At least 2 dead as cyclone ravages 3 districts of A.P.

Guntur, Bapatla, and Palnadu districts worst hit by Cyclone Murasu with more than 12,000 people in rehabilitation centres; system weakens after landfall on Tuesday morning, moves further inland

Nellore Sravani
VIJAYAWADA

At least two persons were killed on Tuesday after severe cyclonic storm Murasu hit south coastal Andhra Pradesh, destroying standing crops spread over 52,459 hectares and damaging 312 houses and power transmission lines.

The State Disaster Management Authority managing director Prakhar Jain confirmed the deaths and said 12,230 people are currently in rehabilitation centres spread across the worst-affected districts of Guntur, Bapatla, and Palnadu.

Mr. Jain told *The Hindu* that the two rain-related deaths took place in Bapatla district. "A 25-year-old man in Chinnaganjam and a 65-year-old woman in Karamchedu lost their lives after buildings collapsed on them," he said.



Storm havoc: A building that collapsed in Prakasam district of A.P. on Tuesday in rain triggered by Cyclone Murasu. KOMMURI SRINIVAS

Trail of destruction

Murasu, which crossed the coast near Ongole in Prakasam district between 3.30 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. with maximum sustained wind-speed of 110-120 km per hour, brought heavy rain to the parched districts of Prakasam and Palnadu while leaving a trail of destruction. Over 30 trees fell on roads and another 300 were uprooted across eight villages in Prakasam district; more than 200 mobile towers were affected.

The inclement weather disrupted transport and left commuters stranded at several locations. More than 35 trains were cancelled, 14 were diverted, and eight were rescheduled. A number of flights were also cancelled.

Mr. Jain said preliminary reports estimated losses of ₹344 crore and added that the damage was less severe than that caused by Cyclone Arnab last week.

After landfall, the system moved northwestwards and weakened into a cyclonic storm by noon. It was expected to further weaken into a deep depression by Tuesday night, while moving towards Telangana, the India Meteorological Department said.

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AMRITA IAS

GS I - Geography, GS III – Disaster Management | Environment

Key Pointers

- What are tropical cyclones, and how do they form over the Bay of Bengal?
- Why does the Bay of Bengal experience more destructive cyclones than the Arabian Sea?
- How does the IMD classify cyclones based on wind speed?
- What is the role of the IMD in cyclone forecasting and issuing warnings?
- What are the roles of the NDMA, State Disaster Management Authorities and District Disaster Management Authorities?
- How do cyclone shelters and early warning systems reduce loss of life?
- How do evacuation, safe buildings and community awareness help during cyclones?
- How can mangrove protection, better coastal planning and disaster preparedness reduce cyclone damage?

U.S. votes with control of Congress at stake

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

Americans voted on Tuesday in pivotal midterm elections with the Democrats hoping to seize control of Congress and shatter President Donald Trump's grip on Washington for the remainder of his term.

As opinion polls pointed to a setback for the President, Mr. Trump made a final pitch to voters, saying he had rebuilt U.S. through his immigration crackdown, war on Iran, and tariff policy.

Polls predict the Democrats will win a majority in the House of Representatives and possibly seize the Senate on the back of voter resentment at a deeply unpopular President.

All 435 House seats and 35 of the 100 Senate seats are at stake, along with Governorships in 36 States. Democrats need only three House gains and a net four seats in the Senate to wrest the chambers from Republican hands.



Americans fill out ballots for the midterms at a polling station in Washington on Tuesday. AFP

Republicans losing the House in an election that amounts to a nationwide judgment on Mr. Trump would give Democrats the power to stall the 80-year-old President's legislative agenda and launch sweeping investigations of his administration. A Senate defeat would threaten the President's ability to appoint Supreme Court justices and senior officials.

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WILL STOP ISRAEL AID: TRUMP
» **PAGE 14**

GS II – Polity, Comparison of Constitutions | Political Systems

Key Pointers

- What are U.S. midterm elections, and how are they different from presidential elections?
- How is the U.S. Congress structured?
- What are the roles of the House of Representatives and the Senate?
- How can midterm elections affect the President's powers?
- What are the main powers of the U.S. Congress?
- How does the system of checks and balances work in the U.S.?
- How is the U.S. presidential system different from India's parliamentary system?

Air quality plummets in Delhi; Oppn. accuses govt. of inaction

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Air quality in the Capital remained in the 'very poor' category for the second consecutive day on Tuesday, with areas including Rohini, Punjabi Bagh, Alipur, Bawana, Jahangirpuri, Vivek Vihar and Narela recording 'severe' levels of air pollution, according to official data.



A blanket of haze hangs over the city on Tuesday; (below) Cong.'s Ajay Maken criticised the govt. over foul air. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA/ANI



Grim outlook

A statement from the Central government's Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi said the overall air quality was likely to remain in the 'very poor' category for the next three days. According to the Central Pollution Control Board's daily bulletin, the city's 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) stood at 350 (very poor) at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, up from 324 (very poor) a day earlier.

AQI is a measurement of air pollution on a scale of 0-500. A higher value suggests an increase in toxicity. An AQI reading between 201 and 300 is considered 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', 401 and 450 'severe' and 451 and 500 'severe plus'.

Senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Ajay Maken said Delhi's pollution could not be attributed to stubble burning alone. He said the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas also identifies vehicles, industries and dust as sources of foul air.

"Are farmers and stubble burning the only ones to blame? When will the Delhi government take responsibility? Today, five monitoring stations in Delhi have recorded an AQI of 500," he wrote on X.

The contribution of stubble burning in neighbouring States to PM2.5 levels in Delhi stood at 8.2% on Tuesday, according to data from the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences. This is predicted to rise to 20.2% on Wednesday.

'Punjab govt.'s failure'

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) sparred over the state of air quality. Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said all States surrounding Delhi had extended full support in controlling pollution except for the AAP government in Punjab, whose "failure is making it difficult for Delhi residents to breathe". "The farmer asked for machines and support. The AAP government gave him FIRs [for stubble burning]," he said.

