
 - ◆ **Society and culture:**
 - ◆ Families are mostly **nuclear and patriarchal in character**.
 - ◆ **Kondhs worship nature**.
 - ◆ Known for their buffalo sacrifice ritual, called "**Kedu**" to worship their **Earth Goddess**".
 - ⊕ **Agriculture:**
 - ◆ **Shifting cultivation**, or slash-and-burn agriculture.
 - ◆ Kondhs call it **dongar chaas or podu chaas**.



South Asian University (SAU)

- ▶ The Delhi High Court has ruled that the SAU is not **subjected to the writ jurisdiction under Article 226.**
- ▶ The court observed that
 - ⊕ The varsity's character is that of an **international institution** as it derives powers from a 2007 inter-governmental agreement. It cannot be included under "other authority" as mentioned in **Article 12** of the Constitution of India.
- ▶ SAU is an international university established by the member nations of the **South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation in New Delhi.**



Exercise Steadfast Defender 24

- ▶ NATO started its **largest military exercise** since the Cold War called **Steadfast Defender 2024.**
- ▶ **About North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**
 - ⊕ **Formation:** NATO was established in 1949 by Washington Treaty.
 - ⊕ **Headquarter:** Brussels, Belgium.
 - ⊕ **Purpose:** NATO's purpose is to guarantee **freedom and security** of its members through political and military means.
 - ◆ **NATO is committed to principle** that an attack against one or several of its members is considered as an attack against all.
 - ⊕ **Members:** 31 member alliance (Recently **Finland joined in 2023**).



Unfurling' and 'hoisting' of National Flag

- ▶ **On January 26**, flag is **folded or rolled-up**, and attached to the top of a pole.
 - ◆ It is then unveiled ('unfurled') by the **President**, who does so **without pulling it up.**
- ▶ **On August 15**, the flag, positioned at the **bottom of the pole**, is raised ('hoisted') by **prime minister**, from the **bottom to the top.**
- ▶ **About National Flag**
 - ⊕ It was adopted on **22 July 1947.**
 - ⊕ **Ratio of length to the height** (width) of the Flag shall be **3:2.**



Cyclone KIRRILY

- ▶ **Tropical Cyclone KIRRILY** made landfall in **Australia.**
- ▶ **Tropical cyclones** originate and intensify over warm tropical oceans.
 - ⊕ **Conditions favourable for Tropical cyclone**
 - ◆ Large sea surface with **temperature higher than 27° C.** **Presence of the Coriolis force.**
 - ⊕ **Small variations** in the vertical wind speed.
 - ⊕ **A pre-existing weak low-pressure area** or low-level-cyclonic circulation.
 - ⊕ **Upper divergence** above the sea level system.



Aadhaar Card

- ▶ **Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** has removed **Aadhaar** from list of acceptable documents for proof of **Date of Birth (DoB).**
 - ⊕ Aadhaar is considered a **proof of identity but not of citizenship or DoB.**
- ▶ **About Aadhaar:**
 - ◆ **12-digit random number** issued by **Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).**
 - ◆ **UIDAI is a statutory authority** established under the **Aadhaar Act, 2016.**
 - ⊕ It contains **Demographic** (Name, Gender, DoB, Address) & **Biometric** (Fingerprints, Iris scans and Facial Photograph) data.
 - ⊕ **Eligibility:** Any resident of India of any age and gender.



Grantha Inscriptions

- ▶ **Stones bearing 11th century Grantha inscriptions** and **16th century Tamil inscriptions** were discovered near **Kangayam** in **Tamil Nadu.**
- ▶ **Grantha** is the script used in **Tamil Nadu** for **writing the Prakrit and Sanskrit language.**
 - ⊕ Grantha script traces its roots to **Pallava period** with **Mahendravarman's Tiruchirappalli rock cut cave** and other cave temple inscriptions.
 - ▶ **Other Grantha inscriptions** include **Narsimhan's Mamallapuram, Kanchi Kailasnatha temple inscriptions, Pandyan Nedunjadaiyan's Anaimalai inscription** and inscriptions of **Cholas of Thanjavur.**



Rohan Bopanna

- ▶ Indian tennis player **Rohan Bopanna** became the **oldest world number 1 in men's doubles tennis.**
- ▶ He is also the **oldest tennis player** to reach the **Grand Slam final.** ▶ He has a **Grand Slam title** and **five ATP Masters 1000 titles.**
- ▶ **Contributions**
 - ⊕ Represented **India** at the **2012 and 2016** editions of the **Olympics.**
 - ⊕ **Member of India's Davis Cup team since 2002.**
- ▶ **Values:** Perseverance, Hard Work, and determination.