

4th Oct, 2024

1. Caste Discrimination in Indian Prison **GS 2 (Social Issues)**

- **Why in News:** The Supreme Court of India recently ruled against **caste-based discrimination in prisons**, declaring several provisions in jail manuals unconstitutional. This landmark decision is aimed at addressing the long-standing practices that marginalize certain communities, particularly **Scheduled Castes (SC)**, **Scheduled Tribes (ST)**, and **Denotified Tribes (DNT)**.
- **Key Points Made by the Supreme Court**
 - **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** The Court held that caste-based discrimination in prisons violates Articles 14 (equality before law), 15 (prohibition of discrimination), and 21 (right to life with dignity) of the Constitution.
 - **Directive for Immediate Reforms:** The Court directed all states and Union Territories to revise their prison manuals within three months to eliminate discriminatory provisions.
 - SC also directed Centre to make necessary changes to address caste-based discrimination in the **Model Prison Manual, 2016** and the **Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023** within a period of three months.
 - **Critique of Caste-Based Labor Assignments:** The Court condemned the practice of assigning menial tasks to marginalized communities, arguing that it perpetuates caste hierarchies and fails to aid in the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners.
 - **Caste as a Basis for Discrimination:** The judgment criticized the notion of categorizing inmates based on caste, asserting that this practice is an outdated remnant of colonial and pre-colonial systems designed to dehumanize individuals.
 - **Forced Labor and Human Dignity:** The Court ruled that the selective assignment of menial jobs amounts to forced labor, violating the constitutional rights of marginalized communities.
 - **Specific Recommendations:** The Court ordered the removal of caste-related references in prison records and manuals, emphasizing the need to provide an environment that respects equality and dignity for all inmates.
 - **Condemnation of Practices Against DNTs:** The Court particularly targeted the systemic discrimination against Denotified Tribes, urging states to review classifications that treat them as habitual criminals.
- **Prevalence of Casteism in Jail**
 - **Historical Context:** Casteism in prisons has roots in colonial-era practices, where the British utilized caste divisions as a means of control. The persistence of these discriminatory practices reflects deep-seated societal biases.
 - **Discriminatory Labor Assignments:** In many prisons, inmates from marginalized communities are assigned menial tasks, such as cleaning and maintenance, while higher caste inmates are given roles perceived as more respectable, such as cooking.
 - **Segregation and Isolation:** Inmates from certain castes may face segregation within the prison system, exacerbating social hierarchies and reinforcing stigma even in confinement.
 - **Forced Labor Practices:** Reports have documented instances where marginalized inmates are compelled to perform hazardous jobs, such as cleaning sewers, often under unsafe and degrading conditions.
 - **Stereotyping and Stigmatization:** The classification of certain groups, particularly DNTs, as habitual criminals perpetuates negative stereotypes and social stigma, affecting their treatment both inside and outside the prison system.

Caste bias, segregation in prisons violate dignity: SC

Central, State jail manuals and laws must be revised within three months, rules the Bench headed by CJI; it says distribution of work on the basis of caste amounts to untouchability

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday declared that caste-based discrimination of prisoners, segregation of their work according to caste hierarchy, and the treatment of inmates from the denotified tribes as "habitual offenders" within prison walls across India are oppressive to fundamental human dignity and personality.

The top court directed the revision of prison manuals within three months. It ordered the deletion of the 'caste column' and any references to caste from registers of undertrials and convicts maintained in prisons. The court underscored that members of denotified tribes must not be

Removing bias

The Bench says "everyone is born equal" and cannot suffer lifelong due to stigma attached to their caste. The directions include:

■ States and UTs should revise their Prison Manuals/Rules in three months

■ Centre should address caste-based discrimination in the Model Prison Manual 2016 and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act 2023 in three months

■ "Caste columns" and references to caste in prisoners' registers should be removed

subjected to arbitrary arrest.

'Violates Constitution'
"Everyone is born equal. There cannot be any stigma attached to the existence, touch or presence of any person... More than 75 years since independence, we have not been able to eradicate the evil of caste discrimination," a three-

judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud observed.

The CJI, who authored the judgment, referred to Article 15(1) of the Constitution which enshrines the fundamental right against discrimination. "But if the state itself discriminates against a citizen, then it is discrimination of the highest form. After all, the state

is expected to prevent discrimination, not perpetuate it," he noted. He held that discrimination among prisoners and distribution of work on the basis of caste amounts to untouchability, which is forbidden under Article 17 of the Constitution.