AAP Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj shared a purported video of water being sprayed at the Jahangirpuri monitoring station and said, "Water is being sprayed only over the AQI monitoring station and nowhere else. They don't want to work on curbing pollution, but on lowering the machine's reading."

Licence rush

Meanwhile, a senior police officer said on Tuesday that they have received 25 applications for temporary licences to sell green firecrackers a day after the Supreme Court's order permitting the sale and bursting of non-toxic firecrackers in Delhi-NCR.

GS III – Environment | Pollution

Key Pointers

- What is the Air Quality Index (AQI), and how are its categories classified?
- What are PM2.5 and PM10, and how do they affect human health?
- What are the major causes of air pollution in Delhi-NCR?
- How do low wind speeds, temperature inversion and winter weather worsen air pollution?
- What is the role of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)?
- What is the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), and how does it control pollution?
- Why is stubble burning not the only cause of Delhi's air pollution?
- What steps can reduce air pollution through cleaner transport, better waste management and control of industrial emissions?

PACs ensure efficient use of public money: Om Birla

LS Speaker flags long-pending reports of the Public Accounts Committees; urges use of technology to analyse data; Keralam CM calls for discussion on how the committees should treat CAG reports

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said on Tuesday that the Public Accounts Committees (PAC) in Parliament and State legislatures ensure that public money was used efficiently and for the right purposes.

He was speaking at the inaugural ceremony of a two-day conference of PAC chairpersons from 25 States being hosted by the Keralam Assembly.

Highlighting the distinctive democratic convention of appointing a Member of the Opposition as the Chairperson of the PAC, Mr. Birla said this practice reflects the maturity, inclusiveness and strength of India's parliamentary democracy.

"The representation of all political parties in the Committee ensures that different perspectives are brought to the examination of public expenditure. This is a shining example of the ability of democratic institutions to rise above political considerations in pursuit of a common national objective," he said.



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla with Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh, Keralam Chief Minister V. D. Satheesan, PAC chairman K.C. Venugopal, and others in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday. ANI

Calling for the use of technology to break down data, he said, "....the PACs are sometimes beset with delays, with reports sometimes pending for 15-20 years. This has to be addressed. Technology, data analytics and artificial intelligence can play an important role in analysing large volumes of expenditure data, identifying emerging trends, detecting potential financial irregularities and improving the monitoring of audit observations," he said.

Keralam Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan called for a serious discussion on the way in which PACs should treat the findings in Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) reports.

On excluding reports

He said legislature has no power to exclude a report tabled by the CAG from the scrutiny of the PAC, calling such a move an "unhealthy parliamentary practice".

He also criticised the methodology the CAG uses to calculate amounts, saying it often defeats the purpose of an audit.

Congress leader and Chairperson of the PAC K. C. Venugopal said the CAG needs to increase the number of audits and focus more on flagship schemes.

(With inputs from PTI)

Absence of top officials at recent meeting flagged

Press Trust of India
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

PAC Chairman K.C. Venugopal voiced concern over the absence of chief secretaries of six States at its recent meeting. They had been called to tender oral evidence on scholarships for Scheduled Caste students. "Their absence denied the committee the opportunity to examine the shortcomings and secure corrective action," he said.

He urged the LS Speaker to intervene in such cases.

GS II – Polity | Parliament | Parliamentary Committees

Key Pointers

- What is the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and why is it important?
- How is the PAC formed, and why is its chairperson usually from the Opposition?
- What are the main functions of the PAC?
- What are the constitutional provisions related to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)?
- How does the CAG help Parliament monitor government spending?
- How are the PAC, Estimates Committee and Committee on Public Undertakings different?
- Why are delays in examining CAG reports a concern?
- How can technology and better committee procedures improve financial accountability?

Business, unusual

Engaging with the Myanmar junta is a short-sighted move

Months after a sham election that installed junta chief Min Aung Hlaing as Myanmar's civilian President, the military continues to wage war on its own people even as the world has largely looked away. More than a lakh people are estimated to have died since the 2021 coup, many in fighting between the junta and the anti-coup People's Defence Forces and ethnic armed organisations. The junta has also killed thousands of civilians in air strikes on villages in rebel-held areas to terrorise communities into giving up their resistance. With wars affecting Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and Yemen, and Iran, the world has grown numb to such violence. The junta has exploited that indifference and a shifting geopolitical situation to act with impunity. Russia and China, its principal arms suppliers, have stood by it with the former supplying jets that were used to bomb civilians. Beijing, which tacitly allowed three ethnic armed organisations to launch an offensive in Shan and Rakhine States in late 2023, has since pressured two of them into ceasefires and returning seized territory. It also backed the January election. Since being sworn in, Min Aung Hlaing has visited India, Thailand, Vietnam and three other ASEAN member-states. ASEAN still swears by its Five-Point Consensus, which calls for an end to violence and dialogue. Yet, its members seem more than eager to do business with a regime that has flouted every point. Meanwhile, U.S. officials reportedly held secret talks with the junta in Tokyo in June and October, and a senior delegation met Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyidaw in September. Japan is reportedly pressing the Financial Action Task Force to take Myanmar off its blacklist.

The motives are not hard to understand. China wants an outlet to the Indian Ocean and security for its oil and gas pipelines. It has also played both sides, dealing with the junta and powerful rebel groups such as the Kachin Independence Organisation, whose territory is rich in rare earths and jade, and the United Wa State Army, which runs a massive tin mine. New Delhi wants to revive its stalled Act East policy, including the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. The U.S. eyes access to mining vital heavy rare earths such as dysprosium and terbium, for use in electric vehicles and weapons systems. What these short-sighted overtures miss is that trade thrives in a country at peace, not one where armed groups are perennially battling for control. The junta which has killed its citizens and has scuttled every move towards democracy cannot deliver that peace. Unless the generals are made to answer for their war crimes, Myanmar will remain a war zone. It will be ruinous not only for its hapless people but also for businesses seeking to trade with it.

GS II – International Relations | Neighbourhood Relations

Key Pointers

- What led to the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021?
- Who are the main groups involved in Myanmar's conflict?
- What is ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, and why has it not been fully implemented?
- Why is Myanmar important to China?
- What is India's Act East Policy, and why is Myanmar important to it?
- What are the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway?
- How does the Myanmar crisis affect India's border security and Northeast India?
- How can India protect its security interests while supporting peace and stability in Myanmar?

