

# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

By



SOURCES



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### **Important News Articles**

1. Affordable housing scheme for middle class to be launched - The Hindu
2. Net zero gain for job guarantee scheme - The Hindu/ Job guarantee scheme outlay stays at ₹ 86,000 cr, no change in PM-Kisan - Indian Express
3. Lakshadweep in focus, domestic tourism to get a boost - Indian Express
4. Concerns over GDP, spending cuts; fiscal deficit is bright spot - Indian Express
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1. Payments Bank
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## Important News Articles

### GS II

#### 1. Affordable housing scheme for middle class to be launched - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

##### Prelims Takeaway

- PM-SVANidhi
- PMAY

**News:**

- Giving a boost to affordable housing, the government announced a **new scheme to help “deserving” sections of the middle class buy or build their own houses.**

**Key Highlights**

- The **Union Finance Minister also gave a push to rural housing** and said two crore more houses would be made under the flagship Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)-Rural.
- Despite the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, “implementation of PMAY (Rural) continued and we are close to achieving the target of three crore houses”.
- **The PMAY is a credit-linked subsidy scheme** to facilitate access to affordable housing for low and moderate-income people.
- It has two components — **PMAY (Urban) for the urban poor under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and PMAY (Rural) for rural India under the Ministry of Rural Development.**
- The total allocation to the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry for 2024-25 is ₹77,523 crore, up from ₹76,431 crore in 2023-24.
- PM-SVANidhi, a micro-credit scheme for street vendors being run by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry,
  - has provided credit assistance to 78 lakh street vendors, out of which 2.3 lakh have received credit for the third time.

#### 2. Net zero gain for job guarantee scheme - The Hindu/ Job guarantee scheme outlay stays at ₹ 86,000 cr, no change in PM-Kisan - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

##### Prelims Takeaway

- MGNREGS
- Budget

**News:**

- **₹86,000 crore budget** was allocated for the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**

**Key Highlights**

- The budget for the scheme for **the financial year 2024-25 has been hiked by ₹26,000 crore** in comparison to the 2023-24 Budget estimates
  - Though it is the same as the revised estimates for the ongoing financial year (2023-24).
- So, **the net gain for the rural employment scheme** could be zero or even negative.
- The government has argued that **MGNREGS is a dynamic scheme and the dues are cyclically paid.**
- But for the last two years, the **Centre has halted the programme in West Bengal**, claiming corruption in implementation of the scheme.
- “To meet the employment needs of registered households under MGNREGS, **a crucial ₹3 lakh crore is essential.**
- However, the allocated budget falls significantly short at a mere ₹86,000 crore.
- Considering the outstanding dues in West Bengal that need clearing and the additional work requirements for the workers in the State this year,
  - Coupled with the historical trend of 15 to 20% of the budget being spent on clearing past dues, the allocation seems increasingly inadequate.
- This shortfall raises serious concerns as it not only jeopardises the guaranteed right to work under MGNREGS
- but also constitutes a gross violation of this fundamental entitlement,”



## GS III

### 3. Lakshadweep in focus, domestic tourism to get a boost - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

#### Prelims Takeaway

- PRASHAD
- MICE Promotion Bureau

#### News:

- Recently, a **special emphasis was laid on domestic tourism** by finance minister in her budget speech
- She asked all **state governments to take up comprehensive development of iconic tourist centres** along with branding and marketing them at a global scale.

#### Key Highlights

- There is also a renewed focus on port connectivity and infrastructure development on islands, including Lakshadweep
- On the archipelago of 35 islands, the government will undertake “projects for port connectivity, tourism infrastructure, and amenities on our islands, including Lakshadweep.
  - This will help in generating employment in the Union Territory, she said.
- Consequently, the **Ministry of Tourism’s flagship Swadesh Darshan scheme** (for integrated development of tourist circuits around specific themes)
  - Has an increased outlay of Rs 1,750 crore for 2024-25, compared to Rs 818 crore in the previous year, and Rs 1,412 crore a year before that.
- In a first, the FM has also announced a framework for rating iconic tourist destinations based on the quality of facilities being offered
  - Also offering **long-term interest-free loans to states** for developing these destinations.
- Late last year, the ministry worked out a model for setting up a city-level **MICE Promotion Bureau at important destinations for facilitating and promoting the city as a MICE destination.**
- It also launched a dedicated brand called ‘**Meet in India**’ to promote India as a conference tourism destination.
- The Ministry launched the ‘Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive’ (**PRASHAD**) **scheme in 2014-2015**
  - To provide financial assistance to states and UTs for infrastructure development at tourist destinations.