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- **Reasons Behind Caste-Based Discrimination in Prisons**

- **Colonial Legacy:** The structure of Indian prisons is influenced by colonial practices that used caste as a means of control and subjugation, leading to entrenched biases that persist today.
- **Societal Norms:** The broader societal acceptance of caste hierarchies contributes to discriminatory practices within prisons, reflecting the stigmatization of certain communities.
- **Lack of Oversight and Accountability:** Inadequate monitoring and oversight of prison regulations allow for the continuation of discriminatory practices without accountability, often embedded in outdated legal frameworks.
- **Insufficient Legal Protections:** While there are laws prohibiting caste-based discrimination, enforcement is often weak, and many provisions are outdated or not aligned with contemporary human rights standards.
- **Cultural Attitudes:** Deep-rooted cultural attitudes regarding caste and social hierarchy contribute to the persistence of discrimination, affecting both prison staff and inmate interactions.

2. Criminalising Marital Rape in India GS 2 (Social issues)

- **Why in News:** The central government has opposed the criminalisation of marital rape in the Supreme Court, stating that matter relating to marital rape needs a "comprehensive approach" rather than a "strict legal approach".
- **Evolution of Section 375 of the IPC:**
 - Section 375 of the IPC defines the acts that constitute rape by a man.
 - The provision, however, lays down two exceptions as well:
 - It decriminalises marital rape,
 - It mentions that medical procedures or interventions shall not constitute rape.
 - The IPC was implemented in India during British colonial rule in 1860.
 - Under the first version of the rules, the marital rape exception was applicable to women over ten years of age. In 1940, this age was raised to 15.
 - However, in October 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, if the wife is under eighteen years of age, shall be considered as rape.
 - The court ruled that the age of consent should be 18, not 15.
- **History of Marital Rape Law in India:**
 - The **Domestic Violence Act, 2005** hints at marital rape by any form of sexual abuse in a live-in or marriage relationship.
 - However, it only provides for civil remedies. There is no way for marital rape victims in India to initiate criminal proceedings against their perpetrator.
 - The **need to remove this marital rape exception was rejected by the Law Commission of India's 172nd report in 2000**, while considering several proposals to reform India's laws on sexual violence.
- **Issues with Exception to Marital Rape:**
 - The marital rape exception, thus, creates a legal fiction where, even if all the requirements for rape are otherwise fulfilled, the law deems not to be rape if the parties are married.
 - Apart from being harmful and discriminatory towards women, the marital rape exception is also entirely **arbitrary**.
 - If sexual assault takes place five minutes before a marriage is formalised, it is rape; but five minutes after, it is not.
 - Sexual assault will be rape if it is committed within the context of a live-in relationship – or any other intimate relationship – and yet, this legal immunity under Section 375 of the IPC kicks in where that relationship has been formalised.

Marital relations must be exempt from rape provisions, Centre tells apex court

Krishnasdas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that punishing non-consensual sexual acts by a man with his own wife as 'rape' will impact conjugal relationship and lead to "serious disturbances" in the institution of marriage.

"The demographics of a marriage are sui generis. There are plenty of examples of male-female relationships. However, the relationship between a husband and wife, which emerges as a result of the tying of the matrimonial knot, is distinct from all of these relationships. To ignore or even to seek to undermine this is to ignore plain reality," the government argued.

The Union government was responding to a bunch



The Centre was responding to a bunch of PILs filed before the SC seeking the criminalisation of marital rape. FILE PHOTO

of public interest litigation petitions seeking to strike down Exception 2 of Section 375 of Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The provision excludes non-consensual sexual intercourse by a husband with his wife, if the latter is over 15 years of age, from the definition of 'rape'.

"In an institution of marriage, there exists a continuing expectation, by either of the spouses, to

have reasonable sexual access from the other. Though these expectations do not entitle the husband to coerce or force his wife into sex, against her will, they constitute a sufficient basis for the legislature to distinguish qualitatively

between an incident of non-consensual sex within the marital sphere and without it," the affidavit filed through the Ministry of Home Affairs reasoned.

The government, represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, said it was reasonable to exempt the relationship of marriage from "drastic penal and procedural rigours" of the rape provisions of the IPC.

"Excessively harsh" "A husband certainly does not have any fundamental right to violate the consent of his wife. However, at-

tracting the crime in the nature 'rape' as recognised in India to the institution of marriage can be arguably considered to be excessively harsh and therefore, disproportionate," the government said.

It reasoned that marriage did not "obliterate" a woman's consent. It agreed that any violation of a woman's consent should indeed result in penal consequences. But there were provisions, other than rape, to protect her consent within marriage.

The Union government also argued that even if a law was framed in the future, it would have to balance between protecting the cherished concept of consent by a woman within the confines of marriage with the competing position of the "potential accused husband".