On the Arunachal frontier, silence is not a strategy



Ashok K. Kantha

Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations at Chanakya University, Bengaluru, and a former Ambassador of India to China

For some time, reports have circulated of transgressions by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Asaphila, Taksing and Longju areas of Arunachal Pradesh. The facts are neither clear nor officially acknowledged. Yet, there are signals that something out of the ordinary is happening along this stretch of the border. The matter warrants close attention.

The clearest signal came on October 22, 2026. Speaking at an Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) function, Director General Shatrujeet Singh Kapoor said: "In the past few days, a situation arose where face-off happened at several locations in Arunachal and it still continues." This was the first official confirmation of the scale of the problem. This daily reported, citing "government sources", that the two sides had been in a stand-off at Asaphila, near Taksing, since late July.

Following a brief face-off near Maja, close to Longju, the PLA reportedly returned in larger numbers and pitched tents about six to seven kilometres inside the Line of Actual Control (LAC), as India perceives it. The stand-off has persisted through meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), the Special Representatives and Corps Commanders, and Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India for the BRICS summit (September 2026).

Official responses, several questions

Official reactions are telling. Neither side has denied the face-offs. On October 23, the spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) referred questions about specific details to the Ministry of Defence. He added that the situation in the border areas "gets disturbed from time to time when Chinese forces diverge from established patrolling patterns". His Chinese counterpart said on October 26 that China "conducts normal border patrol and control activities to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and stability in the border areas".

The Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu was more direct. "No doubt transgression has happened. It keeps happening," he said on October 29, noting that China does not recognise the McMahon Line.

Local groups have also been persistent in raising concerns. In June, the Nah Welfare Society of Taksing informed the district administration that the PLA had built roads, bridges and camps on traditional grazing and hunting grounds. In August, a fact-finding team from a regional party said that Indian patrols were being denied access to some areas. The Army described the June reports as "incorrect and without any basis". The Director General of the ITBP's remarks now lend weight to these local voices.

Some perspective is needed. Chinese transgressions in the Eastern Sector are not new. In the past, however, instances of adverse Chinese possession south of the international boundary have been confined to a few pockets: the Namkha Chu and Sumdorong Chu valleys, and Longju. Elsewhere, the Line of Actual Control (LAC) coincides with the boundary. If China has now made deeper intrusions, established a presence in new areas, expanded its presence in existing pockets or prevented Indian patrols from accessing certain areas, this is a serious, though not unexpected, development. Many of us have cautioned that China could attempt in the Eastern Sector what it did in Eastern Ladakh in 2020.

Chinese commentators have been less coy. A day after the ITBP Director General spoke, one of them argued that the "bottom line" of China's approach was to enforce the "1959 Line". China, he wrote, had "largely achieved this goal" in the Western Sector and was "very likely to implement it in the Eastern Sector in the future".

China's claims, India's rejection

The so-called LAC of November 7, 1959, has no standing with India. In the Eastern Sector, China claims that it coincides with the "illegal" McMahon Line, except at Khinzemane. However, China defines that line by transposing coordinates from the 1914 maps onto present-day maps, ignoring the highest watershed, which was the basis of the 1914 alignment. This approach is entirely unscientific, and India has never accepted it.

In the negotiations leading to the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC, India accepted the concept of the LAC but specifically rejected the Chinese notion of a 1959 line. The LAC was the line of actual control on the ground as it exists, not a notional or historical alignment. In cases of Chinese transgressions, India pressed for the restoration of the status quo ante. The April 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question goes further. In seeking a boundary settlement, Article V requires the two sides to take into account, among other things, "the actual state of border areas".

Chinese transgressions blatantly violate several border agreements that require both sides to "strictly respect and observe" the LAC and not to "overstep" it. Both sides are also committed to refraining from unilaterally altering the status quo. Compounding the problem, China has begun defining the LAC in terms of sovereignty, as the phrasing of its Foreign Ministry statements suggests. This runs contrary to the basic concept of the LAC. When the two sides first formally agreed to use the term in the September 1993 agreement, they explicitly stated that references to the LAC "do not prejudice their respective positions on the boundary question" (Article 6).

India, on the other hand, keeps referring to "different perceptions" of the LAC. In doing so, India lends a degree of legitimacy to Chinese transgressions and weakens its own position. Why should India make such a reference unilaterally, especially when Beijing has forcefully revived its "Zangnan" (South Tibet) narrative on Arunachal Pradesh? For India, there should be one perception of the LAC, which is India's perception. The 1996 Agreement referred to "different perceptions" of the LAC, but Article X also required the two sides to arrive at a "common understanding" of the "entire alignment" of the LAC through an exchange of maps. The "Eight-Point Consensus" of the Special Representatives, announced on August 26, refers to discussions on "ways to improve understanding of the LAC in appropriate areas".

The MEA spokesperson reiterated this formulation. India would be well advised not to formalise the idea of "improved understanding". Doing so would help China achieve what it has sought for two decades: to wriggle out of a formal commitment to establish a "common understanding" of the LAC through an exchange of maps and clarification of its alignment. Ambiguity over the LAC suits a party bent on salami-slicing.

None of this means that every transgression must be publicised. If transgressions follow the pattern of earlier behaviour, it is understandable that the government would not wish to highlight them. However, if the pattern changes, intrusions spill over into new areas, or, more seriously, adverse possession or a physical presence expands, the situation becomes far more serious. This was the litmus test applied in the past.

Hiding intrusions weakens border security

Nothing suggests that keeping such transgressions under wraps helps resolve them. It is incumbent on the government to bring them into the public domain, as it has done in the past. When Chinese forces moved into Wangdung in 1986, the matter was made public and discussed in Parliament. The government also acknowledged Chinese transgressions in Eastern Ladakh in 2020, though transparency has been inadequate since then. If India falls into a pattern of denials, obfuscation or conflicting signals, it will only encourage more blatant salami-slicing.

