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PRASHAST PORTAL



- PRASHAST (Pre-Assessment Holistic Screening Tool) is a school-based disability screening tool.
- It is used for identifying children with probable disability conditions (21) covered under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.
- It serves as an initial screening and referral mechanism.
- It is designed for use by regular teachers, special educators, counsellors, and school heads involved in the screening and support of students.

Structure:

- PRASHAST consists of two parts:
 - **Part-1:** Initial screening conducted by regular teachers.
 - **Part-2:** Validation of observations and tentative identification of disability categories by special educators or counsellors.
- **Process:**
 - Teachers should observe students for a **minimum period of 1–2 months** in various settings such as **classrooms, playgrounds, co-curricular activities**, and social interactions before recording their observations.
 - After screening, the observations are validated through the second-level screening process.
 - If required, the child may be referred for detailed assessment and certification by competent authorities.

Significance: The initiative is part of the Ministry of Education's continued efforts to strengthen **equitable, accessible and inclusive education**, in line with the **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020** and the RPwD Act, 2016.

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CONSERVATION ASSURED | TIGER STANDARDS

- It is a **global framework** designed to assess the effectiveness of **tiger reserve management and protection**.
- It was launched at the **1st Asian Parks Congress in Japan in 2013**.
- CA|TS is a global certification system that ensures effective management specifically of tiger conservation areas. It sets benchmarks for **protection, habitat management, community involvement**, and wildlife monitoring.

CA|TS helps **identify strengths and improvement areas within reserves**, supporting efforts to create safe, sustainable environments for tigers and preserve global biodiversity.

Structure:

- CA|TS consists of **seven pillars** (Importance and status, Management, Community, Tourism (optional), Protection, Habitat management, Tiger populations) and **17 elements** with standards and criteria for managing tiger conservation areas.
- The **Global Tiger Forum (GTF)** and **World Wildlife Fund India** are the two implementing partners of the National Tiger Conservation Authority for CA|TS assessment in India.
- The list of **15 Tiger Reserves who received CA|TS accreditation**:
 - Kaziranga, Manas, Orang and Nameri Tiger Reserve, Assam
 - Sundarbans, West Bengal
 - Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar
 - Dudhwa Tiger Reserve Uttar Pradesh
 - Kanha, Panna and Satpuda Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh
 - Pench Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra
 - Anamalai and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu
 - Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, Kerala
 - Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Karnataka.

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GST REFORMS 2026 - EASIER COMPLIANCE, FASTER REFUNDS AND REDUCED PROSECUTION RISKS

- The GST Council's September 2025 exercise focused on rationalising tax rates on goods and services.
- Its latest meeting, held in October 2026, shifted attention towards simplifying procedures, improving taxpayer experience and reducing compliance-related friction.
- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that most GST-related issues concerning rates and processes had been addressed, while leaving the possibility of further reforms open.
- No GST rate changes were made at this meeting. The Council indicated that rate decisions would generally be considered annually and implemented from the beginning of the subsequent financial year.

Faster Refunds and Improved Working Capital

- **System-based refund processing**
 - The Council recommended a system under which 90% of eligible refund claims would be sanctioned automatically within three working days of acknowledgement, compared with the earlier seven-day timeline for most refunds.
 - Refund acknowledgement is also proposed within 10 days, compared with the existing 15 days.
- **Refunds under the inverted duty structure**
 - An inverted duty structure arises when the tax rate on inputs is higher than the tax rate on the final output, resulting in accumulated ITC.
 - The Council recommended widening refund eligibility to include:
 - **Input services:** The change can be availed from November 1, 2026.
 - **Capital goods:** Refunds relating to eligible capital goods, such as plant and machinery, will be spread over 60 months, with the change scheduled to take effect from April 1, 2027.

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Simplified GST Registration and Returns

- The Council recommended improvements to registration procedures, including greater certainty about the documents required.
- According to the government, 61% of taxpayers already receive automatic registration within three working days. The upgraded system is intended to simplify the process for remaining low-risk applicants by reducing unnecessary queries and rejections.
- Other proposed measures include:
 - Simplified registration for small suppliers selling through e-commerce platforms.
 - Easier amendments and cancellations of registrations.
 - An option for small e-commerce sellers to register in a single State rather than in every State where they sell goods.
 - An optional annual return-filing scheme for businesses with turnover up to Rs. 5 crore that supply directly to consumers.
- The annual return-filing scheme has received in-principle approval, but the Council will consider the final decision at a subsequent meeting.