### 4. Concerns over GDP, spending cuts; fiscal deficit is bright spot - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

#### Prelims Takeaway

- Capex
- Fiscal Deficit

#### News:

- The Finance Minister presented the **interim Union Budget** for 2024-25, **focusing on achievements and providing a recap of the past decade.**

#### Muted GDP Growth Outlook

- The nominal GDP growth rate, **crucial for budget considerations, is anticipated to be 10.5%** for the upcoming year.
- A sluggish nominal GDP growth poses challenges for real GDP growth, estimating a range of 6% to 6.5% for 2024-25.

#### Fiscal Deficit Reduction

- Fiscal deficit, **representing government borrowing from the market**, is a critical parameter.
- The government has successfully **reduced the fiscal deficit from 9.2% of GDP** in the post-COVID period to 5.8% in the current fiscal year.

#### Capex Target Unmet

- The government aimed for a capex target of Rs 10 lakh crore

- But revised estimates reveal it fell short at Rs 9.5 lakh crore, raising concerns about its impact on overall economic growth.

#### Reduction in Health and Education Spending

- **Allocations for health and education**, crucial for development, have been **historically lower than required**.
- The government has not met budgeted targets for both sectors in the current fiscal year, with actual spending falling short.

#### Cuts in Core Schemes

- Major government schemes, particularly **those focused on marginalized sections** like SCs, STs, and minorities, **have experienced expenditure cuts**.
- Revised Estimates for key schemes show reductions, raising questions about the government's commitment to social welfare.

#### Income Tax as Top Revenue Source

- Traditionally reliant on market borrowings, the government's financial resources are shifting.
- Income tax collections are projected to contribute the most (19%) to government resources in FY25, surpassing corporate tax (17%), GST (18%), and borrowings (28%).

## 5. Viability gap funding for tapping off-shore wind leads green push - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation  
**News:**

- Recently, the Finance Minister unveiled a significant move to tap into the untapped potential of **off-shore wind energy**.

#### Off-Shore Wind Energy Boost

- Off-shore wind turbines, situated in the middle of the sea for optimal wind exposure, promise higher conversion rates of wind energy to electricity.
- Despite higher construction and maintenance costs, the government aims to offset these by encouraging large-scale systems.

#### Current Landscape and Future Prospects

- India presently lacks off-shore wind projects, but potential sites, particularly **off the coasts of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu**, have been identified.
- The announcement includes **viability gap funding** to facilitate the establishment of at least **one gigawatt of off-shore wind energy capacity**.
  - It acts as a **financial incentive** to attract investors, signalling the government's commitment to advancing clean energy technologies.

#### Prelims Takeaway

- Coal Gasification and Liquefaction
- Off-Shore Wind Energy
- Renewable Energy
- Electric Vehicles

#### Budget's Green Initiatives

- **Off-Shore Wind Viability Gap Funding:** Intended to facilitate the establishment of off-shore wind farms, lowering entry barriers for investors.
- **Rooftop Solar Incentives:** Households installing rooftop solar systems will receive 300 units of free electricity every month, aiming to encourage widespread adoption.
- **Electric Vehicle (EV) Ecosystem Support:** The government plans to support expanding manufacturing and charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- **Compressed Biogas Blending:** Mandatory blending of compressed biogas in CNG and PNG in a phased manner. Financial aid for biomass collection from various sources was announced to boost electricity generation through biomass.
- **Biomass Aggregation Machinery Support:** Financial assistance will be provided for biomass aggregation machinery, enhancing biomass collection for increased biofuel production.

#### Coal Gasification and Liquefaction

- The Finance Minister also revealed plans to **establish 100 million tonnes of coal gasification and liquefaction capacity by 2030**.

- **Objective:** To reduce dependence on imported liquid or gaseous fuels like natural gas, methanol, and ammonia.
- While these processes do not inherently **make coal a cleaner energy source**, they aim to **enhance India's energy security** by minimizing reliance on external fuel sources.
- Critics argue that the budget falls short in **providing sufficient support for clean energy solutions**.

## 6. Negotiating BITs with trade partners to boost FDI - Indian Express

**Relevance:** Economy

**News:**

- In the Interim Budget speech, the Finance Minister highlighted India's efforts to negotiate new **Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)**.
- **Objective:** To enhance foreign direct investments (FDI), especially in the face of declining FDI inflows.
- FDI equity inflows in India **decreased by 24%** to \$20.48 billion in April-September 2023.