A related question is how India should respond. Should such transgressions be raised primarily at meetings of border commanders, or should they be taken up forcefully at the diplomatic level and, if necessary, at the political level?

Experience offers a clear answer. In September 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the Chumar transgression with Mr. Xi on the first day of his visit to India. This was a key factor in China agreeing to restore the status quo ante. In Eastern Ladakh, by contrast, the status quo ante of April 2020 has yet to be restored, even after six years. India cannot allow China to get away with its playbook of incremental gains that, taken together, create a qualitatively new situation to its advantage.

If there are indeed Chinese transgressions beyond areas of persistent intrusion, particularly if Chinese forces are present in areas on India's side of the LAC or the PLA is preventing India's border forces from patrolling regularly, India would be better served by acknowledging this publicly. Candour will strengthen New Delhi's hand in dealing with Beijing, not weaken it.

India's silence on Chinese border intrusions risks emboldening Beijing and undermining New Delhi's position

GS II – International Relations | India–China Relations

Key Pointers

- What is the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and how is it different from an international border?
- Why do India and China have different views about the LAC?
- What is the McMahon Line, and why is it important in the India–China border dispute?
- What are the main features of the 1993 India–China agreement on maintaining peace along the LAC?
- What was agreed upon in the 2005 agreement on the India–China boundary dispute?
- What are the roles of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) and Special Representatives?
- How do border infrastructure and military activities increase tensions?
- How can India manage border tensions through diplomacy, military preparedness and infrastructure development?

In Tehran, a search for the future of West Asian security



Kabir Taneja

The Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) Middle East

More than eight months after the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran, West Asia remains on tenterhooks, as the United States, Israel, and Iran continue to flirt with a resumption of military hostilities. Elections in Israel as well as the U.S. midterm polls offered an interesting pause, even as war rhetoric remained high. Amid these tensions, an alliance of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, known as the "Mecca Agreement", arrived in Iran's capital in October to discuss regional security.

A large part of Iran's response since the U.S. and Israel began bombing the country in February 2026 has been to target American interests, including data centres, and military installations across the Gulf states. This forms part of Tehran's strategy of asymmetric warfare, shaped by its view of the conflict as an existential threat to the Islamic Republic, particularly following the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in an airstrike.

Why now

The Tehran visit was perhaps one of the most consequential diplomatic moves initiated. From Riyadh's point of view, despite the official statement issued by its Foreign Ministry highlighting diplomatic efforts to disallow a return to military conflict in the region, the outreach had a singular aim: to prevent its conflict with the Houthis from escalating.

Riyadh's airport has been largely shut since October 10, after Houthi-launched missile strikes. A Saudi-led coalition responded with air strikes, but with limited impact. The Houthis have since gained further territorial control in the embattled country, as Saudi Arabia looked clueless on what to do next. Air campaigns against the Houthis have yielded limited results since 2015.

The delegation in Tehran was not led by diplomats but by defence and intelligence leaders from the three countries. It included Pakistan's Army chief, Asim Munir, a favoured military leader of U.S. President Donald Trump, who has also played a mediating role between Washington DC and Tehran. The main point of interest, however, was the Iranian delegation, led by Mohsen Rezaei took over the country's powerful Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) in August, succeeding Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, who had replaced Larijani after his death in March. Rezaei's prominence in the talks also highlights where the nucleus of Iran's emerging power structure lies. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has taken centre stage as the country remains on a wartime footing, with multiple power centres vying for influence following the death of the Ayatollah. The IRGC's leading role is not surprising, given that it has always operated directly under the Supreme Leader's authority.

The 'Mecca Agreement' alliance's outreach to Tehran highlights competing visions for West Asian security

Conflict into leverage

Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan travelling to Iran for this exchange came as a surprise to many, given that Tehran had struck several Arab countries in response to American and Israeli aggression. However, Iran would have sought such an exchange, as it stands to benefit from it. It has made no bones about its support for newer, region-led securitisation taking precedence over those operating under American auspices. The Mecca Agreement, signed in August and tested to its limits by October, has shown little appetite for collaborative military action in the region, despite comparisons with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Following its signing, Iran supported the initiative, with some reports even suggesting that Islamabad might seek Tehran's official membership. For Iran, however, being part of every forum and conversation about the future of West Asian security is exactly what it seeks. Tehran believes that the events of recent months, and its response to them – including the high-risk decision to target its Gulf neighbours – have created leverage that countries such as Saudi Arabia may now seek to address through dialogue. Iran's access to the Houthis, whom it has helped strengthen, is what Riyadh hopes to mobilise for de-escalation, while Pakistan and Türkiye play supporting roles and consolidate their own positions in another iteration of the proverbial "new West Asia".

The road ahead

Ultimately, for Iran, the crevasses created by a conflict that has not delivered the intended outcomes for the Trump administration present an opportunity to consolidate its position with the Gulf states. Many of its neighbours may grudgingly accommodate its demands because they have few alternatives. However, not all may agree with or support the Mecca Agreement's outreach. This could lead to greater divisions over how to engage with Iran within the construct of a regional security architecture for the future, particularly as Tehran is now widely seen as an aggressor – a label the IRGC will not mind, as it seeks to project Iran as a regional power – and remains a geographic reality to contend with. Iran has previously said it is willing to meet its Gulf partners "anywhere" and on any platform to discuss regional security. Although this remains conjecture, the idea of hosting the talks in Tehran may well have originated with Iran itself.

The months ahead will remain tense in West Asia. Recalibrating a long-standing security order is often a chaotic process. The U.S. will not exit the region, but it may have to share space. Mr. Trump will be fine with this. Whether a U.S. accustomed to hegemonic dominance will accept it remains to be seen.

GS II – International Relations

Key Pointers

- What are the major political and security interests of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan in West Asia?
- What is the importance of emerging security partnerships in the region?
- What is the role of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)?
- What is proxy warfare, and how does it influence conflicts in West Asia?
- What role do groups such as the Houthis play in regional conflicts?
- How do the U.S., China and Russia influence West Asian politics?
- Why is the Strait of Hormuz important for global oil trade?
- How can instability in West Asia affect India's energy supply, trade and overseas citizens?

