

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS - 20.08.2026

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Director,
Department of Employment and Training.

TamilNadu Highlights

31st Southern Zonal Council Meeting

The **31st Southern Zonal Council** meeting concluded at **Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu**.

It is chaired by Union Home Minister **Amit Shah**, with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **C. Joseph Vijay** as Vice-Chairman.

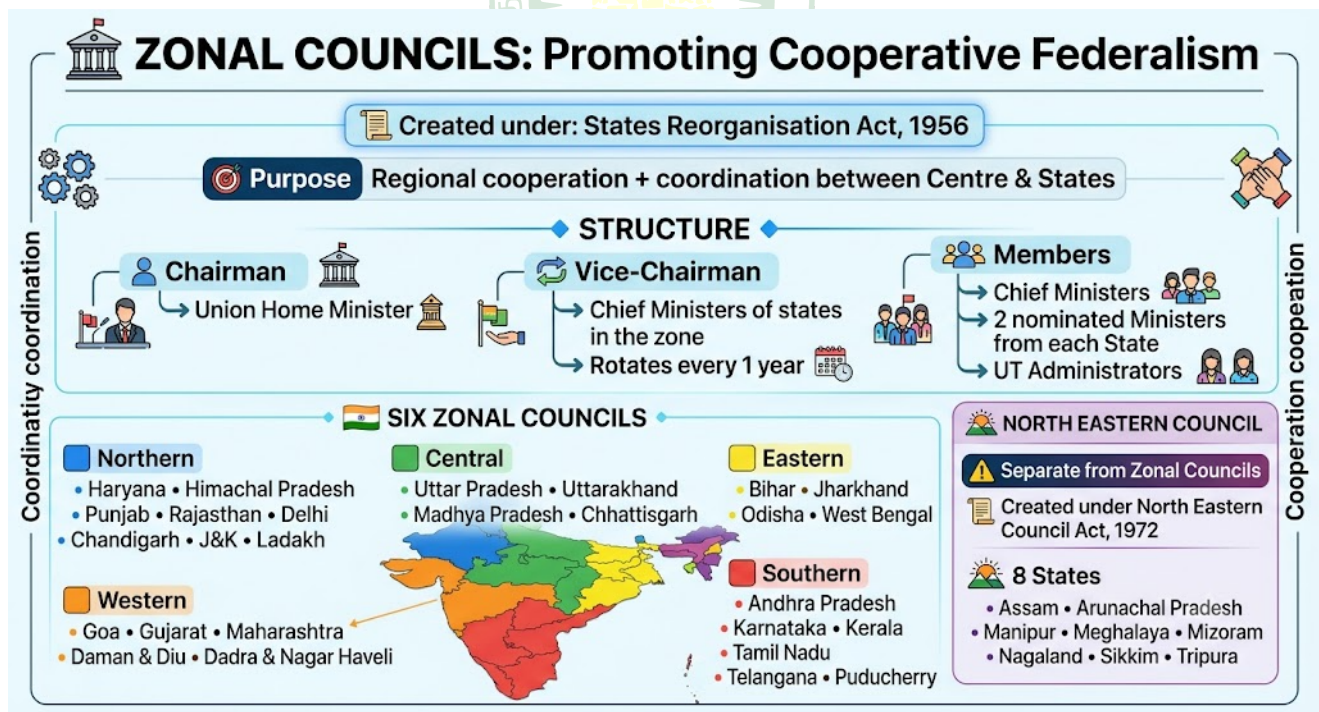
The meeting is hosted by the **Tamil Nadu Government** and organised by the **Inter-State Council Secretariat, Ministry of Home Affairs**.

About Zonal Councils

- **Zonal Councils** are statutory bodies established under the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**.
- Their recommendations are advisory in nature.
- They provide a platform for inter-State cooperation and discussion of regional issues.

Composition of Southern Zonal Council

- States: **Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana**.
- Union Territories: **Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep**.
- Participants include the Chief Ministers, Lieutenant Governors/Administrators and two other Ministers from each State.



Leadership & Participation

- Chairman: **Union Home Minister**.
- Vice-Chairman: Chief Minister of a member State, as applicable.

- Senior officials and advisors also participate in the deliberations.

The meeting provides a forum to discuss core issues concerning the southern States and Union Territories.

