INDIA'S DECLINING FERTILITY RATE AND ITS DEMOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS: UNFPA REPORT 2025

- India's fertility rate has **declined to 1.9**, falling below the replacement level of 2.1, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report **State of World Population 2025**.
- **Despite this decline, India remains the world's most populous country, with an estimated population of 146.39 crore as of April 2025**.
- The population is projected to peak around 170 crore over the next four decades before beginning to shrink.

From High Fertility to Demographic Transition

- In 1960, Indian women had an average of six children. Since then, India has achieved a dramatic reduction in fertility rates, largely through enhanced access to reproductive healthcare, greater educational outreach, and sustained efforts at women's empowerment.
- The UNFPA attributes this demographic shift not to coercive policies but to an organic transition supported by awareness campaigns and policy interventions.
- The decline aligns with India's own projections, such as those published in the **National Family Health Survey** (NFHS-5), which pegged the 2022 fertility rate at 2.0 nationally, with urban fertility at 1.6 and rural fertility at 2.1.
- Some states, however, still have above-average fertility rates, including Bihar (2.98), Meghalaya (2.9), Uttar Pradesh (2.35), Jharkhand (2.26), and Manipur (2.2).

Financial Constraints and Changing Aspirations

- The report reveals that financial strain is a leading factor in decisions to have fewer children. Around 38% of Indian respondents cited economic challenges, while 21% pointed to job insecurity or unemployment.
- Globally, similar concerns are evident, with an average of 39% across 14 countries expressing financial limitations as the primary reason for having fewer children than desired.

Social and Familial Dynamics

- Family dynamics play a pivotal role in fertility decisions. Around 19% of respondents said their partner preferred fewer children, and 15% said lack of support in household responsibilities affected their reproductive choices.
- Additionally, healthcare professionals were also cited as influencing decisions, 14% of Indian respondents said pressure from doctors or health workers led them to have fewer children than they desired. This highlights a concerning gap between reproductive rights and institutional practices.

India's Demographic Dividend and Ageing Population

- **With 68% of India's population in the working-age group (15-64 years), the country still enjoys a significant demographic dividend**.
- However, this window is not infinite. As life expectancy increases, projected at 71 years for men and 74 for women, India's elderly population (currently 7%) is expected to rise steadily in the coming decades.
- This shift necessitates strategic investments in health, social security, and workforce policies to sustain economic growth even as fertility declines.

Policy Considerations and Future Outlook

- India must adapt its health and welfare policies to reflect this demographic reality. Key focus areas should include:
    - Enhancing women's participation in the workforce.
    - Expanding social support for childcare and elderly care.
    - Reforming workplace norms to reduce the economic burden of parenting.
    - Investing in universal access to contraception and fertility counselling.
- The upcoming 2027 Census, delayed from 2021, will offer updated insights critical to informing policy.
- In the meantime, India's demographic strategy must pivot from population control to inclusive, rights-based population governance.

TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT - A DECADE OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND EMPOWERMENT

A New Bharat in the Making:

- **Key idea:** Progress in India is now measured by dignity, opportunity, and inclusion, not just GDP.

Foundational Philosophy:

- **Antyodaya:** Uplifting the last person in the queue.
- **Four pillars:**
  - Building infrastructure that connects,
  - Growth that is inclusive,
  - Manufacturing that creates jobs, and
  - Simplifying systems that empower.

Infrastructure Boom - Physical, Digital, and Social:

- **Capital investment surge:** Capex increased to ₹11.2 lakh crore in 2025–26.
- **Transport infrastructure:**
  - 59,000 km highways and 37,500 km railway tracks built in the last 11 years.
  - **Landmark projects:** Chenab and Anji bridges; Vande Bharat in Kashmir.
- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):**
  - UPI, Aadhaar, DigiLocker has become a global benchmark.
  - **Over 141 crore** Aadhaar registrations and **60 crore UPI transactions** every day signify their reach and acceptance.
  - The idea behind this is simple: **Democratise technology through digital highways**.
- **IndiaAI Mission:**
  - Over 34,000 high-speed **computer chips**, known as GPUs, are now available to all at just one-third the global cost.