AMRITA IAS

Need for a unified urbanisation plan

The Union Budget, Economic Survey and Finance Commission recognise that India is urbanising across a rural-urban continuum. Yet Census 2027 will use the 2011 definitions, deepening the undercount of urban India; a National Urbanisation Policy can recognise this gap and build the institutional and fiscal mechanisms to bridge it

ECONOMIC NOTES

Sudeshna Chatterjee
Jaya Dhindaw

India's 2027 Census, happening after 16 years, will classify a settlement as urban if it is either notified by a State as a statutory town or meets three census-town criteria: a population of at least 5,000, a density of at least 400 persons per sq km, and at least 75% of male workers engaged in non-agricultural work. Everything else will be counted as rural.

This preserves comparability across Census years, but it also means the Census will measure urban India with a yardstick that our own economic and fiscal institutions have begun to move beyond.

Measuring urbanisation

In 2011, India had 377 million urban residents across ~8,000 cities and towns. Since then, States have notified another 1,000 statutory towns. The United Nations estimates that 44% of Indians live in urban areas today, projecting the urban population to cross 720 million by 2050.

The growth has been extraordinarily uneven. Greater Mumbai had close to 12 million residents in 2011, while statutory towns like Gangotri Nagar Panchayat in Uttarakhand have a population of 110.

Around 94% of India's urban settlements are small towns, while ~60% of the urban population lives in Class I cities—which includes cities with populations ranging from 1 lakh to 20 million. It lumps together megacities like Mumbai and Delhi with non-metropolitan cities like Mangaluru and Amravati, obscuring radically different needs and capacities. Meanwhile, the fastest growth is unfolding beyond cities: peri-urban areas are expanding at ~4.15% a year, compared to 2.9% growth occurring within administrative boundaries.

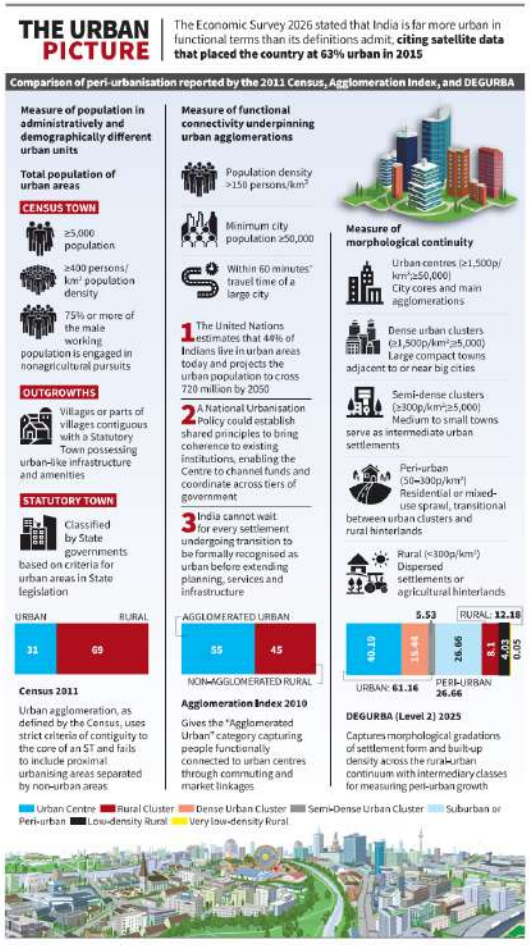
The Economic Survey 2026 stated that India is far more urban in functional terms than its definitions admit, citing satellite data that placed the country at 63% urban in 2015. The 2026 Union Budget allocated ₹5,000 crore each to City Economic Regions, shifting the focus from individual cities to wider economic geographies. The 16th Finance Commission raised the share of local grants earmarked for urban local bodies to 45%. It also created a ₹10,000-crore 'urbanisation premium' to encourage States to merge peri-urban villages into adjoining municipal areas and develop rural-to-urban transition policies.

These measures signal a critical shift, but they do not constitute a coherent framework for recognising transitioning settlements, planning across administrative boundaries or aligning fiscal incentives across India's system of cities. That is the missing link which a National Urbanisation Policy could bridge.

Rethinking the rural-urban binary

Firstly, why does a classification carry so much weight? In India, classification is a gateway. Master plans, municipal finance, Finance Commission grants, building regulation, environmental clearance thresholds and scheme eligibility all depend, in different ways, on how a settlement is classified. This classification is also politically reversible. Article 243Q(2) leaves the notification of an area as urban to the discretion of States, with no standard criteria or requirement to publish reasoning behind the decision.

The law treats rural and urban as mutually exclusive and not a continuum.



Note: DEGURBA = Degree of Urbanisation. ST = Statutory Town. Source: Conceptualised by the WRI India Cities Research, Knowledge and Engagement (RKE) Team based on ORGI (2011c, 2011e); Schiavina et al. 2023; European Commission 2020

Consider Bhiwandi region near Mumbai that spans 60 villages and nine census towns. Here, 91.8% of employment is non-agricultural, yet it is still governed as rural, leaving Panchayats responsible for land use, waste, water and air quality, without a mandate or technical capacity.

The planning consequences are stark. Around 52% of statutory towns and 76% of census towns have no master plan. Nine States have not updated their planning legislation since the 74th Constitutional Amendment in 1992. Meanwhile, the model law most States rely on dates from 1985, and says nothing about the rural-urban continuum, the 74th Amendment, the 2013 Land Acquisition Law, and the emergence of climate adaptation as a planning imperative.

The necessity of national guidance

National guidance on urbanisation already exists, although unacknowledged. Census classification rules, Finance Commission formulae and scheme eligibility criteria, collectively determine which settlements count as urban and what they receive. Because these were not designed as a coherent policy framework, no single institution is answerable for their combined effects.

A National Urbanisation Policy would not prescribe a one-size-fits-all blueprint or a parallel delivery system. Grounded in subsidiarity, it could establish shared principles to build coherence across existing institutions, letting the Centre channel funds, build capacity and coordinate across tiers of government.