- The marital rape exception thus denies to one class of women — married women — the guarantees that law offers to all others.
- **Arguments against Criminalising Marital Rape:**
 - **Misuse of law:**
 - Misuse of the law is a big reason why several individuals, jurists and even men's rights activists have raised alarm over the criminalisation of marital rape.
 - **The statistics cited to argue against the criminalisation of marital rape are those of the misuse of 498A, the law that relates to dowry cases.**
 - A total of 1,11,549 cases were registered under 498A in 2020. Of these, 5,520 were closed by Police citing as false and overall, 16,151 cases were closed by police either because they were false or there was a mistake of fact or law or it was a civil dispute etc.
 - 18,967 cases were tried in courts of which 14,340 led to acquittal and 3,425 led to a conviction.
 - 498A cases pending trial at the end of 2020 are 651,404 with a pendency percentage of 96.2%.
 - **Burden of proof:**
 - The burden of proof is a hugely complex issue that has prevented marital rape to be criminalised.
 - In the case of marital rape, one has to consider that intercourse is a part of any marriage.
 - Now, if marital rape itself is criminalised, the question remains who would the burden of proof be on and what would that burden be.
 - **Gender neutrality:**
 - Arguments to make the definition of 'rape' gender-neutral has been put forward on many occasions, and the same argument is put forward in the case of marital rapes too.
 - Even if the exception of IPC section 375 is removed or criminal provisions are added to the Domestic Violence act, husbands will not be able to use those
- **How is Marital Rape Treated Around the World?**
 - According to Amnesty International data, **77 out of 185 (42%) countries criminalise marital rape through legislation.**
 - **Australia (1981), Canada (1983), South Africa (1993), the USA (1993)** have enacted laws that criminalise marital rape.
 - In many countries, it is either not mentioned or is explicitly excluded from rape laws.
 - The **United Nations has urged countries to end marital rape by closing legal loopholes, saying that "the home is one of the most dangerous places for women".**
- **News Summary:**
 - The Central Government has **opposed the criminalisation of marital rape in the Supreme Court**, arguing that the issue requires a comprehensive socio-legal approach rather than a strict legal one.
 - The government expressed concerns that criminalising marital rape could have significant consequences for the institution of marriage and lead to serious disruptions in marital relationships.
 - **Key Points from the Government's Arguments:**
 - **Far-Reaching Implications:**
 - The government stated that making sexual acts between a husband and wife punishable as "rape" could severely impact conjugal relationships and disrupt the institution of marriage.
 - **Parliamentary Decision:**
 - The Centre informed the court that Parliament, after thorough deliberation, had retained Exception 2 to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which exempts marital rape from being classified as a criminal offense.
 - This decision was made during amendments to Section 375 in 2013.
 - **Separate Legal Provisions for Consent within Marriage:**
 - While the government acknowledged that a husband's violation of his wife's consent is unacceptable, it argued that the consequences within marriage should differ from those outside of it.

- **Dual Tracks for Faculty:** Universities should establish distinct tracks for research-focused and teaching-focused faculty to ensure that both roles are valued and not conflated.
- **Societal Impact Over Metrics:** Academic contributions should be evaluated based on societal relevance rather than mere journal impact factors, emphasizing the real-world implications of research.
- **Paradigm Shift Needed:** A cultural shift is required to recognize and reward both research and teaching efforts, ensuring that universities fulfill their mission as centers of higher learning.

The metrics-focused system has created a situation which implies that education is a market rather than a citizen's right and the state's duty.

4. Why Italy matters to India GS 2 (International Relations)

- **Why in News:** Italy and India are enhancing their collaboration in the **Indo-Mediterranean Sea**, focusing on mutual interests in trade, security, and cultural exchange amid global challenges.

- **Strategic Importance of the Indo-Mediterranean**

Why Italy matters to India

- **Vital Trade Route:** The Indo-Mediterranean region is crucial for global trade, particularly for Italy, which ranks as the sixth-largest exporter globally.
- **Digital Connectivity Initiatives:** The upcoming **Blue-Raman submarine data cables** will connect Genoa with Mumbai, enhancing digital infrastructure between the two nations.
- **Security Challenges:** Joint efforts are essential to address piracy in the **Red Sea**, regional conflicts, and the impacts of Russia's actions in Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade.

Antonio Russo
ambassador of Italy
to India

Italy is a country of 'polycentric' Italy and India share common interests that also join challenges in the Indo-Mediterranean Sea. This region is vital for global trade, especially for Italy which ranks sixth among the world's largest exporters. It is also crucial for digital connectivity: the Blue-Raman submarine data cables will soon connect Genoa with Mumbai. Piracy in the Red Sea, the conflict in Gaza and Lebanon, and the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade require our joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Mediterranean.