Social Inclusion and Basic Services Expansion:

- **Healthcare and education:** Over the past 11 years, the **number of medical colleges** has grown from 387 to 780, and **AIIMS** institutions from 7 to 23. MBBS and PG seats have also more than doubled.
- **Welfare delivery at scale:**
  - 530 million **Jan Dhan** accounts (more than Europe's population).
  - 40 million homes built (under PMAY), 120 million toilets under SBM.
  - 140 million households connected via **Har Ghar Jal.**
  - **Ayushman Bharat:** 350 million covered.
  - **PM-KISAN:** 110 million farmers receive direct support.
  - **Ujjwala Yojana:** 100 million families now use LPG.

Manufacturing and Industrial Growth:

- **Make in India:**
  - Launched in **2015** to create jobs and revive industrial growth.
  - Today, **electronics manufacturing** has increased six times to cross Rs 12 lakh crore.
  - **Electronics exports** have increased eight times to cross Rs 3 lakh crore to become among the top exported goods.
  - India is now the **2nd largest mobile phone producer**
- **Semiconductor Mission:**
  - **The country's first commercial lab** is under construction; five OSAT units are underway; over 20 chipsets with indigenous IP have been designed by students and engineers in India.
  - **270 universities onboarded** for chip design training.

Conclusion - A Belief in the Future: The decade under the current govt gave citizens dignity, empowerment, and belief. **Viksit Bharat is no longer a dream** — it's a destination being built with inclusion and resolve.

KERALA SEEKS WILDLIFE ACT AMENDMENT TO CULL PROBLEMATIC WILD ANIMALS

- Kerala is facing a surge in wildlife attacks, with 273 out of 941 village local bodies identified as conflict hotspots.
- **Problematic Species**
  - Key animals involved include tiger, leopard, elephant, bison, wild boar, bonnet macaque, and peafowl.
  - While bonnet macaques and peafowls are not dangerous to humans, their crop raids have forced farmers to abandon large areas of farmland.
- **Human Casualties**
  - Between 2016-17 and January 2025, wildlife attacks have claimed 919 lives and injured 8,967 people, highlighting the urgency of the issue.

Causes of Rising Human-Wildlife Conflict in Kerala

- **Habitat Degradation and Displacement**
  - Declining quality of forest habitats is forcing wild animals to move into human settlements in search of food and space.
- **Population Imbalance**
  - A surge in populations of wild pigs and monkey species has significantly increased incidents of crop raiding and property damage.
- **Human Activities Near Forests**
  - Grazing of domestic cattle in forest areas and changes in cropping patterns near forest fringes are contributing to increased encounters.
- **Ecological Imbalance**
  - Regional fluctuations in wildlife populations have disturbed the natural balance, intensifying conflicts between humans and animals.

Why Kerala Seeks Amendment to the Wildlife Act

- **Legal Hurdles in Emergency Response**
  - Current laws require the state to exhaust all options—capture, tranquilisation, or relocation—before considering the **killing of Schedule I protected animals**, delaying timely action in emergencies.
- **Multiple Regulatory Layers**
  - Apart from the Wildlife Act, Kerala must adhere to guidelines from the Tiger Conservation Authority and Project Elephant Scheme, further complicating decision-making during conflicts.
- **Limited Powers of Local Authorities**
  - Although district collectors can order removal of public nuisances, court rulings restrict the use of these powers for dealing with wild animals, reducing the state's ability to act swiftly.