### Prelims Takeaway

- Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)
- Free Trade Agreement (FTAs)
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

**Background**

- New BITs became scarce after India adopted the **model BIT in 2016**.
- India aims to **pursue economic integration with western nations** through **free trade agreements and investment treaties**.
- The FM emphasized the importance of negotiating BITs to **encourage sustained foreign investment**, aligning with the 'first develop India' spirit.
- **FDI inflow during 2014-23 reached \$596 billion**, marking a golden era and doubling the inflow during 2005-14.

**Challenges with BITs**

- Trade partners raised concerns about India's insistence on the '**exhaustion of local remedies clause**' in the model BIT.
  - It advocates resolving investment-related disputes locally before resorting to international arbitration.
- **India's rank of 163** out of 190 countries in **ease of enforcing contracts** poses a challenge to FDI inflows.
  - It took 1,445 days and 31% of the claim value for dispute resolution.

**Historical Perspective**

- Prior to 2015, India had **BITs with 83 countries/regions**.
- India suspended BITs with 68 countries/regions post-2015, urging renegotiations based on the 2016 model BIT.
- **Six BITs are still in force**, with the suspension triggered by high-profile defeats in investor-state disputes.

## 7. India increases its tally of Ramsar sites to 80 by adding Five more wetlands to the list - PIB

**Relevance:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

**News:**

- Recently, the government announced the designation of **five new Ramsar sites** in India on **World Wetlands Day**.
- Total Ramsar sites in India **increased to 80** from 75, with **Tamil Nadu having the most (16 sites)**, followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).

### Prelims Takeaway

- Ramsar Convention
- New Ramsar Sites
- World Wetlands Day 2024

**World Wetlands Day 2024**

- **Theme: Wetlands and Human Wellbeing**, highlighting the essential role of wetlands in flood protection, clean water, biodiversity, and recreational opportunities.

- India, a Party to the Ramsar Convention since 1982, has seen a **significant increase in Ramsar sites**, reaching 80 from 26 in the last ten years.

#### New Ramsar Sites

##### 1. Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)

- It is a **man-made village irrigation tank** rich in biodiversity built centuries back.
- It supports more than 1% of the biogeographic population of **Painted Stork and Black-headed Ibis**.

##### 2. Aghanashini Estuary (Karnataka)

- It is formed at the confluence of the **Aghanashini River with the Arabian Sea**.
- The brackish water of the Estuary provides **diverse ecosystem services** including flood and erosion risk mitigation, biodiversity conservation and livelihood support.
- The wetland helps in **traditional fish farming in the estuarine rice fields** (locally known as **Gazni rice fields**), bivalve shell collection and salt production.

##### 3. Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)

- It is a man-made wetland constructed to **store rainwater for irrigation purposes**.
- Harbours **two vulnerable species**, namely the Common pochard and River tern and **four near-threatened species**, namely the Oriental Darter Black-headed Ibis Woolly-necked Stork and Painted Stork
- It is also one of the largest wintering grounds for the **Bar-headed goose**.

##### 4. Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu)

- One of the largest inland wetlands of Tamil Nadu, it is a significant source of groundwater recharge for the area.

##### 5. Longwood Shola Reserve Forest (Tamil Nadu)

- It serves as habitat for the globally endangered **Black-chinned Nilgiri Laughing thrush, Nilgiri Blue Robin** and vulnerable **Nilgiri Wood-pigeon**.

## Editorials, Gists and Explainers

### 8. A case of capex under the 'macroscope' - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Economy

**Context:**

- India's economic recovery post-COVID-19 was marked by robust performance in **exports and domestic investments**.
- **Global supply chain easing** and a **structural rise in services exports and domestic investments** fueled the export growth.