Topic: Polity

Criminalisation of Politics in India

Current Status

- **4,192** cases against sitting and former **MPs** and **MLAs** are pending trial across India.
- Chief Ministers of **14 out of 28 States** have criminal cases pending trial.

Major Reasons

- **Weak Disqualification Laws:** Under the **Representation of the People Act, 1951**, disqualification generally follows conviction, allowing candidates to contest elections while trials are pending.
- **Money & Muscle Power:** Financial resources and local influence can make candidates electorally attractive.
- **Low Voter Awareness:** Although candidate affidavits disclose criminal and financial details, voter awareness remains inadequate.
- **Party Complicity:** Political parties may prioritise electoral winnability and popularity over clean political records.
- **Judicial Delays:** Long trials and repeated adjournments can delay conviction.

Impact

- **Erosion of Democracy:** Restricts voters' effective choices and undermines free and fair elections.
- **Corruption & Electoral Malpractices:** Can encourage voter intimidation, booth capturing and use of black money.
- **Declining Public Trust:** Repeated election of candidates facing serious criminal allegations can weaken confidence in democratic institutions.
- **Distortion of Governance:** Political power may be used to protect personal or criminal networks rather than advance public interest.

Major Committee Recommendations

Committee	Key Recommendation
Indrajit Gupta Committee, 1998	Partial state funding of elections

2nd ARC, 2007	Partial state funding to reduce influence of black money
NCRWC, 2002	Greater accountability of political parties; audit of party expenditure; disclosure of assets & liabilities
Law Commission, 244th Report, 2014	Disqualification upon framing of charges for offences carrying maximum punishment of 5 years or more; fast-track trials for MPs/MLAs

Supreme Court Interventions

- **Union of India v. ADR (2002):** Candidates must disclose information relating to criminal records, assets and educational qualifications; voters' right to know is linked to freedom of expression.
- **Lily Thomas v. Union of India (2013):** An MP/MLA/MLC is immediately disqualified upon conviction where the sentence is **2 years or more**.
- **Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India (2018):** Political parties must publicise the criminal antecedents of candidates.
- **Rambabu Singh Thakur v. Sunil Arora (2020):** Parties must publish details of candidates facing criminal cases, along with reasons for selecting them, within **48 hours** of selection.
- **Speedy Trials:** The **Supreme Court** has repeatedly directed the creation/designation of special courts and monitoring mechanisms for speedy disposal of cases involving legislators.

130th Constitution Amendment Bill, 2025

Background: Introduced in **2025** and referred to a **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** amid opposition.

- **Key Proposal:** A minister facing an offence punishable with **5 years or more** imprisonment, who is arrested and detained for **30 consecutive days**, would face removal from office.
- If the **Prime Minister** or **Chief Minister** remains in custody for **30 consecutive days**, the Bill proposes that they resign or cease to hold office from the **31st day**.
- Removal is proposed to operate through the **President/Governor**, on the advice of the Prime Minister/Chief Minister, respectively, or automatically after 30 days of detention.

Black Money in Elections

Context

The **Supreme Court** has recently issued directives to curb unexplained cash and electoral offences, observing that voter choices influenced by illicit money undermine free and fair elections and the very essence of democracy.

What is Black Money in Elections?

- Use of unaccounted or undeclared money to influence voters, fund campaigns, distribute cash/gifts and meet election-related expenses outside the legal framework.
- It creates an uneven electoral playing field and strengthens the nexus between money, crime and politics.

Why is it a Threat to Democracy?

- **Distorts voter choice:** Financial inducements can turn electoral choice into a transaction.
- **Unequal playing field:** Candidates with greater access to illicit funds gain an unfair advantage.
- **Criminalisation of politics:** Creates links between crime, business and political power.
- **Erodes public trust:** Perceived electoral manipulation weakens confidence in democratic institutions.
- **Policy capture:** Candidates dependent on illicit financing may become vulnerable to private interests.
- **Undermines democratic equality:** Excessive money power can drown out the political voice of less-affluent citizens.

Legal & Institutional Framework

- **Election Commission of India:** Uses expenditure monitors, **Static Surveillance Teams** and **Flying Squads** to detect unlawful election expenditure.
- **Article 324:** Gives the **ECI** broad powers for the conduct and supervision of elections.
- **Representation of the People Act, 1951:** Provides the legal framework for electoral offences, corrupt practices and election expenditure.
- **Income Tax Authorities:** Investigate unexplained cash and assets and undertake seizures where applicable.
- **Judiciary:** Reviews electoral disputes and ensures that prosecutions and withdrawal of cases follow the law.

