

### PM INAUGURATED NEW PAMBAN BRIDGE



- The Pamban Rail Bridge, also known as the Rameswaram Bridge, is a historic cantilever bridge that connects Rameswaram Island to the mainland of India. Opened in 1914, it has served as a vital transportation link for over a century, playing a key role in both regional and national connectivity.

### Key Developments and Upgrades

- **Modernization and Upgrades:** In recent years, the Pamban Rail Bridge has undergone significant upgrades to enhance its functionality and accommodate modern transportation needs:
  - **Vertical Lift Span:** In 2025, a new vertical lift span was added, making the Pamban Bridge India's **first** vertical lift sea bridge. This feature allows the central span to lift, providing **22 meters of clearance for ships**, an improvement from the previous 19 meters.
  - **Faster Train Operations:** The upgraded bridge now supports **double-line electrification**, allowing for faster train operations between the mainland and Rameswaram Island.
- **Operational Timeline:** The modernization project began in **2019** and was completed by March 2025, with the newly upgraded bridge becoming operational during this period.

### Historical Background

- **Construction and Inauguration:** The Pamban Bridge was commissioned on **February 24, 1914**, to improve connectivity between the mainland and Rameswaram Island. Over the years, it has become a key landmark in the region.
- **Strategic Importance**
  - **Sole Link:** For much of its history, the bridge was the only link between Rameswaram Island and the mainland, making it a crucial infrastructure piece for both transportation and economic activities.

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- **Pilgrimage Significance:** The bridge has played a pivotal role in facilitating the movement of pilgrims traveling to the Rameswaram Temple, a major religious site in Tamil Nadu.
- **Humanitarian Role:** During the Sri Lankan Civil War, the bridge also served as an important route for refugees seeking asylum in India, further emphasizing its strategic significance.

#### DELHI TO IMPLEMENT AYUSHMAN BHARAT JAN AROGYA YOJANA



- The Delhi government has signed an MoU with the **National Health Authority** to roll out the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, making Delhi the **35th Union Territory/state** to implement this flagship health insurance scheme. **West Bengal** remains the only state yet to adopt it.

#### Ayushman Bharat Scheme Overview

- Ayushman Bharat is a **flagship healthcare initiative** by the Government of India, designed to provide accessible and affordable healthcare services to vulnerable sections of society. Launched on 23rd September **2018**, the scheme is officially known as Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY). It is recognized as the **largest health assurance scheme in the world**.

#### Key Features

1. **Coverage of Medical Procedures:** The scheme offers free and cashless treatment for **1,961 medical procedures** across 27 specialities. This includes a wide range of services such as: Medicines, Diagnostic services, Hospitalisation, ICU care, Surgeries.
2. **Financial Coverage:** Under Ayushman Bharat, eligible families are provided with an annual health coverage of up to Rs 10 lakh:
  - Rs 5 lakh from the Central Government.
  - Rs 5 lakh as a top-up from the States/UTs Government.

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#### Implementation and Governance

- The National Health Authority (NHA) is the **apex body** responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme.

#### Impact and Reach

- The scheme aims to cover **55+ crore beneficiaries**, targeting 12 crore families, which constitutes approximately **40% of India's vulnerable population**.
- As a result of the Ayushman Bharat initiative, the **out-of-pocket expenditure** for healthcare has significantly decreased, from **62% in 2014 to just 38% today**.

#### DWARKADHISH TEMPLE



- Located in **Dwarka, Gujarat, India**, the Dwarkadhish temple, also known as the **Jagat Mandir**, is a revered Hindu temple **dedicated to Lord Krishna**, who is referred to as Dwarkadhish, which means the 'King of Dwarka'.
- This temple holds immense significance as it is **one of the destinations** along the **Char Dham pilgrimage circuit**, which includes the other pilgrimage sites, Badrinath, Rameshwaram, and Puri.
- According to archaeological findings, the **original temple was built in 200 BCE** at the earliest.
- It is believed to have been constructed by **Vajranabha**, the **great-grandson of Lord Krishna**, over the hari-griha (Krishna's residential place).
- The temple was rebuilt and made bigger in the 16th century.
- The temple has a **five-story building** supported by **72 pillars**, which are made of **limestone and sand**.
- Bearing the imprints of the 16th-century **Chalukya style of architecture**, the temple has intricately carved walls with mythical characters and legends on them.
- The temple is a **Pushtimarg temple**, which means that it **follows the teachings and rituals of Vallabhacharya**, a 15th-century Hindu saint and philosopher.