Changes to Arrest and Prosecution Provisions

- The Council recommended removing the arrest powers of GST officers and increasing the prosecution threshold from Rs. 1 crore to Rs. 5 crore.
- The stated objective is to distinguish more clearly between tax-related disputes and conduct involving criminality.
- The Finance Minister emphasised that prosecution should follow the establishment of a prima facie criminal case rather than an officer making an arrest merely in anticipation of possible wrongdoing.
- The Council also recommended reducing the maximum general penalty from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 10,000.
- For non-fraud cases, it recommended a lower penalty of 5% and removal of the minimum penalty requirement of Rs. 10,000.

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A LAW, AN INCENTIVE, AND A NARROW WINDOW: WHY STUBBLE FIRES KEEP COMING BACK

- Stubble burning means setting fire to crop residue — the lower parts of plants left after harvesting.
- It is prevalent from early October to late November across northwest India, especially Punjab, Haryana, and parts of Uttar Pradesh.
- It is mainly associated with paddy straw, and Punjab and Haryana together produce around 29 million metric tons of it.
- **Why It Matters for Health and Soil?**
 - Releases large amounts of particulate matter, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and other carcinogenic substances, forming a thick smog.
 - Causes **loss of soil fertility** by depleting nitrogen, sulphur, potash, phosphorus and other micronutrients.
 - The heat generated causes **loss of soil moisture and organic content**, which in turn increases fertiliser use in the next crop cycle.

Why Farmers Keep Growing Paddy and Wheat Anyway?

- The deeper question: why do farmers persist with these crops despite strict laws and falling groundwater? The answer lies in the **incentive structure**.
 - **Paddy procurement** (2012–2024 average): 37% nationally, but 87% in Punjab and 74% in Haryana — more than double the national average.
 - **Wheat procurement**: 30% nationally, versus 70% in Punjab and 63% in Haryana.
 - These national averages already include Punjab and Haryana — excluding them would make the gap even starker.
- This **assured procurement** provides guaranteed income, discouraging diversification.
- Additionally, **power is free** in Punjab and almost free in Haryana, further encouraging water-intensive paddy and wheat cultivation via groundwater extraction.

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Technical Solutions and Their Limits

- **In-Situ Measures:** Crop Residue Management (CRM) machines — Happy Seeders, Super Seeders, Rotavators; Short-duration rice varieties and direct seeding of rice.
- **Ex-situ Measures:** Converting residue into bio-ethanol and compressed biogas.
- The problem with both:

Happy Seeders/Super Seeders need an expensive 60-HP tractor, often idle for most of the year. Even hiring one costs ₹10,000 with a long waiting period.

Ex-situ measures cost ₹1,500–₹2,500 per acre — a significant expense for many farmers.

Policy Responses: Punjab vs Haryana

- **Punjab's Approach**
 - Relied mostly on in-situ CRM-based measures, with limited ex-situ initiatives.
 - CAQM noted in 2025 that Punjab still needs improvement in timely CRM machinery availability, support for CBG (compressed biogas) plants, and better enforcement.
- **Haryana's Approach**

Adopted an incentive-based model, aligned with the Parliamentary Panel's recommendations:

- ₹1,000/acre for CRM use.
- ₹4,000/acre for direct seeding of rice.
- ₹7,000/acre for diversification to alternate crops.
- Additional incentives to panchayats for good performance.

Conclusion

Stubble burning survives not because farmers lack alternatives, but because the system rewards exactly the behaviour it then punishes — assured procurement and free power push farmers toward paddy, while a water-conservation law compresses their harvest window to days.

Haryana's incentive-based model shows a more promising direction than Punjab's penalty-heavy approach, but even the headline "90% reduction" may be a measurement artifact, not a real one.

A lasting fix needs genuine crop diversification, better residue economics, and satellite monitoring that farmers can't simply outrun by burning after dark.