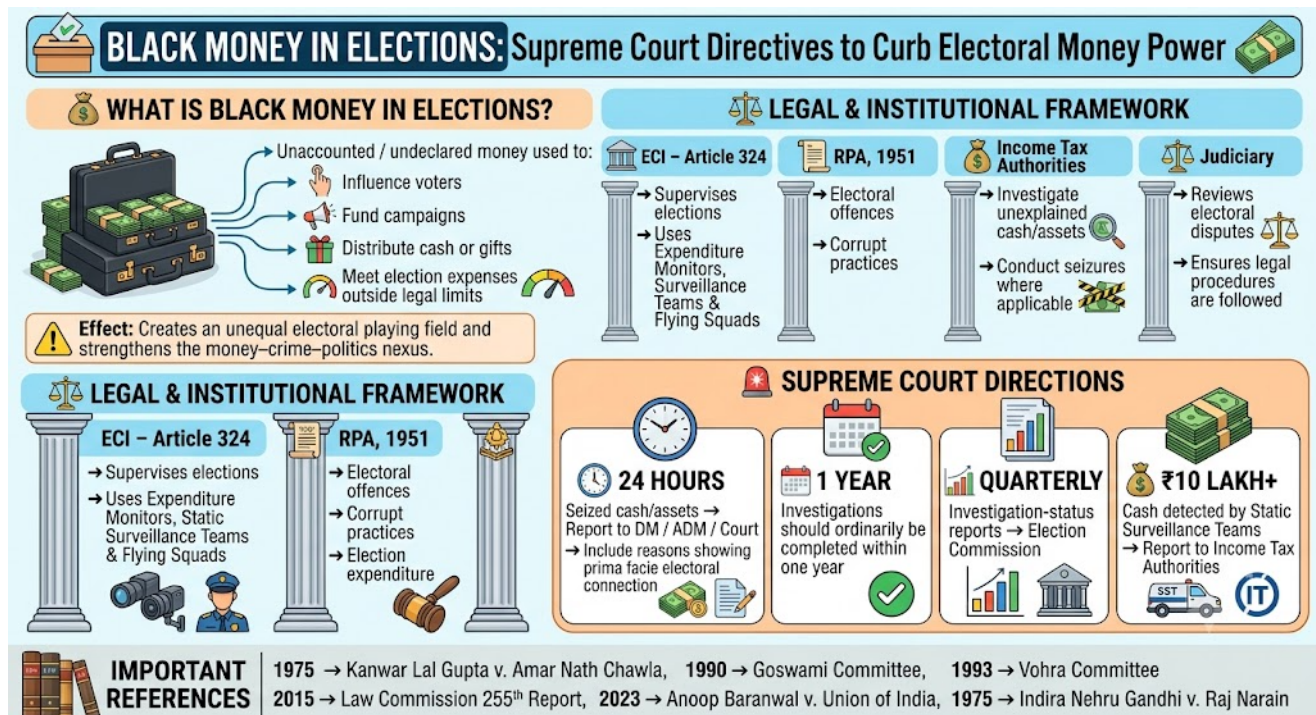
Supreme Court's Recent Directions

- Seized cash/assets to be reported to the **District Magistrate/Additional District Magistrate/Court** within **24 hours**, with reasons establishing a prima facie electoral connection.
- Investigations should ordinarily be completed within **one year**; delays must be recorded and reported to the **ECI**.
- Quarterly investigation-status reports to be submitted to the **ECI**.
- Cash exceeding **₹10 lakh** detected by **Static Surveillance Teams** to be reported to Income Tax authorities.

- **High Courts** to designate special courts for speedy disposal of cases against candidates and sitting MPs/MLAs.
- Withdrawal of prosecution against candidates during an election cycle requires prior approval of the jurisdictional **High Court**.
- Pending election-offence cases should be disposed of expeditiously.
- **ECI** and governments to submit compliance reports by **18 November 2026**.