The need for a National Urbanisation Policy

WRI India's report '*Equitable, Productive, Low-carbon and Resilient System of Cities in India - Recommendations for a National Urbanisation Policy*' proposes seven systems transformations:

Standardise the definition and classification of statutory urban settlements; modernise spatial and regional planning; reorient public and private finance flows into urbanisation; embed a tiered coordination architecture, anchored by a National Urbanisation Council; build sectoral reforms on functional foundations; align urban politics with reform incentives; and support knowledge exchange and local innovation.

The first three are foundational and their sequence matters. Article 243W makes devolution permissive rather than mandatory, so notification does not automatically transfer all 18 municipal functions listed in the Twelfth Schedule, to newly notified urban areas. A settlement that has not been classified as urban cannot even begin the transition towards receiving critical municipal services. Therefore, settlement status should be reviewed at fixed intervals against set criteria, not only during the Census, using satellite and geospatial data on built-up growth and economic activity, as the Economic Survey recommends.

Spatial planning comes second because every other reform, from housing and infrastructure to climate adaptation and finance, must ultimately be located somewhere. Yet for most Indian settlements, the plans that should guide these decisions do not exist.

The institutional foundations for better coordination do exist. Metropolitan and District Planning Committees have existed under Articles 243ZE and 243ZD of the Constitution for over three decades. Guidance must acquire statutory force to drive change: regional planning must extend below the million-plus threshold as most of the growth is unfolding there. In such areas, peri-urban zoning cannot be optional.

Finance comes third because implementation requires monetary resources. India's municipal revenue is ~1% of GDP, compared with 7.4% in Brazil and 6% in South Africa, while property tax yields only 0.15% of GDP. Piecemeal, scheme-specific transfers leave cities unable to predict cash flow. India has developed a sophisticated set of blended financing instruments, but access is limited. Own-source revenue and formula-based transfers should become the fiscal pillars of urban governance, besides project preparation capacity.

Coordination comes next. The Inter-State Council dates from 1990 and the Central Council of Local Government from 1954. While NITI Aayog routinely brings States together, a National Urbanisation Council could better connect institutions and mechanisms.

The fifth transformation is about jurisdictional fit. Sectoral reforms are generally designed around administrative jurisdictions that do not match the geography of the problem. For instance, 65% of Delhi's PM 2.5 originates outside the city, so a municipal air quality plan cannot succeed, however well-funded. Reforms should be built on functional units – the airshed, the basin, the city region – with institutions empowered at that scale.

The final two transformations concern incentives and learning. Untied grants should reach municipalities directly through a published formula, paired with the knowledge and innovation support that cities need to meet benchmarks.

In most cases, the institution, criterion or instrument already exists. What is missing is regularity, enforceability, reach and accountability for non-performance. India cannot wait for every transitioning settlement to be formally recognised as urban before extending planning, services and infrastructure. A National Urbanisation Policy addresses this by shifting the unit of planning from administrative boundaries to functional areas.

(Sudeshna Chatterjee is Director of Research and Jaya Dhindaw is Executive Director of WRI India's Sustainable Cities Program.)

THE GIST

- The 2027 Census will classify a settlement as urban if it is either notified as a statutory town or meets three census town criteria. This means the Census will measure urban India using a yardstick that the country's own economic and fiscal institutions have begun to move beyond
- Around 94% of India's urban settlements are small towns, while about 60% of its urban population lives in Class I cities. The classification lumps together megacities with non-metropolitan cities, obscuring their radically different needs and capacities
- Grounded in subsidiarity, a National Urbanisation Policy could establish shared principles to build coherence across existing institutions

GS II – Governance | Urban Local Bodies

Key Pointers

- How does the Census of India classify an area as urban?
- What is the difference between statutory towns, census towns and urban agglomerations?
- Why is India's urban classification based on the 2011 Census outdated?
- What are the main features of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992?
- What are the functions of Urban Local Bodies under the Twelfth Schedule?
- What are the roles of District Planning Committees and Metropolitan Planning Committees?
- How can a National Urbanisation Policy address poor planning, weak finances and unplanned urban growth?
- How can municipal bodies be strengthened through better funding and planning?

How the Supreme Court shaped due process in death penalty cases

In *Bachan Singh*, the apex court upheld the death penalty but laid down guidelines for judicial discretion; in *Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, it prescribed 'practical guidelines', including the submission of mental health evaluations and custody conduct reports of the accused

L. Nageswara Rao

The Day Against the Death Penalty, observed on October 10, offered a fitting moment to look back on how the Supreme Court's 1980 safeguards, laid down when it upheld capital punishment, have fared over the past four decades.

In *Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab* (1980), the Constitution Bench upheld the death penalty, but imposed specific conditions in the shape of guidelines for the exercise of judicial discretion. Following the legislative scheme of Section 354(3) of the CrPC, now Section 393(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, life imprisonment was to be the norm, and death sentence could be imposed only for "special reasons". Courts were to weigh the circumstances of the crime alongside those of the accused, and impose death only where life imprisonment was "unquestionably foreclosed".

The exceptionality principle

This idea of exceptionality of the death sentence in *Bachan Singh* is not quantitative regarding an offence's rarity but rests on "a real and abiding concern for the dignity of human life". The methodology adopted by the Court to ensure that the promise of human dignity is fulfilled is individualised sentencing. It is the idea that the death penalty, while being proportionate, must be imposed after properly considering the individual circumstances of the accused. This allows courts to assess how social, structural and psychological factors shape moral blameworthiness, and whether reformation is truly foreclosed. And it is for the state to prove, by evidence, that the probability of reformation does not exist.

Regrettably, this dignity-oriented jurisprudence was soon made precarious. *Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab* (1983), as the Court later acknowledged in *Sangeet v. State of Haryana* (2013), shifted the inquiry towards the crime, in effect asking whether there were reasons to impose life imprisonment rather than special reasons to impose death. In December 1995, a two-judge Bench went further. *Ravji v. State of Rajasthan* held that the nature and gravity of the offence, not the circumstances of the criminal, was what mattered in deciding punishment. Ravji was hanged in May 1996; Surja Ram, in April 1997. Two men were sent to the gallows on a principle the Supreme Court would later declare contrary to binding law.