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- Vallabhacharya propounded the philosophy of Shuddhadvaita, or pure non-dualism, which emphasizes the devotion and grace of Krishna.
- The temple is managed by the descendants of Vallabhacharya, who are known as Vallabha Kul.
- The temple has a special relationship with the Nathdwara temple in Rajasthan, which is the main seat of the Pushtimarg sect.
- The temple is one of the 108 Divya Desams, or holy abodes of Vishnu, which are glorified by the Alwars, the 12th-century Tamil poet-saints.
  - The temple is the 98th Divya Desam and is praised by four Alwars: Nammalwar, Thirumangai Alwar, Thirumalisai Alwar, and Periyalwar.
- The temple is also mentioned in the works of other Hindu saints and scholars, such as Adi Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhvacharya, and Narsinh Mehta.

#### TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION REPORT 2025



- It was released by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- It seeks to address issues in science, technology and innovation that are topical and important for developing countries in a comprehensive way with an emphasis on policy-relevant analysis and conclusions.
- The 2025 edition of the report, entitled: Inclusive artificial intelligence for development, aims to guide policymakers through the complex Artificial Intelligence (AI) landscape and support them in designing science, technology and innovation policies that foster inclusive and equitable technological progress.

#### Highlights of the Report:

- It shows that just 100 companies, mostly in the United States and China, are behind 40 percent of the world's private investment in research and development, highlighting a sharp concentration of power.

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- At the same time, 118 countries – mostly from the **Global South** – are **missing** from global AI governance discussions
- The report estimates that up to **40 percent** of global jobs could be affected by AI.
- To avoid being left behind, developing countries need to strengthen what UNCTAD calls the “three key leverage points”: infrastructure, data and skills.
- **India and China** are the **only developing countries** in the world with **significant private investments** in AI in 2023.
- The **US** **leads** the world in terms of **private investment in AI**, at 67 billion US dollars in 2023, or 70 percent of global AI private investment. **China** was in **second position**, with 7.8 billion US dollars, and **India in tenth position**, with 1.4 billion dollars.
- **India** **ranked 36th** in 2024 out of 170 nations on the **Readiness for Frontier Technologies Index**, improving its position from 48th in 2022.

#### CONSTRUCTION DEFECTS IN NATIONAL HIGHWAYS: A MAJOR FACTOR IN INDIA'S ROAD ACCIDENTS

- Despite rapid expansion in India's National Highway (NH) network, serious construction defects continue to undermine road safety.
- From surface deformities and potholes to bridge collapses and poor retaining walls, these structural issues have played a direct role in creating hazardous zones, popularly known as ‘black spots’, across the highway network.
- Between 2019-20 and 2023-24, at least 59 major instances of construction damage were identified across 15 states.
- These defects have not only raised safety concerns but also exposed systemic flaws in project planning, execution, and monitoring.



### Types of Construction Defects in National Highways

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) categorizes defects under four major heads:
  - **Pavement Issues:** Cracks, rutting, settlements, and undulations often result from poor-quality materials or faulty engineering.
  - **Retaining Wall Failures:** Retaining walls, meant to hold back soil and prevent landslides, have collapsed in several locations due to weak construction.
  - **Bridge & Structural Damages:** Slab failures and nose structure collapses during bridge launches point to serious lapses in design and supervision.
  - **Other Construction & Maintenance Shortcomings:** These include incomplete drainage systems, improper slope protection, and poor maintenance practices.

### Real-World Consequences of Poor Highway Quality

- In two tragic accidents reported in January 2025, faulty road conditions were directly linked to loss of life.
- A newlywed couple met with an accident on the Delhi–Meerut Expressway after their vehicle hit a poorly designed divider.
- Days later, a truck fell into a 50-meter-deep valley in Karnataka's NH-63, killing 10.
- These instances are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the impact of substandard highway engineering on human lives.

### Expert and Government Accountability

- In March 2025, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari openly criticized civil engineers and consultants for preparing flawed Detailed Project Reports (DPRs), calling them primary culprits behind India's high road fatality numbers.
- In his statement to the Rajya Sabha recently, he revealed that many defects were identified through audits by agencies like NHAI, NHIDCL, BRO, and third-party reviewers.
- Penalties and corrective actions were taken, but the recurrence of such defects indicates systemic issues.

