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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS





## Daily Current Affairs from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Assam Tribune*

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#### GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

##### 1. Rajasthan tables anti-conversion Bill

**Context:** Citing conversion through coercion, allurements or fraudulent means, the Rajasthan government has tabled the Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill in the Assembly on Monday with a maximum imprisonment of 10 years and all offences being cognizable and non-bailable. Once passed, Rajasthan will join 11 other states including Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, UP and Madhya Pradesh in having anti-conversion law.

#### Key points

- **Overview:** The Bill is being introduced to prevent forcible conversions, especially those of vulnerable communities and tribes.

- **Anti-conversion law:** Anti-conversion laws refer to laws that are designed to prevent or prohibit the conversion of one religion to another. These laws may be used to prevent individuals from leaving a particular religion or to prevent religious groups from proselytizing or recruiting members from other religious groups.
- **Constitutional Provision:** Article 25 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the freedom to practise, profess, and propagate any religion. It also grants all religious groups the right to control their religious affairs, subject to public morality, health, and order.
- **Existing Laws:** Religious conversions have not been subject to any national restrictions or regulations. Private Member Bills to control religious conversions, however, have repeatedly been introduced in the Parliament since 1954.
- **Need for the Bill:** *No Right to Evangelize* - According to the Constitution, every person has the fundamental right to profess, practise, and spread their religion. A collective right to proselytise cannot be derived from an individual's freedom of conscience and religion. Because both the person seeking to be converted and the person who is converting have a right to religious freedom. *Fraudulent Marriages* - In the recent past, there have been several instances where people have forced someone to convert to their religion after they have been married to someone of a different religion by either lying about or hiding their religion.
- **Issues associated:** There are several issues associated with anti-conversion laws that have been the subject of debate and controversy. Some of the main issues include-
  - *Freedom of religion* - Anti conversion laws can be seen as a violation of the right to freedom of religion, which is protected by international human rights laws. These laws can restrict an individual's ability to choose their own religion and can be used to suppress minority religions.
  - *Discrimination* - Anti conversion laws can be used to discriminate against certain religious groups, particularly minority religions. In some cases, these laws have been used to target and persecute minority religious groups.
  - *Conflict with other laws* - Anti-conversion laws can sometimes conflict with other laws, such as laws that protect freedom of expression or the right to freedom of association.
- **Way Forward:** It is a complex issue with multiple perspectives on the matter, however, here are a few ways in which the current situation with the anti-conversion laws in India could be addressed moving forward-
  - *Reviewing the existing laws* - The current anti-conversion laws in India should be reviewed to ensure that they are consistent with international human rights standards and the Indian Constitution. This review should be carried out by experts in the field of human rights and religious freedom and should consider the views and concerns of all relevant stakeholders.
  - *Limiting the scope of the laws* - The scope of anti-conversion laws should be limited to prohibit only forced or fraudulent conversions while allowing genuine and voluntary conversions. This would help to ensure that the laws are not used to violate the right to freedom of religion or to discriminate against certain religious groups.
  - *Prioritize dialogue and education* - There should be more efforts made to promote dialogue and understanding between different religious groups, with a focus on education and awareness-raising about different religions. This could help to reduce tensions and conflicts between religious groups and promote greater respect for diversity and freedom of religion.

**2. CM's visits to South Korea, Japan**

**Context:** Advantage Assam 2.0 is being curated to highlight the comprehensive ecosystem in the state and showcase the all-round development of a 'New Assam'. Leading the initiatives, the Chief Minister, as a part of his global outreach programme, recently visited South Korea and Japan. Assam has three-pronged advantages: location, strategic positioning, and policy initiatives, which have made Assam a natural choice for investment. Dr Sarma stated that Assam is one of the top-priority States for the Government of India, whose strategic location close to the growing economies of ASEAN and BBN countries has made the State highly significant, especially in view of the Central government's Act East Policy.