A decade later, in *Santosh Kumar Bariyar v. State of Maharashtra* (2009), the Court held that *Ravji* had been decided in ignorance of *Bachan Singh*, and noted that it had been followed in at least six other cases in which the death sentence was awarded. *Bariyar* also clarified that life imprisonment is "unquestionably foreclosed" only when the sentencing aim of reformation is unachievable. In 2012, 14 retired judges called the two executions "the gravest known miscarriage of justice" in independent India.

A focus on reformation

Since then, including in the 262nd Law Commission Report in 2015, reformation has been championed as an important goal in death penalty cases. Yet sentencing, particularly in trial courts, looked much the same. A nationwide study of 306 death sentences imposed between 2018 and 2020 found that 36.1% were pronounced on the same day as conviction, and another 18.4% on the following day. In most cases, the defence neither argued nor presented evidence on mitigation.

It is against this record of crime-centric practice that the Supreme Court has, in recent years, turned to the fairness of the sentencing procedure itself. In *Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2022), it prescribed 'practical guidelines' to operationalise the collection of information on the accused, requiring the state to produce mental health evaluations, reports on conduct in custody, and a probation officer's report. In a *suo motu* Writ Petition, since referred to a Constitution Bench, the court insisted that the defence must have a real and meaningful opportunity to present material on sentence. And in *Vasanta Sampat Dupare v. Union of India* (2025), it held that a sentencing hearing which is compliant to *Manoj* flows from Articles 14 and 21. A death sentence imposed without one is unconstitutional and can be reopened even after it has attained finality.

More recently, in *Waris v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (September 2026), the Court upheld a conviction for the rape and murder of a child but commuted the death sentence, because the State had led no evidence to exclude the possibility of reformation. The gravity of the crime, however extreme, could not by itself establish that life imprisonment was unquestionably foreclosed.

The promise, however, remains unfulfilled where it matters most. In 2025, trial courts sentenced 128 people to death. In 95.18% of the cases where compliance could be assessed, the procedure prescribed in *Manoj* was not followed.

A troubling record

However, the greater worry lies not with the question of sentence but elsewhere. Over the past decade, nearly a third of the death sentences decided by the High Courts and the Supreme Court have ended in acquittals. In 2025 alone, the Supreme Court acquitted the accused in 10 of the 19 death penalty cases it decided, repeatedly noting seriously flawed investigations and prosecutions. In *Dupare*, it acknowledged that investigations often rest on "confessions extracted in opacity" and forensic material "of doubtful rigour". A system so prone to error cannot safely decide an irreversible punishment on the crime alone. *Bachan Singh* left us a warning: "Judges should never be bloodthirsty."

The anguish that brutal crimes provoke is real, and no one is insulated from it. But *Ravji* stands as a stark reminder of what follows when that anguish overwhelms legal reasoning. The safeguards developed from *Bachan Singh* to *Dupare* are not obstacles to justice; they are the conditions on which the constitutionality of the death penalty rests. Fidelity to that process is not mercy. It is what the Constitution mandates.

(The author is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India. Views expressed are personal.)

GS II – Polity | Judiciary | Fundamental Rights

Key Pointers

- What are the laws and constitutional provisions related to the death penalty in India?
- What does Section 354(3) of the CrPC, and its corresponding provision under the BNSS, say about death sentences?
- What is the rarest of rare principle laid down in the Bachan Singh case (1980)?
- What were the important observations in the Machhi Singh (1983) and Santosh Kumar Bariyar (2009) cases?
- What is the reformative approach to punishment?
- What guidelines did the Supreme Court issue in the Manoj case (2022) while deciding death penalty cases?
- How do Articles 14 and 21 protect the rights of people facing criminal trials?

‘Structured mechanism’ in place to deal with Ganga Water Treaty: India

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Weeks before the expiry of the Ganga Water Treaty in December, the External Affairs Ministry on Tuesday reiterated that India and Bangladesh have a “structured mechanism” to deal with the treaty’s requirements.

Addressing the bi-weekly media briefing, Ministry official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal reiterated that India has invited Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to visit New Delhi but that there is neither any “update” on the treaty’s renewal nor on the dates for the trip.


Randhir Jaiswal

“Between India and Bangladesh, we have a Joint Rivers Commission which is the structured mechanism for discussion on all cross-boundary rivers, including the Ganga,” said Mr. Jaiswal, adding that India wishes to have a “positive relationship” with Bangladesh.

The bilateral Ganga Water Treaty is set to expire on December 12. The treaty was signed in 1996 between India and Bangladesh when Sheikh Hasina of Awami League became Bangladesh’s Prime Minister for the first time. The three-decade old agreement for river water sharing requires expert-level and political consultations for renewing the pact.

“As far as India-Bangladesh relationship is concerned we want to work towards a positive, forward looking and constructive relation,” said Mr. Jaiswal reiterating India’s invites to Prime Minister Rahman. Diplomatic sources from the Bangladeshi side had informed earlier that they are expecting an automatic short-term renewal of the treaty after the expiry on December 12, though the Indian officials have not indicated at that till now.

Mr. Jaiswal also took note of the protests by the readymade garment industry workers in Bangladesh who have been hitting the streets demanding fair wages as the country faces high inflation and electricity crisis. “Yes, we have been following the situation in Bangladesh. There have been developments there and we will continue to follow the developments,” he said in response to a question on the protests by the workers in the garments sector.

GS II – International Relations | Neighbourhood Relations

Key Pointers

- Which major rivers are shared by India and Bangladesh?
- What are the main provisions of the 1996 Ganga Water Treaty?
- How does the treaty provide for sharing Ganga water during the dry season?
- What is the role of the Joint Rivers Commission?
- What are the main problems in sharing river water between countries?
- What does the principle of equitable and reasonable use of shared rivers mean?
- What is the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, 1997?
- How can India and Bangladesh improve cooperation on water sharing?

Welfare payments will be based on voter IDs, not Aadhaar: Minister

Beneficiaries are identified and paid on the basis of Aadhaar at present; Panchayati Raj Minister says people must give EPIC number, biometrics

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Voter identity cards, along with biometric authentication, will be the basis for identifying beneficiaries and processing payments for welfare schemes within the ambit of the Panchayati Raj Ministry, Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and JD(U) leader Rajiv Ranjan Singh reiterated on Tuesday.