Therefore, Italy has stepped up its commitment to security and defence in the Indian Ocean Region and West Asia. Apart from joining the Group of Friends of UNCTAD in 2021, a has been the second largest contributor to the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Atalanta and the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EUMASoH). Since February 2024, Italy has been a driving force in the EU military operation, UNAVFOR ASPIDES, to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Gulf.

Naval presence
We have also increased our naval presence in India. After joining the Information Fusion Centre of the Indian Ocean Region in March 2022, patrol ship ITS Francesco Morosini visited Mumbai in August 2023. The Italian Carrier Strike Group (task force) carrier ITS Cavour and light cruiser ITS Alpino is currently in Goa. We are expecting the amazing tall ship ITS Amerigo Vesputi in Mumbai from November 24 to December 2. It is the training vessel of the Italian Navy. We are also planning to hold an 'Italy village' that will offer cultural, fashion, and culinary events, as well as conferences and exhibitions.

ITS Cavour is a short take off and vertical landing ship constructed by the Italian naval shipyard Fincantieri and has been in the service

of the Italian Navy since 2009. As a 'short take off' vessel, it can project maritime power, but also provide logistical autonomy and serve environmental and humanitarian interventions. We are delighted that FASDEX exercises training exercises to develop and maintain member skills and strengthen interoperability are being held during the stay. ITS Cavour is also hosting a workshop on defence industry cooperation. At the same time, it serves as a hospital to operate children with facial malformations: a team of Italian and Italian doctors is performing surgeries under the framework of 'Operation Smile', originated by the Smile House Foundation, Italy.

Defence ties
Historically, the Italy-India defence cooperation relies on a defence agreement signed in October 2021. This document lays the basis for a further expansion of our defence ties in many fields, from research to industrial cooperation, maritime domain awareness, sharing of information, and education and environmental issues related to military activities. At the same time, our defence cooperation strongly relies on regular talks such as the Italy-India Military Cooperation Group meeting, held in March in New Delhi.

When it comes to defence production, Italy matters to India: two of our companies, Leonardo and Fincantieri, are ranked among the first 50 of S&P's top arm producing and military services companies in the world (2023), while other companies, such as Breda, Elettronica and PZC, shed smaller but size, possess outstanding technical know-how. Over the last few years, Italian defence companies have chosen to be open to joint ventures, co-production, and joint development. Fincantieri is cooperating with Coda Shipyard since 2020, while Elettronica signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bharat Electronics Limited in 2020. This partnership approach is in line with India's State

Piracy in the Red Sea, the conflict in Gaza and Lebanon, and the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade require our joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Mediterranean.

requirements by the Indian armed forces. Italy also looks at India as a valuable partner for development of the Indian Ocean Region, from East Africa to India's shores via the Arabian Sea. Both Italy and India are keen promoters of Africa in international fora and jointly supported the inclusion of the African Union in the G20. During the Italy-Africa Council in January, Italy launched a new initiative with Africa, the Mattei Plan, aimed at creating a mutually beneficial partnership to realise several important projects across the continent. This initiative mobilises Italian capabilities with €5 billion in public investments and the involvement of all public entities and the private sector. Among the first countries chosen for this plan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Mozambique are adjacent to the Indo-Mediterranean area. The ambition is to engage with other partners to realise sustainable projects which will help drive economic and social development in Africa.

At the same time, Italy has supported the India-Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEEC). Amidst the conflict in Gaza and the escalating tensions in West Asia, we believe that IMEEC can be part of a long-term vision to ensure shared prosperity in the region. Railway connections, ports, logistics and customs systems can support peace endeavours along a trade route that is as essential for Italy as it is for India.

People-to-people ties
Italy matters to India as a friend. We host the second largest Italian diaspora in the EU. Italy is a reliable economic and defence partner, the second largest manufacturing country in Europe, and a robust security provider taking up responsibilities as a member of the EU and NATO. What person over time are people-to-people ties. These bonds dig deep into an ancient history of contacts between our two civilisations and find new inspiration with every story of cultural exchange, interaction, and business success.

- **Enhanced Naval Cooperation**

- **Increased Naval Presence:** Italy has boosted its naval engagement in India, participating in initiatives like the **Information Fusion Centre** of the **Indian Ocean Region** and deploying the patrol ship ITS Francesco Morosini.
- **Training and Humanitarian Missions:** The Italian Carrier Strike Group, including the aircraft carrier ITS Cavour, is conducting joint exercises and hosting humanitarian initiatives such as **'Operation Smile'** for facial surgeries.
- **Cultural Exchange Plans:** Plans are underway to establish an **'Italy village'** in India to promote cultural, fashion, and culinary events, strengthening people-to-people ties.