**Key points**

- **Overview:** India-South Korea relations have made rapid strides in recent years. With the convergence of India's Act East Policy (AEP) and South Korea's New Southern Policy (NSP), there has been an acceleration of economic and strategic relations between the two countries.
- **The Vision of the New Southern Policy:** The Korean government's New Southern Policy aims to cultivate its relations with ASEAN and India as key partners in the southern region, raise this partnership between four major diplomatic partners (the U.S., China, Japan, Russia), develop values that can be empathized with others, and build a mutually prosperous "people centred" community. The New Southern Policy emphasizes the so-called "3P community," which stands for a community of People, Prosperity and Peace.
- **India's importance for South-Korea:** One of the points that the Koreans have been making to India is that they see India as a country that is now strategically important to them. India doesn't have edges which can create problems for them. They are aware of one factor which they have grown up with, which is the Pakistan factor. South Korea is too heavily dependent on China's market.
- **India-Japan bilateral relation:** *Within India* - Japan has been a leading financial donor in the form of ODA (Official Development Assistance) to India.  
*Outside India* - Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGR) announced in 2017 and joint projects in some third countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka and in Africa as well will be taken jointly.
- **Big-ticket Investments with Japan:** Japanese ODA supports India's development in sectors such as power, transportation, environmental projects and projects related to basic human needs. \$90 billion has gone into the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.
- **New Areas of Engagement with Japan:** A 'Cool EMS Service' was started, under which Japanese food items are transported in cool boxes from Japan to India through postal channels. India is likely to pitch for integration between the Ayushman Bharat project and the Japanese Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative.
- **Concerns with South Korea:** Both India and South Korea are concerned about China's rise, especially when China becomes assertive. Both are increasingly worried about Chinese electronic presence in India.
- **Way forward:** India and South Korea must leverage opportunities arising from complementarities between the two economies to enhance investment, to promote joint ventures, and to work towards the goal of raising bilateral trade to \$50 billion by 2030". Experts say that a strong India is in Japan's best interest and for that, Japan must provide even more support. Further cooperation for peace, stability and prosperity of Indo-Pacific is required.

**3. How will the govt. produce the required fuel ethanol?**

**Context:** India is on track to achieve 20% ethanol blending in petrol within the next two months, a milestone that was originally expected to be met in 2026. According to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, the country will now produce 1,100 crore litres of fuel ethanol annually, supporting energy security, reducing oil imports, and benefiting farmers. To meet this demand, the government is expanding ethanol production using sugar, rice, and maize, while increasing the capacity of distilleries.

**Key points**

- **Sources of Ethanol Production:** The government plans to produce ethanol from multiple sources to ensure a stable supply. With ethanol distillery capacity ramped up to 1,600 crore litres, the government is ensuring adequate production levels through subsidies, incentives, and infrastructure investments. The key feedstocks include-
  - *Sugar and Molasses* – Expected to contribute 400 crore litres annually.
  - *Food Corporation of India (FCI) Rice* – Will provide 110 crore litres of ethanol.
  - *Broken Rice and Maize* – Estimated to supply around 400 crore litres.
- **Government Policy Initiatives:** The government has introduced policy reforms and incentives to support ethanol production-
  - *Reduction in FCI Rice Price* – Price lowered from ₹28/kg to ₹22.5/kg to make ethanol production more cost-effective.
  - *Dual-Feed Distilleries* – Sugar mills are modifying infrastructure to produce ethanol from both sugar and maize.
  - *Financial Incentives* – Ethanol producers benefit from subsidized loans, guaranteed procurement, and long-term contracts.
- **Economic and Environmental Impact of Ethanol Blending:** *Reducing India's Oil Import Bill* - India imports ₹10.5 lakh crore worth of crude oil annually. Ethanol blending can save ₹6,000 crore per 100 crore litres of ethanol produced.  
*Boosting Farmer Incomes* - With ethanol demand rising, farmers are shifting to maize cultivation, earning better returns than traditional crops.  
*Sustainable Fuel Alternative* - Ethanol is a clean fuel that reduces carbon emissions, contributing to India's climate goals and energy security.
- **Challenges:** *Impact on Food Security* – Higher maize allocation to ethanol may affect poultry, livestock feed, and human consumption.  
*Need for Infrastructure Upgrades* – More distilleries and supply chain improvements are needed to handle higher production.  
*Market Stability Concerns* – Ensuring stable ethanol prices without affecting food prices remains a policy challenge.
- **Conclusion:** India's 20% ethanol blending target marks a major milestone in its transition to sustainable energy sources. With a strong policy push, increased maize production, and expanded distilleries, the country is set to reduce oil imports, support farmers, and enhance energy security. The future of ethanol in India depends on continued investment, technological advancements, and balancing food security with fuel needs. If executed well, India could become a global leader in biofuel production.

**4. Some wind behind the sails of India's shipping industry**

Context: The Indian government has made significant strides in developing the maritime sector, an area largely neglected by previous administrations. While these efforts have contributed to economic growth and improved infrastructure, the Indian shipping industry remains stagnant. Several structural challenges, including financial constraints, regulatory hurdles, and tax disparities, continue to hinder its competitiveness.