He was speaking to the media on the sidelines of an event at the Sikkim Cooperative Milk Producers' Union Ltd. in Gangtok.

He had made this remark earlier on Friday during a workshop organised by his Ministry on the "People's Plan Campaign (PPC) 2026-27" in Delhi.

His remarks come amid the Opposition campaign on "vote theft" alleging wrongful deletions from the electoral rolls.

"Aadhaar is currently the basis for payments to beneficiaries, but it will no longer be considered the primary means of identification," Mr. Singh said.



Fraud risk: The Minister argued that an Aadhaar card can be easily made in five minutes at 'every street corner'. M.A. SRIRAM

The Minister, while speaking in Delhi, had lamented the easy availability of the Aadhaar card, which he said can be made in "every street corner", implying the possibility of fraudulent beneficiaries.

"If one wants, one can get an Aadhaar card made in five minutes," he said.

He said the beneficiaries would instead have to provide biometric authentication along with their EPIC, or voter identification card, numbers to establish their identity and receive government benefits.

"Biometric authentication along with EPIC will serve as their identification credentials, and payments will be made based on that information," he said.

The proposed shift, the Minister argued in Gangtok, would ensure that welfare schemes are extended only to "eligible" beneficiaries, culling out "fraudulent entries". This would strengthen the verification process and improve transparency in the delivery of welfare benefits, he said

The Sixteenth Finance Commission has recommended total grants amounting to ₹4,35,236 crore for 2.55 lakh panchayats and traditional local bodies for 2026-31.

GS II – Polity | Governance | Social Justice

Key Pointers

- What is an Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), and who issues it?
- What is Aadhaar, and what is the role of UIDAI?
- How are Aadhaar and voter ID different?
- What does the Aadhaar Act, 2016, say about using Aadhaar for welfare schemes?
- What is the difference between verifying a person's identity and checking their eligibility for a welfare scheme?
- How can biometric errors prevent people from receiving welfare benefits?
- How are Articles 14 and 21 linked to privacy and access to welfare schemes?
- How can the government prevent fraud without excluding genuine beneficiaries?

India to push for predictable climate finance, equitable transition at key UN summit

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Predictable climate finance, technology transfer, and nationally determined approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation will be India's key demands at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Turkiye, from November 9 to 20.

Underlining a long-standing position, India will reiterate that developed countries must fulfil their financial obligations to developing nations.

India is not inclined towards language suggesting "fossil fuel cuts or phase-out" or restrictions, as it is already on a pathway to ramp up its share of renewable energy, increasing forest cover, and improving energy efficiency.

These emerged at a press conference convened by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Tuesday, outlining India's priorities ahead of the conference.



India will seek a decision to commence the Climate Finance Work Programme at COP31. AP

India will seek continuation of the Just Transition Work Programme (JWT) and "oppose attempts" to impose new, top-down mitigation targets on developing countries.

Climate finance will be a central negotiating issue, with India seeking a decision to begin a Climate Finance Work Programme.

Voluntary indicators

Mr. Yadav said finance provided by developed countries under Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement must be "predictable, largely public and concessional", and must not add to the debt burden of developing countries.

India will argue that indicators being developed under the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) should remain voluntary and should not become conditions for accessing climate finance. "Among the successes that we have had is reducing the number of parameters down to 59 from the nearly thousand," Mr. Yadav said.

GS III – Environment | Climate Change | International Relations

Key Pointers

- What is climate finance, and why do developing countries need it?
- What are the responsibilities of developed countries under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement?
- What does Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement say about climate finance?
- What is the Just Transition Work Programme?
- What is the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)?
- Why does India demand reliable and affordable climate finance?
- What is the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)?
- How can climate finance help developing countries adopt clean energy and deal with climate change?

WHAT IS IT?

Green firecrackers: an oxymoron?

Vasudevan Mukunth

Green firecrackers — like those the Supreme Court recently allowed the residents of New Delhi to burst for two days for Deepavali — are designed to pollute the air less as they burn.

According to the CSIR-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) team that developed them, these firecrackers emit 30% less particulate matter or, alternatively, emit 20% less particulate matter and 10% less gases — both compared to conventional firecrackers in the same category.

To this end, the team reportedly changed the proportions of fuels and oxidisers to increase how efficiently each cracker burnt, added additives to suppress dust formation, and/or reduced the quantities of certain metals.

Thus CSIR-NEERI developed three kinds of green firecrackers: Safe Water Releaser (SWAS), whose ingredients release water to suppress some of the particulate matter produced as they burn; Safe Thermite Cracker (STAR), which use a thermite-based composition to achieve higher combustion efficiency and lower emissions; and Safe Minimal Aluminium (SAFAL), which have lower aluminium content and, again, emit less.

Each of SWAS, STAR or SAFAL can be used in different types of fireworks, e.g. sparklers, flowerpots, etc.

All green firecracker products carry a CSIR-NEERI logo on their packaging and a QR code to verify the product's certificate.

While they pollute the air less, these firecrackers are still polluting — their emissions include fine particulate matter, noxious gases, and other combustion products — and harm respiratory and cardiovascular health. They are also noisy.



People buy crackers at ahead of Deepavali in Tamil Nadu on Friday. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN E

A city that bursts only green firecrackers also need not have less polluted air as that depends on the number of crackers burst, the local weather, and existing pollution levels.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

GS III – Environment | Pollution | Science and Technology

Key Pointers

- What are green firecrackers, and how are they different from regular firecrackers?
- What are the three types of green crackers developed by CSIR-NEERI: SWAS, STAR and SAFAL?
- How do green crackers reduce smoke and harmful gases?
- What is the role of CSIR-NEERI in developing green crackers?
- What are PM2.5 and PM10, and how do they affect human health?
- Why do green crackers still cause air pollution?
- How do weather conditions and the number of crackers affect air quality?
- What steps can reduce firecracker pollution while protecting public health and cultural practices?