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### PM MODI'S LANDMARK VISIT TO SRI LANKA - STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC, ECONOMIC & CULTURAL TIES

- PM Narendra Modi, on a 3-day state visit to Sri Lanka, held high-level talks with President Anura Kumara Disanayake and oversaw the signing of 7 MoUs across key sectors, further strengthening India - Sri Lanka ties.
- The visit also marked a significant diplomatic gesture as Sri Lanka conferred the prestigious Mithra Vibhushana medal on PM Modi - the highest such honour for a foreign leader.

#### High-Level Engagements between India and Sri Lanka:

- **Delegation-level talks in Colombo:** Reviewed progress under the “Joint Vision for a Shared Future” (from Disanayake’s previous visit to India).
- **Defence and strategic cooperation:**
  - Landmark **India–Sri Lanka Defence Pact** signed to bolster strategic and maritime cooperation.
  - Sri Lanka **reassured India** that its **territory won’t be used against India’s security interests**.
  - PM Modi welcomed this assurance as **a testament to the deep trust and strategic alignment** between the two neighbours.
  - Seen as **a counterbalance** to Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Energy, digital, trade and development cooperation:**
  - **Energy:** Development of Trincomalee as an energy hub.
  - **Clean energy:** Sampur Solar Power Project inaugurated virtually.
  - **Digital infrastructure**, healthcare, trade facilitation, and regional development were focus areas.
  - **Eastern province framework** for Indian grant assistance signed.
- **Economic support and regional stability:**

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- India's crisis-time support acknowledged: India provided \$4.5 billion assistance during Sri Lanka's economic crisis. Support included credit lines, food and fuel aid.
- Discussions included debt restructuring and a proposed currency swap agreement for macroeconomic stability.
- Tech support:
  - India provided ₹300 crore grant to support Sri Lanka's Digital Identity Project.
  - Focus on collaboration in digitalization across multiple domains including governance, services, and financial inclusion.

#### China's Expanding Footprint - A Strategic Concern:

- Chinese investments and influence in Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka has received \$3.7 billion from China to develop infrastructure, including:
  - A new oil refinery in Hambantota.
  - Expansion of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.
- Hambantota port - A security flashpoint:
  - Leased to China for 99 years after loan defaults.
  - Used by Chinese surveillance vessels like Yuan Wang 5, raising India's maritime security concerns.
  - Sri Lanka continues to allow Chinese vessels to dock under "replenishment" claims.

#### Conclusion:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2025 visit to Sri Lanka marks a watershed moment in India-Sri Lanka relations, reflecting a strategic recalibration amidst evolving regional geopolitics. The conferment of the Mithra Vibhushana medal on PM Modi symbolizes the cultural and diplomatic warmth between the two nations.
- At a time when China's influence in the Indian Ocean is expanding, India's proactive outreach reasserts its Neighbourhood First policy and the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine.



## MUKUNDRA HILLS TIGER RESERVE



- It is situated near Kota in southeastern
- It is **named after two continuous flat-topped, almost parallel hills** with narrow central ridges, forming **part of the Vindhyan range** and **extending from the Chambal River to Kalisindh**, with a length of almost 80 km. and the width ranging from 2 to 5 km.
- The tiger reserve was constituted in the year 2013, which encompasses the area of **Mukundra National Park, Dara Sanctuary, Jawahar Sagar Sanctuary, and part of Chambal Sanctuary** (from Garadia Mahadev to Jawahar Sagar Dam), forming its core/critical tiger habitat.
- It was once a hunting preserve belonging to the Maharaja of Kota.
- It is traversed by four **rivers: Chambal, Kali, Ahu, and Ramzan.**

### **Vegetation: Dry Deciduous Forest**

**Flora:** *Anogeissus pendula* (**Kala Dhok or Kaladhi**) is the **predominant species**, along with Khair (*Acacia catechu*), Ber (*Zizyphus mauratiana*), Kakan (*Flacourtia indica*), Raunj (*Acacia lecofolia*), etc.

**Fauna:** The important fauna include: **Leopard, Sloth bear, Nilgai, Chinkara, Spotted Deer**, Small Indian Civet, Toddy Cat, Jackal, Hyena, Jungle Cat, Common Langur, etc.