<p><b>Improvement in Investment Ratio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Statistical Office estimates that India's investment ratio improved to 29.8% of GDP in FY23-24, up from the recent low of 27.3% in 2020-21.</li> <li>India ranks fourth globally for the most significant improvement in the investment ratio.</li> </ul> <p><b>Interim Budget 2024: Prioritizing Capex</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The FY25 Interim Budget continues the emphasis on public capital expenditure, setting a record high of ₹11.11 trillion.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is equivalent to 3.4% of GDP, the highest in two decades.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Economic services receive the majority, with hard infrastructure sectors like roads and railways being significant beneficiaries.</li> </ul> <p><b>Focus on Railways and Defence Capex</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Major economic rail corridors are identified under the PM Gati Shakti program, enhancing logistics efficiency.</li> <li>Defence capex sees a record allocation of ₹1.72 trillion, supporting the Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign.</li> <li>A new scheme for deep-tech technologies for defence is also introduced.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Inclusive Capex Push</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loans and advances are expected to increase to ₹1.71 trillion in FY25, facilitating state-level capex.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>States contribute significantly to general government capex.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The housing sector receives attention, expanding PM Awas Yojana (Grameen) to include two crore additional houses.</li> <li>Green energy ambitions are integrated into the capex plan, promoting rooftop solarisation for one crore households.</li> <li>Despite the focus on government capex, there is a slowdown in spending by public sector enterprises (PSEs).</li> </ul> <p><b>Fiscal Consolidation and G-Sec Borrowing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The high point of the budget is fiscal consolidation, with a fiscal deficit target of 5.1% of GDP in FY25, lower than consensus expectations.</li> <li>Gross G-sec borrowing is expected to moderate to a three-year low of ₹14.13 trillion.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will potentially benefit the private sector with improved availability of lendable resources.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## 9. Ignoring an agricultural sector in distress - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Agriculture

**Context:**

- The Finance Ministry's report and the vote-on-account by the Finance Minister are focusing more on projecting a positive image of the government than addressing the financing plans for 2024-25.
- The primary concern is whether the distress in agriculture over the past decade has improved or worsened.

<p><b>Marginal Increase in Allocations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The allocations to agriculture, fisheries, and animal husbandry have seen a marginal increase.</li> <li>However, official data suggests a decline in the sectoral deflator in agriculture, indicating a squeeze on farmers' incomes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Incomes and Profitability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agricultural prices experienced a strong downward pull, affecting farmers' incomes.</li> <li>Minimum support prices (MSP) did not rise adequately, impacting the government's ability to control prices in the market.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For major foodgrain crops, the MSPs rose by an average of 8-9% per annum between 2003-04 and 2012-13, but only by about 5% between 2013-14 and 2023-24.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Real incomes of farmers fell, accompanied by a rise in rural unemployment and a crowding of the agricultural sector.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For rural men, the rise in unemployment was from 1.7% to 5.6%. For rural women, the rise was from 1.7% to 3.5%.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The promise to double the real incomes of farmers by 2022 seems to have disappeared in recent years.</li> </ul> <p><b>Stagnant Rural Wages and Public Investment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Real wages in rural India have not risen since 2016-17 and have even fallen after 2020-21.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These trends have been true for agricultural wages and non-agricultural wages in the rural areas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The public investment in agriculture, including research and extension, remained stagnant or fell over the past decade.</li> <li>Capital investment in agricultural sectors did not rise, contributing to the overall stress in rural India.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Painting a Rosy Picture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Finance Ministry's report and Budget speech present a different narrative, emphasizing absolute numbers on increases in agricultural production.</li> <li>However, they overlook the long-term decline in agricultural growth since the early 2010s.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The index numbers of production of all principal crops grew by 3.1% annually between 2003-04 and 2010-11, but only by 2.7% annually between 2011-12 and 2022-23.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Budget Estimates for 2024-25</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Budget Estimates for 2024-25 do not inspire confidence, lacking substantive measures to reverse the decline in agricultural growth.</li> <li>Key heads and flagship schemes in agriculture and allied sectors face spending cuts, including fertiliser and food subsidies, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, and MGNREGS.</li> <li>The budgeted allocations for the fisheries sector and animal husbandry show minimal increases.</li> </ul>
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## 10. On Israel's obligation to prevent genocide - The Hindu

**Relevance:** Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

**Context:**

- In a landmark ruling, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has **mandated Israel to take measures to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza.**
- Israel's compliance with the ruling remains uncertain, given the absence of an **enforcement mechanism by the ICJ.**

### Can South Africa Move Against Israel?

- The Genocide Convention (Article IX) allows states to bring cases against others, even if not directly involved in the conflict.
- This is because the prohibition of genocide is considered a peremptory norm of international law (jus cogens) from which no derogation is permissible.
- South Africa, despite its unrelated status, was granted standing to sue, emphasizing the common interest of all states parties in preventing genocide.