Important References

- **Kanwar Lal Gupta v. Amar Nath Chawla (1975)**
- **Goswami Committee Report (1990)**
- **Vohra Committee Report (1993)**
- **Law Commission 255th Report (2015)**
- **Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India**
- **Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain** — free and fair elections are central to democracy.



Topic: History

Communal Award

Context

The anniversary of the announcement of the **Communal Award** was recently observed.

Communal Award

- In **August 1932**, British Prime Minister **Ramsay MacDonald** formally announced the **Communal Award**.
- It recognised the **Depressed Classes** as a minority and granted them separate electorates for **20 years**.
- It provided **71 special seats** in the provincial legislatures.
- Separate electorates were also provided for **Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans**.

Mahatma Gandhi's Response

- **Gandhi** strongly opposed separate electorates for the Depressed Classes, arguing that they would divide Hindu society.
- He began a **fast unto death** at **Poona** on **20 September 1932**.

B.R. Ambedkar's View

- **Ambedkar** strongly supported separate electorates for the Depressed Classes.
- He believed that the Depressed Classes needed independent political representation and leadership.

COMMUNAL AWARD - 1932
Separate Electorates & the Poona Pact

COMMUNAL AWARD August 1932
Announced by British PM Ramsay MacDonald

- Depressed Classes recognised as a minority
- Separate electorates for Depressed Classes
- 71 special seats in provincial legislatures

Separate electorates were also given to: Muslims • Sikhs • Indian Christians • Anglo-Indians • Europeans

GANDHI'S RESPONSE

- ✗ Opposed separate electorates for Depressed Classes
- 💬 Argument: It would divide Hindu society.
- 📅 20 September 1932
- Began fast unto death at Poona

AMBEDKAR'S VIEW

- ✓ Supported separate electorates
- Wanted independent political representation
- Believed Depressed Classes needed their own political leadership

POONA PACT - 1932 24 September 1932

KEY CHANGE:

✗ Separate Electorates	✗ Electorates	↓	✓ Joint Electorates	↑	✓ Reserved seats increased: 71 → 148
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→ British Government accepted the Pact as a modification of the Communal Award.

Poona Pact, 1932

- Signed on **24 September 1932** between **B.R. Ambedkar** and leaders negotiating on behalf of the Depressed Classes, following Gandhi's fast.
- Replaced separate electorates with joint electorates.
- Increased reserved seats for the Depressed Classes from **71 to 148** in provincial legislatures.

- The British Government accepted it as a modification of the **Communal Award**.

Topic: Schemes and Initiatives

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) – Completes 7 Years

Context: The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) completed **7 years** on **15 August 2026**, with rural tap-water coverage increasing significantly across India.

- **Launched:** **15 August 2019** by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**.
- **Objective:** Provide **Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC)** to every rural household, targeting **55 litres/person/day**.
- **Progress:** Rural tap-water coverage rose from **16.7%** to over **82%**, reaching **15.91 crore+** rural households.
- **Har Ghar Jal:** More than **2 lakh villages** have been declared 'Har Ghar Jal' certified.
- **Target:** The original **2024** deadline has been extended to **December 2028**.
- **Funding:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme — **90:10** for Himalayan & NE States, **50:50** for other States and **100%** Central funding for UTs.

CBDC-Based DBT under PMGKAY

Context: In **August 2026**, the government introduced **Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)**-based **Direct Benefit Transfer** for food subsidies under **PMGKAY** in **Chandigarh** and **Dadra & Nagar Haveli**.

- **First implementation:** **Chandigarh** and **Dadra & Nagar Haveli** became the first UTs to operationalise this system for all **PMGKAY** beneficiaries.
- **New mechanism:** Food subsidy is transferred directly into beneficiaries' **Digital Rupee** wallets instead of conventional bank accounts.
- **Usage:** The purpose-bound digital subsidy can be used to purchase foodgrains from empanelled merchants.
- **PMGKAY:** Launched in **March 2020** during the **COVID-19** pandemic to provide free foodgrains to over **80 crore** beneficiaries.
- **Nodal Ministry:** **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (MoCAF&PD)**.
- **Implementing Department:** **Department of Food & Public Distribution (DFPD)**.

NABARD Launches RSVC-AMRIT Platform

Context: The Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, **Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood**, launched the **RSVC-AMRIT** platform to promote rural innovation and facilitate the transfer of affordable technologies to rural communities.