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WHY THE US SUSPENDED INDIAN IT FIRMS FROM GREEN CARD FILINGS

The US government has suspended several **large Indian IT firms** (Cognizant, Infosys, Tata, Wipro, HCL, and Capgemini) from a key programme that lets skilled foreign workers gain permanent residency, citing alleged fraud and claiming foreign workers took jobs at the cost of American workers.

This is a major blow for Indian professionals looking to work at these companies in the US. Last month, the US had already announced Cognizant's suspension, without specifying the allegations, the number of applications affected, or the duration.

Part of a Broader Crackdown

- This action represents a clear broadening of the crackdown on foreign workers that has become central policy under President Donald Trump.
- Technology and IT services companies face particularly heightened scrutiny over their reliance on foreign workers.
- US authorities have stepped up investigations into alleged **misuse** of both the **H-1B** and **PERM programmes**, including claims of:
 - Wage undercutting
 - Fraudulent filings
 - Displacement of American workers

Understanding PERM: The Programme at the Centre of This

- **PERM** (Program Electronic Review Management) is the system through which employers generally **obtain labour certification** before sponsoring a foreign employee for an employment-based Green Card.
- **Key Features**
 - Unlike a visa application (made primarily by an individual), PERM filing is done by the employer on behalf of the worker.
 - Before filing, the employer must obtain a prevailing wage determination for the position and carry out prescribed recruitment.

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- The process is meant to establish that permanently hiring a foreign worker will not adversely affect job opportunities, wages, or working conditions of US workers.
- Once the Labour Department certifies the application, the employer can proceed to the next stage of the Green Card process.

How This Affects Indian Workers?

- For employees whose Green Card process hasn't yet reached the PERM filing stage: The immediate consequence is delay.
 - They cannot make fresh PERM filings while the suspension is in place.
 - This means they cannot secure a priority date or begin moving through the employer-sponsored Green Card process.
- **Why This Hits Indians Especially Hard:** India already faces a severe backlog.
 - In the US State Department's September 2026 Visa Bulletin, the **EB-2 category** (Employment-Based Second Preference) for India was listed as "unavailable" for final action.
 - The EB-3 final-action date was January 1, 2014 — meaning applicants from over a decade ago are still being processed.
 - The system also imposes per-country limits on employment-based Green Cards, disproportionately affecting **high-demand countries like India**.
- **An Additional H-1B Complication**
 - US rules allow certain H-1B holders to extend their stay beyond the normal six-year limit if a labour certification was filed sufficiently early.
 - For workers approaching this six-year deadline, being unable to start the PERM process could become a serious problem.
 - Workers who already have approved petitions and are merely waiting because a Green Card number is unavailable are in a different position — they can, subject to rules, still qualify for H-1B extensions of up to three years at a time.

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KEY FACTS ABOUT GOMTI RIVER



- It is a **tributary of the Ganges (Ganga) River, flowing entirely through the state of Uttar Pradesh.**

- The river is also known by the names **Gumti or Gomati.**

Course:

- It **originates** from **Gomath Tal (Fulhar Jheel)** near the town of Madho Tanda in the Pilibhit district which **lies within the Pilibhit Tiger Reserve.**
- The **entire Gomti basin** is underlain by **thick alluvial sediments** of the **Quaternary age.**
 - The alluvial sediments consist of boulders, pebbles, gravel, sand, silt, clay, and kankars.
 - The unconsolidated unit may be further subdivided into younger alluvium and older alluvium.
 - The younger alluvium occupies the present-day flood plains, while the older group occupies elevated portions, mainly the doab portions.
 - The older alluvium is characterized by kankar nodules at depth otherwise it is similar to the younger alluvium.
- It is a **perennial river.** The river is characterised by **sluggish flow throughout the year, except during the monsoon** season, when heavy rainfall causes a manifold increase in the runoff.

Major Tributaries: Sai River, Chowka River, Kathina River, and Saryu River.

- There are various **cities that** are situated on the banks of River Gomti, such as **Sultanpur, Lucknow, Jaunpur, and Lakhimpur Kheri.**
- Over the years, Gomti has become **one of the most polluted rivers** in Uttar Pradesh.