### Basis for the Ruling

- The Court found a "plausible" link between South Africa's claims and the protection sought for Palestinians, citing statements from Israeli officials as evidence.
- While an immediate ceasefire was denied, Israel is ordered to prevent genocidal acts, allow entry of basic services, and preserve evidence.
- With respect to compliance, Israel was directed to submit a report to the Court on all steps undertaken within one month.
- The Court said that the fate of hostages abducted by Hamas is a grave concern and called for their immediate and unconditional release.

### What Happens Next?

- The UN Security Council will discuss the decision, potentially giving it a binding effect.
- The US, with a history of shielding Israel from UNSC demands, faces a dilemma in vetoing an ICJ-approved decision.
- Western countries, including the US, have suspended funding for the UNRWA, alleging its staff's involvement in Hamas attacks.

## 11. The problem of moving attention away from services- The Hindu

**Relevance:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

**News:**

- In her speech, the Finance Minister focused on **the government's broad achievements over the last 10 years**
- She also gave some indications for **what might be in store in the coming years, in terms of new expenditures**

**Key Highlights**
**Poverty and income**

- The Finance Minister said that 25 crore people have been brought out of multidimensional poverty (MPI) in the last 10 years.
- The limitations of the MPI in estimating changes in poverty have been discussed extensively.
- For instance, the MPI does not tell us about the trends in income poverty, a useful indicator of economic well-being.
- While this used to be captured by the consumption expenditure survey of the National Sample Survey, no data on this are available for the period after 2011-12.
- The further claim that the "average real income of the people has increased by 50%" is also misleading.
- According to the last Economic Survey, the real per capita income in 2003-04 was ₹42,995 and increased to ₹68,572 in 2013-14.
- The advanced estimates for 2023-24 place per capita income in 2011-12 prices at ₹1,04,550. So, in both periods, the per capita increased by a similar factor of 1.5 (1.59 and 1.52).
- On the other hand, if we look at real wages during this same period, there has been a stagnation.
- As reported in a recent report by an international periodical, "In 2004-05 the average rural worker earned an adjusted \$3 per day.
- That jumped to \$4.80 by 2014 and has remained flat ever since".
- There is other evidence to show that the incomes of the poor are depressed.
- This is also reflected in the poor growth in private final consumption expenditure.
- Structural change in employment is seeing a reversal with the share of agriculture in total employment going up, which is an indication that there are not enough jobs available outside of agriculture.
- Even the increase in women's labour force participation rates in the last 4-5 years seems to be a sign of distress
  - as most women are in unpaid family labour and not in gainful employment.
- The demand for jobs under MGNREGS is still high despite the low wages being given and the various bottlenecks in accessing the Scheme.
- This is reflected in the fact that as per the Revised Estimate (RE) for 2023-24, the outlay for MGNREGS is ₹86,000 crore (compared to the Budget Estimate of ₹60,000 crore), which is also the budgeted allocation for FY2025.
- A number of estimates show that to meet the full demand and increase wages to at least minimum wage levels, much more would be needed.

**Allocations for social sector**

- The Budget allocations for most social sector schemes and departments remain more or less the same as last year.
- The allocations for school and higher education as well as the health and family welfare departments show some nominal increases compared to last year's BE, about 6-8%.
- Although upgradation of Anganwadi centres was mentioned in the speech, the budget for Saksham Anganwadi at ₹21,200 crore is slightly lower than the RE of ₹21,523 crore for 2023-24.
- The budget for PM-POSHAN (school mid-day meals) is ₹11,600 crore compared to the RE of ₹12,800 crore for 2023-24.
- It must be remembered that in real terms, most of these schemes have seen reductions of 25-30% over the last 10 years.
- The allocation for the National Social Assistance Programme, which includes old age, widow and disability pensions, in nominal terms, was ₹10,618 crore in 2014-15 and is now only ₹9,652 crore.


**Mentorship**  
 India

## Quick Look

### 1. Payments Bank

- A payments bank is like any other bank but operates on a smaller scale without involving any credit risk.
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the Nachiket Mor Committee.
- Objective: To advance financial inclusion by offering banking and financial services to the unbanked and underbanked areas, helping the migrant labour force, low-income households, small entrepreneurs, etc.
- It is registered as a public limited company under the Companies Act 2013 and licensed under Section 22 of the Banking Regulation Act 1949.
- It is governed by a host of legislation, such as the Banking Regulation Act, 1949; RBI Act, 1934; Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, etc.
- Features
  - They are differentiated, and not universal banks.
  - The minimum paid-up equity capital for payments banks shall be 100 crores.
  - It can take deposits up to Rs. 2,00,000; can accept demand deposits in the form of savings and current accounts.
  - The money received as deposits can be invested in secure government securities only in the form of a Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR).
    - This must amount to 75% of the demand deposit balance.
    - The remaining 25% is to be placed as time deposits with other scheduled commercial banks.
  - It can offer remittance services, mobile payments/transfers/purchases, and other banking services like ATM/debit cards, net banking, and third-party fund transfers.
  - It can become a banking correspondent (BC) of another bank for credit and other services which it cannot offer.
  - It cannot issue loans and credit cards; cannot accept time deposits or NRI deposits.
  - It cannot set up subsidiaries to undertake non-banking financial activities.