- **Defence and Development Collaboration**

- **Strengthening Defence Ties:** A recent defence agreement signed in October 2023 lays the foundation for expanded cooperation in research, maritime awareness, and military education.
- **Joint Ventures in Defence Production:** Italian firms like **Leonardo** and **Fincantieri** are engaging in co-production and joint development initiatives aligned with India's **'Make in India'** strategy.
- **Support for African Development:** Italy and India are collaborating on the **Mattei Plan** to invest €5.5 billion in sustainable projects in Africa, reflecting their commitment to development in the Indo-Mediterranean region.

5. Centre approves 5 new classical languages GS 1 (Art and Culture)

- **Why in News:** The Union Cabinet approved the status of **'classical language'** for five additional languages: **Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit, and Assamese**.

- **About Classical Language**

- The term "Indian classical languages" refers to a group of languages that have a long history and a rich, unique, and distinctive literary legacy
- The Indian government announced in 2004 that languages might hold the title of "Classical Language" of India if they fulfilled a number of certain requirements.

- It was established by the **Linguistic Experts' Committee and the Ministry of Culture.**
- To be designated as a classical language in India, a language must meet specific criteria:
 - **High Antiquity:** The language should have an ancient recorded history of 1,500 to 2,000 years.
 - **Heritage Literature:** There must be a significant body of ancient literature that is cherished by generations of speakers.
 - **Diverse Textual Evidence:** Knowledge texts, including prose and poetry, along with epigraphical and inscriptional records, should exist.
 - **Distinct Historical Form:** The classical form of the language may differ significantly from its contemporary iterations.
- The languages now recognized include widely spoken languages like **Marathi, Bengali, and Assamese, alongside Pali**, which is significant in Buddhist tradition and taught in universities.
- This decision increases the total number of recognized classical languages in India from **six to eleven**.
 - The currently recognised classical languages include **Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia.**
 - The new additions include **Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, and Bengali.**

Marathi, Bengali among five granted classical language status by Union Cabinet

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved classical language status to Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Pali, and Prakrit.

The demand for classical status for Marathi has been pending since 2013 and the approval comes just ahead of the Assembly election in Maharashtra. The approval for Bengali comes amid Durga Puja, the biggest festival in West Bengal.

India has had six classical languages till now – Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Sanskrit, and Odia. Tamil was the first language to be given classical status in 2004, followed by Sanskrit in 2005. Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to X to congratulate all speakers of the newly designated classical languages. "Marathi is India's pride. Congratulations on this phenomenal language being accorded the status of a Classical Language. This honour acknowledges the rich cultural contribution of Marathi in our nation's history," he said.

"Bengali literature has inspired countless people for years. I congratulate all the Bengali speakers all over

Till now, India had 6 classical languages – Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Sanskrit, Odia

er the world on this," he added.

According to the Union Culture Ministry, the criteria for bestowing classical status was revised by the Linguistics Experts Committee, chaired by the Sahitya Akademi president, in a meeting in July.

The Hindu had reported on July 8 that the Central government was all set to tweak the criteria. The Linguistics Expert Committee comprises of representatives of the Union Ministries of Home, Culture, and four or five linguistic experts at any given time.

Once a language is notified as a classical language, the Education Ministry provides certain benefits to promote it which includes two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in the said languages, a Centre of Excellence for studies in classical languages and the University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with at least in the Central

Universities, a certain number of professional chairs for the classical languages.

"The inclusion will create significant employment opportunities, particularly in academic and research fields. Additionally, the preservation, documentation, and digitisation of ancient texts of these languages will generate jobs in archiving, translation, publishing, and digital media," the Ministry said in a statement.

Welcoming the move, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde tweeted, "Finally, Marathi language has been given the status of classical language. This battle has been successful. Maharashtra government had continuously followed up with the Centre for this. I thank PM Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shahji, Cultural Affairs Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawatji. Several Marathi speaking people, Marathi intellectuals, linguists, writers, critics have helped in this. A heartfelt thank you!"

Maharashtra Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis said, "It is a golden moment and a historic day. This is a very proud moment! Eternally thankful to time Minister Narendra Modi!"

6. Union Cabinet Approves Major Agricultural and Employee Incentive Initiatives GS 2 (Governance)

- **Why in News:** The Union Cabinet has merged all centrally sponsored schemes for the agriculture sector into two umbrella schemes — the **Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY)** and the **Krishonnati Yojana (KY)**. The aim is to avoid duplication and ensure convergence.