Kerala Government's Stand on Culling Wild Animals

- The state government has urged the Centre to amend the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, to permit the killing of all man-eating wild animals.
- **Not Indiscriminate, But Controlled Culling**
  - The state is seeking limited, regulated culling—restricted by region, season, and threat level—to protect lives and agriculture, not blanket permissions.
- **Failure of Preventive Measures**
  - Fencing and other preventive efforts have failed to deter wild animal intrusions into human habitats.
- **Ineffective Wild Boar Control**
  - The current wild boar control system involving licensed shooters is bogged down by impractical rules, such as checking for pregnancy before shooting, rendering it ineffective.
- **Need for Wildlife Population Control**
  - The govt emphasized that unchecked growth of certain wildlife populations is escalating threats to both human life and livelihoods.

AXIOM MISSION 4 (AX-4)

- Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4) is the fourth private astronaut mission to the International Space Station (ISS), organized by Axiom Space in collaboration with NASA, SpaceX, and ISRO.
- **Objectives:**
  - Enable commercial activities in low Earth orbit, including space tourism and private research.
  - Demonstrate the feasibility of commercial space stations as platforms for business and science.
  - Strengthen international collaboration in space exploration.
  - Conduct **scientific experiments in microgravity**, focusing on materials science, biology, Earth observation, and life sciences.
- **Launch Vehicle & Capsule:** First flight of Crew Dragon C213—the fifth and final new Dragon capsule—to be launched atop a Falcon-9 Block 5 from LC-39A, Kennedy Space Centre.
- **Mission Timeline:** Originally set for early June 2025, the mission was moved multiple times— then again postponed on June 11, due to the LOx leak, which caused further delay.
- **Crew (4 total):**
  - Peggy Whitson (USA)
  - Shubhanshu Shukla (India)
  - Sławosz Uznański-Wiśniewski (Poland)
  - Mission Specialist: Tibor Kapu (Hungary)
- **Significance:**
  - Marks **India's return to human spaceflight after 41 years**, since Rakesh Sharma's 1984 mission.
  - First government-sponsored flights to the ISS for India, Poland, and Hungary in over four decades.

GANGOTRI NATIONAL PARK

- It is located in the Uttarkashi District region of the state of
- It sits along the upper catchment of the Bhagirathi River.
- **International boundary:** The northeastern section of the park forms the international boundary of India and Tibet (China).
- The area enclosed by the park also borders **Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary and Govind National Park.**
- The mountains in the park are part of the **Gangotri Group of the Garhwal Himalayas**, which are a subrange of the eastern Himalayas.

Peaks: Major peaks within the park include **Chaukhamba I, Satopanth**, Chaukhamba II, Chaukhamba III, and Kedarnath Main.

- The famous **Gangotri Glacier** is located in the park boundaries and is known for being one of the primary sources of the Ganges.

Vegetation:

- It is home to **high-altitude ecosystems** that are common in the Himalayas.
- **Western Himalayan subalpine** conifer forests dominate the lower elevation landscapes. These forests are filled with fir trees intermixed with deodar, oak, spruce, and rhododendrons trees.
- Higher elevations in the park are home to **Western Himalayan alpine shrubs.** Alpine meadows are also common beneath the massive glaciers.

Fauna: Snow leopard, brown bear, blue sheep, musk deer, Asian black bear, and the Himalayan tahr etc.

INDIA'S FIRST E-WASTE RECYCLING PARK IN DELHI

- This state-of-the-art facility will be India's first integrated E-Waste Eco Park and will be built under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, at Holambi Kalan in north-west Delhi.
- It will cover 11.4 acres, and is expected to process up to **51,000 metric tonnes of e-waste annually**.
- The project will be developed by the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) on a **Design, Build, Finance, Operate, and Transfer (DBFOT)** basis, with a 15-year concession period.

Zones: Dedicated areas for dismantling, refurbishing, component testing, plastic recovery, and a second-hand electronics market.

Employment: Creation of over 1,000 green jobs and skilling/training centres for informal recyclers.

Significance: Aims to manage nearly 25% of Delhi's e-waste, set a national benchmark for smart waste processing, and promote sustainable urban infrastructure.

Environmental Impact: Reduces dependency on landfills, minimises hazardous waste, and promotes resource recovery and reuse.