### 2. Green Roofs

- According to a recent research, green roofs treated with mycorrhizal fungi foster a more diverse soil community that is more likely to support long-term green roof sustainability.
- Green roofs are ballasted roofs consisting of a waterproofing membrane, growing medium (soil), and vegetation (plants) overlying a traditional roof.
- Green roof systems, akin to conventional roofs, need to address drainage, stormwater management, and safeguard the building using a waterproof membrane.
- However, they also must establish a conducive growing environment, potentially offering support, irrigation, and root protection barriers while maintaining minimal weight.
- Two types of green roofs exist viz. intensive and extensive.
  - Intensive green roofs are essentially elevated parks. They can sustain shrubs, trees, walkways and benches with their complex structural support, irrigation, drainage, and root protection layers.
  - Extensive green roofs are relatively light. They support hearty native ground cover that requires little maintenance. Extensive green roofs usually exist solely for their environmental benefits and don't function as accessible rooftop gardens.
- Green roofs last longer than conventional roofs, reduce energy costs with natural insulation, create peaceful retreats for people and animals, and absorb stormwater, potentially lessening the need for complex and expensive drainage systems.
- On a wider scale, green roofs improve air quality and help reduce the Urban Heat Island Effect, a condition in which city and suburban developments absorb and trap heat.



### 3. One Stop Centre Scheme

- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme formulated under the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- Objectives:
  - To provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof.
  - To facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services under one roof to fight against any forms of violence against women.
- It supports all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.
- The Scheme is funded through the Nirbhaya Fund and the Central Government provides 100% financial assistance under the Scheme.
- The day-to-day implementation and administrative matters would be the responsibility of the District Collector/District Magistrate.

### 4. Extended ROentgen Survey with an Imaging Telescope Array (eROSITA)

- Recently, the German eROSITA consortium has released the data for its share of the first all-sky survey by the soft X-ray imaging telescope.
- The eROSITA is a wide-field X-ray telescope on board the Russian-German "Spectrum-Roentgen-Gamma" (SRG) observatory.
- It is a sensitive X-ray telescope capable of delivering deep, sharp images over very large areas of the sky.
- It consists of seven identical Wolter-1 mirror modules; placed in a halo orbit around the L2 point.
- It has been performing an all-sky survey, in which the whole celestial sphere is mapped once every six months.
  - Eight such all-sky charts are planned until December 2023.
- It is also expected to yield a sample of several million Active Galactic Nuclei, providing a unique view of the evolution of supermassive black holes within the emerging cosmic structure.
- The survey will provide new insights into a wide range of astrophysical phenomena as well as solar system bodies that emit X-rays via the charge exchange process.

### 5. New scheme for bio-manufacturing, bio-foundry on the cards

- Seeking to push utilisation of recycled resources, government will launch a scheme of 'bio-manufacturing and bio-foundry'
- It will provide environment-friendly alternatives such as biodegradable polymers, bio-plastics, bio-pharmaceuticals and bio-agri products to consumers and industry.
- "This scheme will help in transforming today's consumptive manufacturing paradigm to one based on regenerative principles
- The 'bio-manufacturing and bio-foundry' concept is broadly based on circularity in which recycling and reuse of resources will be key for manufacturing.
- It will also use bio-agri inputs for various uses, including production of ethanol, as a source of bioenergy and bio-degradable items. Similarly, bio-based feedstock will be used in bio-refineries.