- **Developed by:** NABARD in collaboration with the **Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (OPSA)**.
- **Purpose:** RSVC-AMRIT acts as the digital backbone of the **RuTAGe Smart Village Centre (RSVC)** ecosystem, supporting technology discovery, validation, deployment, monitoring and knowledge management.
- **Technology Transfer:** Connects innovators, startups, technology providers, academic institutions, funding agencies and rural communities for grassroots technology adoption.
- **Focus Areas:** Agriculture, rural enterprises, renewable energy, education, water and sanitation; **NABARD** currently supports **8 RSVCs**.
- **AMRIT:** Accelerated Medium for Rural Innovations and Technologies — a national repository for rural innovations and best practices.
- **Implementation:** RSVCs will be established through partnerships involving **OPSA, NABFOUNDATION** and corporates through **CSR**, with **NABFOUNDATION** as the implementation partner.

About NABARD

- **Established:** 1982
- **Headquarters:** Mumbai, Maharashtra
- **Role:** India's apex development financial institution for agriculture and rural development.
- **Chairman:** Dr. Shaji Krishnan V.

RSVC-AMRIT: Bringing Affordable Technology to Rural India

WHAT IS RSVC-AMRIT?

A digital platform developed to promote rural innovation and help transfer affordable technologies to rural communities.

DEVELOPED BY



Office of the
Principal
Scientific Adviser
(OPSA)

RSVC ECOSYSTEM

RuTAGe Smart Village Centres (RSVCs)

→ Help bring suitable technologies to rural communities.

Partners include: OPSA + NABFOUNDATION + Corporates (CSR)

Implementation Partner: **NABFOUNDATION**

HOW IT WORKS

Innovators & Startups



RSVC-AMRIT
Platform



Rural Communities

→ Supports technology discovery → validation → deployment → monitoring

FOCUS AREAS



→ NABARD supports 8 RSVCs

WHAT IS AMRIT?

AMRIT = Accelerated Medium for Rural Innovations and Technologies

→ National repository of rural innovations & best practices

Topic: Appointment

NITI Aayog

Context

Senior IAS officer **Anurag Jain**, a **1989-batch Madhya Pradesh cadre** officer, took charge as the **CEO of NITI Aayog** following approval from the **Appointments Committee of the Cabinet**.

About NITI Aayog

What is NITI Aayog?

- **NITI Aayog** is the Government of India's apex public policy think tank and strategic advisory institution.
- It replaced the **Planning Commission**, shifting India's development approach from a centralised, top-down model to a decentralised, bottom-up and participatory framework.

Establishment & Legal Status

- Constituted: **1 January 2015**
- Legal Character: Non-constitutional, non-statutory and extra-constitutional body.
- Established through an **Executive Resolution** of the **Union Cabinet**.

Objectives

- Promote cooperative and competitive federalism.
- Provide strategic and technical inputs to the Centre and States.
- Facilitate bottom-up planning.
- Develop a shared national development agenda.

Governance Structure

- **Chairperson:** Prime Minister of India.
- **Vice-Chairperson:** Appointed by the Prime Minister; enjoys the rank of a Union Cabinet Minister.
- **Governing Council:** Comprises the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers of all States and UTs with legislatures, and Lieutenant Governors of other UTs.
- **Regional Councils:** Constituted when required to address specific inter-State or regional issues.
- **Full-time/Part-time Members:** Includes experts and members designated by the Prime Minister.
- **CEO:** Appointed by the Prime Minister for a fixed tenure with the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.

Key Functions

- **Cooperative & Competitive Federalism:** Promotes Centre–State cooperation and encourages healthy competition through the **SDG India Index**, **Health Index** and **Innovation Index**.
- **Bottom-Up Planning:** Encourages planning from the village/Panchayat level and integrates local needs into State and national plans.
- **Policy & Programme Monitoring:** Develops long-term policy frameworks, monitors major Central schemes and suggests mid-course corrections.
- **Think Tank & Knowledge Hub:** Provides policy research, best practices, international benchmarking and promotes technology adoption.
- **Inclusive Development:** Focuses on vulnerable and marginalised groups and integrates national security priorities into development planning.

Hakainde Hichilema Re-elected as President of Zambia

Context: In the **August 2026** general elections, **Hakainde Hichilema** was re-elected as the **President of Zambia** for a second consecutive five-year term, covering **2026–2031**.