• Merger of Agricultural Schemes

- The Cabinet decided to consolidate various Central schemes in agriculture into two new programs:

▪ Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY):

- **Allocation:** Rs 57,074.72 crore
- This scheme aims to promote sustainable agriculture.
- The PM-RKVY comprises of the following schemes:
 - Soil Health Management
 - Rainfed Area Development
 - Agro Forestry
 - Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana
 - Agricultural Mechanization including Crop Residue Management
 - Per Drop More Crop
 - Crop Diversification Programme
 - RKVY DPR component
 - Accelerator Fund for Agri Startups

▪ Krishonnati Yojana (KY):

- **Allocation:** Rs 44,246.89 crore.
- It will address food security and agricultural self-sufficiency.

All agri sector initiatives brought under 2 new schemes; States to implement them

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Thursday decided to merge all Central schemes in the agriculture sector into two new schemes, Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (PM-RKVY) and Krishonnati Yojana (KY). With a projected expenditure of ₹1,01,323.61 crore, the schemes will have a Central share of ₹59,088.98 crore and the States will have to add the remaining ₹42,234.63 crore.

The PM-RKVY, with an allocation of ₹57,074.72 crore, is aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture and the KY will address food security and agricultural self-sufficiency, with a fund of ₹44,246.89 crore. Both schemes will be implemented through the State governments.

The Centre said the rationalisation of various schemes was to avoid duplication, ensure convergence, and provide flexibility to States.

Focusing on emergent challenges of agriculture such as nutrition security, sustainability, climate resilience, value chain development, and private sector participation is also envisaged under the two schemes.

"State governments will be able to draw a comprehensive strategic plan suiting their requirements for agriculture sector. Annual Action Plan (AAP) of States can be approved in one go rather than approving them individually," the Centre said.

Schemes such as Soil Health Management, Rainfed Area Development, Agro Forestry, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas

Yojana will be merged in the two new schemes.

Mission for edible oils
The Cabinet also approved the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds), for boosting domestic oilseed production and achieving self-reliance in edible oils.

"The Mission will be implemented over a seven-year period, from 2024-25 to 2030-31, with a financial outlay of ₹10,103 crore.

The newly approved NMEO-Oilseeds will focus on enhancing the production of key primary oilseed crops such as rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soybean, sunflower, and sesamum, as well as increasing collection and extraction efficiency from secondary sources like cottonseed, rice bran, and tree borne oils," the Centre said. The mission aims to increase

primary oilseed production from 39 million tonnes (2022-23) to 69.7 million tonnes by 2030-31.

India to join energy hub
The Cabinet also approved the signing of a letter of intent enabling India to join the Energy Efficiency Hub.

"This move solidifies India's commitment to sustainable development and aligns with its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," the Centre said.

The Union Cabinet also approved payment of productivity-linked bonus of 78 days for ₹2,028.57 crore to 11,72,340 non-gazetted railway employees. The amount will be paid to various categories of railway staff like track maintainers, loco pilots, train managers, station masters, supervisors, technicians, ministerial staff and other Group C staff.

- The rationalisation of various schemes has been undertaken to avoid duplication, ensure convergence, and provide flexibility to states, and state governments will also be able to draw a comprehensive strategic plan suiting their requirements for the agriculture sector.

7. India's fight against AIDS

GS 2 (Health)

- **Why in News:** India plays a crucial role in the **global fight against HIV/AIDS**, and its efforts are vital for achieving the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030**.

- **Key Insights**

- World leaders pledged to end the AIDS pandemic as a public health threat by 2030. India is also committed to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.
- **Progress in India:** India has shown significant commitment and results in combating HIV, with annual new infections falling by 44% between 2010 and 2023—outpacing the global average.
- **New Infections:** In 2023, India recorded approximately 68,000 new HIV infections, averaging about 185 daily.
- **Global Context:** As of 2023, nearly 40 million people worldwide were living with HIV, with a person dying every minute due to lack of treatment.