## Prelims Track Question

**Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the Credit-Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS)**

1. CLSS is a government initiative aimed at providing interest subsidy to individuals belonging to economically weaker sections for housing loans.
2. The scheme operates under the Ministry of Finance to facilitate affordable housing for all.
3. The primary focus of CLSS is to promote the construction and purchase of new houses.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

**Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**

1. MGNREGS guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
2. The scheme aims to enhance livelihood security by providing at least 120 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year.
3. MGNREGS is a centrally sponsored scheme, and funds are shared between the central and state governments.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

**Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the Swadesh Darshan scheme**

1. Swadesh Darshan is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, aimed at developing thematic tourist circuits in the country.
2. The scheme focuses on promoting pilgrimage tourism and creating infrastructure around religious sites.
3. Financial assistance under Swadesh Darshan is provided only to the state

governments and Union Territory Administrations for project implementation.

**How many of the statements given above is/are INcorrect?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

**Q4. Consider the following statements regarding Fiscal Deficit**

1. Fiscal Deficit represents the excess of government expenditures over its total revenue, excluding borrowings.
2. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act of 2003 mandates the Union government to contain its fiscal deficit to 3% of the nominal GDP.
3. An increase in fiscal deficit can lead to higher interest rates and negatively impact private sector borrowing.
4. Fiscal deficit adds to government debt, and repaying the debt requires the government to levy additional taxes, potentially affecting economic activity.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. All four

**Q5. With reference to coal gasification, consider the following statements**

1. It is a process in which coal is partially oxidised with air, oxygen, steam or carbon dioxide to produce syngas.
2. It has greater efficiency than conventional coal-burning.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

**Q6. Consider the following statements about Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs)**

1. BITs are treaties between two countries aimed at protecting investments made by investors of both countries.

2. Model BIT widened the definition of investment that needed to qualify for BIT protection.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only 1  
B. Only 2  
C. Both 1 and 2  
D. Neither 1 nor 2

**Q7. Consider the following pairs with reference to the newly designated Ramsar Sites**

1. Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve: Karnataka
2. Aghanashini Estuary: Andhra Pradesh
3. Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary: Tamil Nadu
4. Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve: Kerala

**How many of the pairs mentioned above are correctly matched?**

- A. Only one  
B. Only two  
C. Only three  
D. All four

**Q8. Consider the following**

1. Loans from a public or foreign government
2. Long-term investments by the government on creating assets
3. Money earned by selling assets such as shares of public enterprises

**How many of the items mentioned above are the components of capital budget?**

- A. Only one  
B. Only two  
C. All three  
D. None

**Q9. Consider the following statements about International Court of Justice (ICJ)**

1. The seat of the Court is located in New York, United States.
2. The hearings of the ICJ are always public.
3. The court's judgments in contentious cases are final and binding.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one  
B. Only two  
C. All three  
D. None

**Q10. Consider the following statements regarding Multidimensional Poverty**

1. Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) considers only income-related aspects to assess poverty.
2. MPI is a composite measure that takes into account various dimensions of poverty, including health, education, and living standards.
3. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) publishes the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index annually.
4. An increase in the MPI value indicates an improvement in overall living standards and a reduction in poverty.

**How many of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- A. Only one  
B. Only two  
C. Only three  
D. All four



## Prelims Track Answer

### Answer 1 Option B is correct

#### Explanation

- CLSS is a government initiative under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, not the Ministry of Finance. It aims to provide interest subsidy to individuals belonging to economically weaker sections (EWS), Low-Income Group (LIG), and Middle-Income Group (MIG) for housing loans. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- The scheme operates under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, not the Ministry of Finance. It is designed to promote affordable housing for all. **Hence, statement 2 is INcorrect**
- The primary focus of CLSS is to promote the construction and purchase of new houses by providing interest subsidies on housing loans to eligible beneficiaries. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

### Answer 2 Option B is correct

#### Explanation

- MGNREGS guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This is a key feature of the scheme. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- The aim of MGNREGS is to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year, not 120 days. **Hence, statement 2 is INcorrect**
- MGNREGS is a centrally sponsored scheme, and funds are shared between the central and state governments. The central government bears the major financial burden, while the state governments implement the scheme at the ground level. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

### Answer 3 Option A is correct

#### Explanation

- Swadesh Darshan is indeed a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Its primary objective is to develop thematic tourist circuits in the country, promoting diverse attractions. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- While Swadesh Darshan aims to develop thematic circuits, it does not exclusively focus on pilgrimage tourism. It encompasses various themes, including cultural, heritage,

coastal, and wildlife tourism. **Hence, statement 2 is INcorrect**

- Financial assistance under Swadesh Darshan is provided to both state governments and Union Territory Administrations for project implementation. This ensures collaborative efforts between the central and regional authorities in promoting tourism. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