**Key points**

- **Progress Under Sagarmala:** As of September 2024, 839 projects requiring an investment of ₹5.8 lakh crore have been outlined, with 241 projects (₹1.22 lakh crore) completed, 234 projects (₹1.8 lakh crore) under implementation, and 364 projects (₹2.78 lakh crore) in various stages of development. The government has set ambitious targets, aiming to achieve a \$5 trillion economy by 2027 and a \$7 trillion economy by 2030, with exports projected to reach \$2 trillion by 2030.
- **Stagnation in the Shipping Industry:** Despite the progress in port infrastructure, the Indian shipping industry has not experienced commensurate growth. Cargo handled at major ports has only increased marginally from 1,071.76 million tons in 2016-17 to 1,249.99 million tons in 2020-21, an annual growth rate of just 2.85%. Additionally, the Indian-registered fleet has grown at a slow pace, increasing from 1,313 ships in 2016-17 to 1,526 in 2024.
- **Challenges:**
  - Capital Constraints and High Borrowing Costs** - Indian shipping companies face high borrowing costs, short loan tenures, and strict collateral requirements. Unlike foreign counterparts, Indian shipowners cannot use ships as collateral, making financing difficult.
  - Unfavourable Tax Policies** - Indian-flagged ships are subject to 5% IGST on purchase price, a tax not imposed on foreign vessels operating in Indian waters.
  - Shipbuilding Challenges** - India's shipbuilding industry suffers from inadequate infrastructure, high input costs (especially steel), dependence on imports for spare parts, and delays in vessel deliveries. Additionally, customs duties on imported machinery increase production costs, while a lack of skilled workforce reduces efficiency.
- **Recent Government Initiatives:**
  - Maritime Development Fund (MDF)** - A ₹25,000 crore fund aimed at improving access to capital for shipowners. However, only 49% of this fund will come from the government, with the rest dependent on major ports, raising concerns about its sustainability.
  - Infrastructure Status for Large Vessels** - This status allows shipping companies to access benefits like those in other infrastructure sectors.
  - Customs Duty Exemption on Shipbuilding Spares** - The government has extended this exemption for another 10 years.
- **The Need for Comprehensive Reforms:**
  - Long-Term Financing at Competitive Interest Rates** - The industry requires loan tenures of 7-10 years with lower interest rates to facilitate ship acquisition and modernization.
  - Expansion of Shipbuilding Infrastructure** - India must invest in new shipyards and modernise existing ones to build large vessels and reduce dependence on imports.
- **Conclusion:** While the Sagarmala Programme has significantly improved India's maritime infrastructure, its benefits have not translated into proportional growth in the shipping industry. Structural challenges, including capital constraints, tax disparities, and shipbuilding inefficiencies, continue to limit India's competitiveness.



**5. The kind of jobs needed for the 'Viksit Bharat' goal**

**Context:** The Union Budget plays a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of India's economy, particularly in job creation. While short-term measures such as tax relief can stimulate consumer demand, long-term structural reforms are necessary to ensure sustained employment growth and real wage increases. The 2024 Budget introduced Employment Linked Incentives (ELI) under the Prime Minister's five-scheme initiative, aiming to generate over four crore jobs in five years.

**Key points**

- **Climate-Resilient Jobs:** Climate change is an urgent and escalating concern. In 2019, India ranked as the seventh most-affected country by climate change, suffering a \$159 billion income loss in 2021. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) estimates that adaptation costs will reach nearly \$1 trillion by 2030.
- **AI-Resilient Jobs:** The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses a significant challenge to employment, particularly in the IT and business services sectors, which currently account for over 70% of India's service exports. Technologies such as metaGPT, AI-powered coding, and chatbot-driven customer service are already replacing human jobs, raising concerns about employment sustainability.
- **Aspiration-Centric Jobs:** While exposure to digital media and startup culture has broadened their aspirations, their foundational education, particularly in English and technical skills, remains weak. Many still rely on government jobs and coaching institutes to secure employment, reflecting a deeper insecurity rooted in their socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Some Necessary Measures:** A Response to Environmental and Economic Challenges - To address climate related challenges, job creation must align with sustainability goals. The government can introduce large-scale programs that create employment while promoting environmental resilience.
  - For example, state-subsidised e-rickshaws could be provided in six lakh villages, generating two million jobs, particularly for women, while improving last-mile mobility.

*Safeguarding Employment in the Age of Automation* - To counteract the effects of AI, India must focus on AI-resilient jobs that prioritise human creativity and physical engagement. Similarly, enhancing support for the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) can empower rural artisans, farmers, and craftsperson by connecting them with global and urban markets. These initiatives not only create sustainable employment but also safeguard traditional industries from AI-driven disruptions.

*Meeting the Needs of India's Ambitious Youth* - One effective strategy is rapid infrastructure development, such as constructing 70,000 integrated pack-houses to address the existing 95% infrastructure gap in agricultural supply chains, generating over two million jobs. Additionally, boosting local manufacturing of Agri-inputs and promoting high-value exports can create sustainable off-farm employment opportunities.

- **Conclusion:** While tax relief and short-term policies can provide temporary economic boosts, India needs long-term structural reforms to sustain employment and wage growth. The government must focus on climate-resilient jobs that support sustainability, AI-resilient jobs that protect human creativity, and aspiration-centric jobs that align with youth ambitions. By strategically investing in these areas, India can not only mitigate the risks of climate change and automation but also unlock the full potential of its workforce, paving the way for a truly developed Viksit Bharat.