- **What is HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)?**

- HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.
- It is spread by contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly during unprotected sex (sex without a condom or HIV medicine to prevent or treat HIV), or through sharing injection drug equipment.
- If left untreated, HIV can lead to the disease **AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome)**.
- AIDS is the **late stage of HIV infection** that occurs when the body's immune system is badly damaged because of the virus.
- **Treatment:** The human body can't get rid of HIV and no effective HIV cure exists. However, effective treatments are available that enable individuals to manage the virus and lead healthy lives.
- **Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):** ART consists of medications specifically designed to treat HIV. When taken consistently as prescribed, ART can significantly reduce the amount of HIV in the bloodstream, a process known as viral suppression.
 - **Viral Load:** The term "viral load" refers to the amount of HIV present in the blood. ART can lower this to very low levels, and if the viral load becomes so low that it is undetectable by standard laboratory tests, this is referred to as having an undetectable viral load.
 - **Living with HIV:** Individuals with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load through consistent ART can live long, healthy lives. Importantly, they will not transmit the virus to HIV-negative partners through sexual contact.
- **Prevention Methods:** In addition to treatment, there are effective strategies to prevent HIV transmission:
 - **Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP):** PrEP is a medication taken by individuals at high risk of contracting HIV to help prevent infection from sexual activity or injection drug use.
 - **Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP):** PEP involves taking HIV medications within 72 hours after a potential exposure to the virus, reducing the likelihood of HIV establishing an infection.
- **India's Measures:**
 - National AIDS and STD Control Programme (2021-2026)
 - HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act 2017.

Indian push needed to end AIDS as a global health threat by 2030: UNAIDS

Hindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

Without India doing a large part of the heavy lifting, it is unlikely that the world will meet the Sustainable Development Goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, said Eamonn Murphy, UNAIDS director for the Asia Pacific and other regions, in a written interview with *The Hindu*.

Noting that India has demonstrated high commitment and positive results in the last decades, he said that annual new HIV infections had fallen 44% between 2010 and 2023, better than the global average. However, HIV prevention efforts will need to be accelerated if India is to close the gap with a focus on specific states and districts, he said.

The UNAIDS director



Eamonn Murphy

emphasised that the next five years would be critical for the country to accelerate efforts and share its experience with other countries in the region.

"Prevention is key"
Dr. Murphy, who was recently in India to discuss the challenges in HIV prevention with the Union government and other stakeholders, said that planning

for long-term sustainability beyond 2030 was crucial to preserving the gains made and ensuring that the impact is durable and transformative.

"To achieve the goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, we must not only diagnose and successfully treat people living with HIV but also dramatically lower new infections. Prevention is key. Every new infection means a person requires treatment for life. So, for a sustainable HIV response we must focus more on prevention," he said.

"We must also ensure that there are sustainable health systems for HIV and health which are co-designed and co-implemented by communities and civil society so they respond to people's needs," he added.

Dr. Murphy noted that

last year, there were 68,000 new infections in India, meaning that around 185 people were infected every day.

"The global AIDS strategy calls for 80% of prevention services to be delivered by community-led organisations that are best placed to reach key populations. These organisations need the right space and resources to lead," he said.

New treatments
India has made notable progress in reducing annual AIDS-related deaths by nearly 80% between 2010 and 2023, which is also above the global average, he said.

UNAIDS is currently advocating for new technologies, including long-acting injectables, to reach all patients at affordable prices, he added.

8. Input Tax Credit (ITC) GS 3 (Economy)

- **Why in News:** In a significant development for the commercial real estate sector, the Supreme Court of India has permitted the **Input Tax Credit (ITC)** on construction expenses for buildings intended for lease. This ruling is expected to boost investments in commercial real estate and alleviate financial pressures for tenants.
- **What is Input Tax Credit (ITC)?**
 - **Input Tax Credit (ITC)** is a provision under the **Goods and Services Tax (GST) system** that allows businesses to claim a credit for the tax paid on inputs (goods or services) used in the course of their business.
 - Essentially, it enables businesses to reduce their overall tax liability by offsetting the GST they pay on purchases against the GST they collect on sales.
 - **Ruling**
 - The Supreme Court stated that if the construction of a building is essential for activities like renting or leasing, the building can be classified as "plant and machinery."
 - This classification allows businesses to claim ITC on the construction costs associated with such buildings.
 - The ruling suggests that this ITC will be available retroactively.
 - **Impact**
 - **Easing Financial Strain:** The ruling is expected to alleviate the financial burden of rent on tenants occupying commercial spaces, making leasing more affordable.
 - **Broader Applicability:** The decision is not limited to commercial real estate; various industries, such as hotels, logistics, and infrastructure, will also benefit by claiming ITC on rentals for commercial properties.
 - **Future Considerations:** Tax experts are pondering whether this ruling will extend to factory buildings, jetties, storage tanks, and similar structures. There is also speculation about potential amendments to GST laws to clarify ITC eligibility for real estate players.