### Answer 4 Option C is correct

#### Explanation

- Fiscal Deficit represents the excess of government expenditures over its total revenue, including borrowings. It is a key indicator of the government's financial health. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- While the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act of 2003 does mandate fiscal discipline, the specified target for fiscal deficit is 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), not nominal GDP. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect**
- An increase in fiscal deficit can lead to higher interest rates. When the government borrows extensively, it reduces the pool of funds available for private sector borrowing, leading to increased interest rates. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**
- Fiscal deficit adds to government debt, and repaying this debt requires the government to levy additional taxes. This can potentially affect economic activity by reducing disposable income and consumption. **Hence, statement 4 is correct**

### Answer 5 Option C is correct

#### Explanation

- Coal gasification is the process of producing syngas, a mixture consisting of carbon monoxide (CO), hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>), carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), natural gas (CH<sub>4</sub>), and water vapour (H<sub>2</sub>O). **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Benefits of gasification
  - Transporting gas is a lot cheaper than transporting coal.
  - Help address local pollution problems.
  - Has greater efficiency than conventional coal-burning because it can effectively use the gases twice. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**

- Coal gasification is one of the more water-intensive forms of energy production.
- There are also concerns about water contamination, land subsidence and disposing of waste water safely.

**Answer 6 Option A is correct****Explanation**

- BITs are treaties between two countries aimed at protecting investments made by investors of both countries. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- They protect investments by imposing conditions on the regulatory behaviour of the host state and thus, prevent undue interference with the rights of the foreign investor.
- Prior to 2015, India had BITs with 83 countries/regions.
- India suspended BITs with 68 countries/regions post-2015, urging renegotiations based on the 2016 model BIT.
- Model BIT narrowed the definition of investment that needed to qualify for BIT protection. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- It contains a clause mandating exhaustion of domestic remedy prior to initiating international arbitration proceedings.
- Six BITs are still in force, with the suspension triggered by high-profile defeats in investor-state disputes.

**Answer 7 Option B is correct****Explanation**

- Recently, the government announced the designation of five new Ramsar sites in India on World Wetlands Day.
- Total Ramsar sites in India increased to 80 from 75, with Tamil Nadu having the most (16 sites), followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).
- New Ramsar Sites
  - Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)
  - Aghanashini Estuary (Karnataka)
  - Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)
  - Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu)
  - Longwood Shola Reserve Forest (Tamil Nadu). **Hence, option B is correct.**

**Answer 8 Option C is correct****Explanation**

- The capital budget refers to an account of assets and liabilities of the government that

includes capital receipts and capital expenditures.

- Capital expenditure components are Expenditure on the acquisition of land, building, machinery, equipment, creating assets such as roads and hospitals, repayment of government borrowings, loans, and advances by the central government to state and union territory governments, etc.
- Capital receipts components are Loan borrowings, disinvestments, funds received from the issue of shares or debentures, etc. **Hence, option C is correct.**

**Answer 9 Option B is correct****Explanation**

- The ICJ, also known as the World Court, is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN).
- It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the UN and began work in April 1946.
- It is supported by a Registry, its permanent administrative secretariat, which operates independently of the United Nations Secretariat.
- All hearings of the ICJ are conducted publicly. The official languages of the Court Are French and English. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
  - Of the six principal organs of the UN, it is the only one not located in New York, United States.
- The ICJ serves two main functions viz.
  - Contentious Cases: It acts as a dispute settlement body between two member states, addressing several issues such as land frontiers, maritime boundaries, territorial sovereignty, diplomatic relations etc.
  - Advisory Opinions: It can provide advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by UN bodies or specialized agencies, clarifying lawful functioning or strengthening authority in relation to member states.
  - The court's judgments in contentious cases are final and binding on the parties to a case, and without appeal. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

**Answer 10 Option B is correct****Explanation**

- Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a comprehensive measure that goes beyond income-related aspects. It considers various dimensions, such as health, education, and living standards, to assess poverty. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect**
- MPI is a composite measure that considers multiple dimensions of poverty, providing a more holistic understanding of the living conditions of a population. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) publishes the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index annually, contributing to global efforts to monitor and address poverty. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**
- In the context of MPI, a higher value indicates a higher level of multidimensional poverty. Therefore, a decrease in the MPI value indicates an improvement in overall living standards and a reduction in poverty. **Hence, statement 4 is incorrect**



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+91 9999 057869  
www.mentorshipindia.com

A-92, Third Floor, Hari Nagar  
Delhi - 110064

 @mentorship.india