- **President:** Hakainde Hichilema, leader of the **United Party for National Development (UPND)**.
- **Election date:** 13 August 2026.
- **Vote share:** Hichilema secured **2,965,326 votes (61.4%)**.
- **Main challenger:** Brian Mundubile, who received **1,856,217 votes (38.4%)**.
- **Electoral system:** A presidential candidate must obtain more than **50% + 1** of valid votes to win outright; otherwise, a run-off election is held.

Topic: Important Days

World Humanitarian Day 2026

Context: **World Humanitarian Day (WHD)** was observed globally on **19 August 2026** to honour humanitarian workers who risk their lives to provide assistance during conflicts, disasters and other crises.

- **2026 Theme:** "Honouring fallen humanitarians and calling for greater protection of health care."
- **UN Proclamation:** The **UN General Assembly** designated **19 August** as **World Humanitarian Day** through **Resolution A/RES/63/139** in **2008**.
- **First observed:** 19 August 2009.
- **Campaign:** The **UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** launched the **WHD** campaign in **2010**.

- **Why 19 August?** On **19 August 2003**, a truck bombing at the **Canal Hotel, Baghdad, Iraq**, killed **22 humanitarian workers**, including **Sérgio Vieira de Mello**, the **UN Special Representative** for Iraq.

Topic: Defence

Exercise MAITREE-XV (2026)

Context: An **85-personnel** Indian Army contingent, mainly from **9 Gorkha Rifles**, departed for **Thailand** for the **15th edition** of **Exercise MAITREE**.

- **Type:** Annual bilateral military exercise between the **Indian Army** and **Royal Thai Army**.
- **Host: Thailand | Venue: Vibhavadi Rangsit Camp, Surat Thani.**
- **Participants: 85 personnel** from each country.
- **Established: 2006;** conducted alternately in India and Thailand.
- **Aim:** Enhance military cooperation, interoperability and joint operational capabilities.
- **Focus:** Counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in jungle and semi-urban environments.
- **UN Framework:** Training conducted under **Chapter VII** of the **UN Charter**.
- **Key Activities:** Tactical drills, raids, room intervention, weapon/equipment demonstrations and a joint validation exercise.
- **Previous Edition: 14th edition – Umroi, Meghalaya, September 2025.**

Topic: Environment

India's First Guide to Grasslands and ONEs

Context

India launched its first-ever **Guide to Grasslands and Other Open Natural Ecosystems (ONEs)** during a side event at the **17th Session** of the **Conference of the Parties (COP17)** to the **UNCCD** in **Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**.

The guide was launched under the guidance of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** to promote conservation and sustainable management of India's grasslands and open natural ecosystems.

About the Guide

- **Aim:** To strengthen the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of India's open natural ecosystems.
- It seeks to draw scientific attention to ecosystems that have traditionally been neglected because of their limited tree cover.

- **Landscapes covered:** Himalayan and Terai grasslands, Thar and Banni landscapes, Deccan savannas, Rocky plateaus, Ravines and scrublands, Coastal ecosystems, Desert landscapes.
- **Thematic areas:** Includes pastoralism, fire ecology and carbon sequestration.

Significance

- Highlights the ecological importance of grasslands and other open natural ecosystems.
- Supports a broader approach to ecosystem conservation beyond forests and tree-dominated landscapes.



International Highlights

India–Armenia Defence Cooperation

Context

India and Armenia signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** in **August 2026** to strengthen their bilateral defence industrial partnership.

The agreement was signed in **Yerevan, Armenia**, during Secretary **Rajesh Kumar Singh**'s official visit.

About India–Armenia Defence Cooperation

- **Defence Industrial Partnership:** Focus on strengthening defence research and development, innovation, joint/shared production and defence industrial linkages.



- **R&D Cooperation:** Both sides explored new avenues for defence R&D and technological cooperation.
- **Key Discussions:** Meetings were held with Armenian Defence Minister **Suren Papikyan** and Minister of High Tech Industry **Davit Tadevosyan**.
- India's Ambassador to Armenia **Nilakshi Saha Sinha** also participated in the discussions.

Significance

- Strengthens bilateral defence relations between **India** and **Armenia**.
- Expands opportunities for defence technology, R&D and industrial cooperation.
- Supports India's broader objective of expanding its defence industrial partnerships.