SC lays down 'functionality', 'essentially' test to claim ITC

Procurement of goods or services must be directly essential to business operations, and inputs must be functionally integral to the performance or output to qualify for input tax credit, it says

Krishnakumar Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday declared that real estate companies can claim Input Tax Credits (ITC) under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, on costs of construction for commercial structures intended for renting or leasing purposes.



The judgment would give a fillip to the real estate sector. "If a building qualifies to be a plant, ITC can be availed against the supply of services in the form of renting or leasing the building or premises, provided the other terms and conditions of the CGST Act and Rules framed are fulfilled," Justice Oka held.

The court, however, noted that if the construction of a building by the recipient of service was for his own use, the "chain would break and ITC would not be available". "Under the CGST Act, renting or leasing immovable property is deemed to be a supply of service, and it can be taxed as output supply. Therefore, if the building in which the premises are situated qualifies for the definition of plant, ITC can be allowed on goods and services used in setting up the immovable property, which is a plant," Justice Oka reasoned.

The court said the question whether or not a mall, warehouse or any building other than a hotel or a cinema theatre could be classified as a "plant" within the meaning of the expression "plant or machinery" in Section 17(5)(d) of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 was a factual question. This has to be determined keeping in mind the business of the registered person and the role that building plays in the business. "Functionality test will have to be applied to decide whether a building is a plant," the judgment noted.

9. UK to Return Chagos Islands to Mauritius GS 2 (International relations)

- **Why in News:** The United Kingdom recently returned the **sovereignty** of the **Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius**.
- **Key-details of the Agreement**
 - This agreement resolves a **long-standing dispute that dates back over 50 years**, primarily surrounding the forced removal of the **indigenous Chagossian population** and the establishment of a crucial U.S. military base on **Diego Garcia**.
 - The agreement allows Mauritius to implement a **resettlement program for the Chagossians**, supported financially by the UK.
 - Operations at the **Diego Garcia military base** will continue for at least the next 99 years, with the UK providing annual payments and financial support to ensure the base's effective operation.
 - The U.S. military base on Diego Garcia is crucial for military operations in **Africa, West Asia, and Southeast Asia**. It serves as a staging ground for naval and air operations, making it a key asset in U.S. military strategy.

U.K. to return Chagos to Mauritius in historic deal

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The U.K. and Mauritius have reached a historic political agreement to secure the strategically important U.K.-U.S. military base on Diego Garcia and towards restoring Mauritian sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago. A treaty is now being worked out to firm up the agreement, the U.K. announced on Thursday.



An aerial view of Diego Garcia.

(BIOT), with the U.K. authorised to exercise the sovereign rights of Mauritius on Diego Garcia."

MEA reaction

Welcoming the agreement on the return of Mauritius sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, including Diego Garcia, India's Ministry of External Affairs said this "significant" understanding completes the "decolonisation" of Mauritius.

"The resolution of the long-standing Chagos dispute after two years of negotiations, in compliance with international law, is a welcome development," the MEA said in a statement.

India has consistently supported the Mauritian claim for sovereignty over Chagos, in line with its principled stand on decolonisation and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, as well as its long-standing and close partnership with Mauritius, the MEA noted. India remains committed to working with Mauritius and other like-minded partners in strengthening maritime safety and security and contributing to enhanced peace and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region, it added.

- The agreement aims to maintain regional security while addressing historical grievances.

- **About Chagos Archipelago**

- The Chagos Archipelago is located in the Indian Ocean, about 1,000 miles south of India.
- It is an isolated atoll of tiny islands in the middle of the **Indian Ocean**, between **Africa and Western Australia**.
- The chain includes the **Salomon Islands, Peros Banhos, Nelson's Island, Three Brothers Islands, Eagle Islands, Danger Island, the Egmont Islands and Diego Garcia**, a strategically important US military base.
- Diego Garcia is the **largest island** of the **Chagos cluster** and is also located on **major international trade routes**.
- **Historical Background:**
 - The islands were part of Mauritius until the UK separated them in the 1960s during Mauritius's path to independence.
 - Prior to their eviction, the Chagossians lived on the islands for generations, relying on fishing and small-scale agriculture.
- **Forced Eviction:** The UK and U.S. established a military base on Diego Garcia in the 1970s, leading to the forced removal of over 1,000 Chagossians. The eviction process involved relocation to Mauritius and the Seychelles.
- **Legal and Diplomatic Developments:**
 - **ICJ Ruling (2019):** The International Court of Justice ruled against the UK's control over the islands, stating that the forced evacuation was unlawful. It called for the UK to withdraw its presence.
 - **UN Resolution:** A UN General Assembly resolution demanding the UK's withdrawal received support from 116 countries, indicating broad international condemnation of the UK's actions.

