

Today's Prelims Topics

Rubber Plantation in India

Context

Tripura has surpassed its target of 30,000 hectares of rubber plantation, it is now aiming to increase the plantation to 69,000 hectares.

About Rubber

- Rubber is a natural polymer of isoprene and an elastomer (a stretchy polymer).
- It is **native to the Amazon basin** and was introduced to countries in the tropical belts of **Asia and Africa in the late 19th century**.
- **Growing Conditions for Rubber:**
 - **Climate:** It requires a hot and humid climate with a temperature of 25°-35°C and annual rainfall of over 200 cm.
 - **Soil Type:** Well-drained, porous and moderately acidic soil that's rich in organic matter. **Laterite soil** is considered the best soil for rubber cultivation.
- **Types of Rubber:**
 - **Natural Rubber:** Natural rubber is extracted from the latex sap of certain trees, such as the *Hevea brasiliensis* tree.
 - **Synthetic Rubber:** Synthetic rubber is made from petroleum products. It is less expensive and easier to produce, but it is not as durable as natural rubber.

Rubber Production in India

- The British established the **1st rubber plantation in India in 1902** on the banks of the **river Periyar in Kerala**.
- India is the **5th largest producer of rubber in the world**.
 - **Top 4 producers:** (1) Thailand (2) Indonesia (3) Ivory Coast (4) Vietnam
- **India is the 2nd biggest consumer (1st- China)** of Rubber globally. About 40% of India's total natural rubber consumption is currently met through imports.
- **Top Rubber Producing States:** Kerala > Tamil Nadu > Karnataka.

Rubber Board

- It is a **statutory organization** constituted under Section (4) of the Rubber Act, 1947.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- **Headquarters:** Kottayam, Kerala.
- **Composition:** The Board is headed by a **Chairman appointed by the Central Government** and has 28 members representing various interests of the natural rubber industry.
- The Board is responsible for the development of the rubber industry in India.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Rubber plantation](#)

Jallikattu

Context

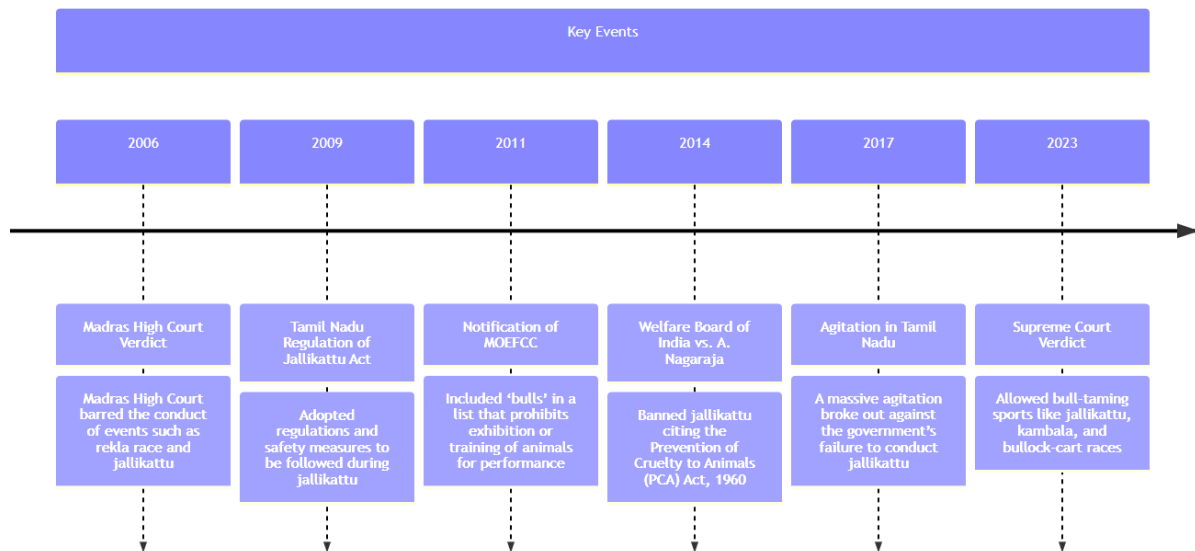
A total of 83 people were injured in the jallikattu organised at Mukkanipatti and Pallapatti village in Tamilnadu.

About Jallikattu

- It is a traditional **Bull-Taming sport**.
- The sport involves releasing a bull into an arena, and participants attempt to **grab and hold onto the bull's hump** for a specific period of time or distance. It is considered a **test of strength and skill for the participants**.
- It is a 2000-year-old tradition popular in **Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, Theni, Pudukkottai and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu known as the Jallikattu belt**.
- It is celebrated in the second week of January, during the Tamil harvest festival, **Pongal**.
- Jallikattu is considered a traditional way for the peasant community to preserve their pure breed native bulls.
- **Kangayam, Pulikulam, Umbalachery, Bargur and Malai Maadu** are among the popular native cattle breeds used for Jallikattu.



Timeline of Jallikattu Dispute



Source:

- [The Hindu - 83 injured in jallikattu](#)

Water Hyacinth Crisis at Lake Naivasha

Context

Kenya's popular Lake Naivasha is getting impacted by the water hyacinth that has taken over large parts of it.

Lake Naivasha

- It is a freshwater lake located in the **Kenyan Rift Valley**, northwest of Nairobi.
- **It is a Ramsar site.**
- It is considered to be of recent geological origin and is ringed by extinct or dormant volcanoes.
- It is fed by **Malewa and Gilgil Rivers**.

About Water Hyacinth

- It is a floating aquatic plant **native to the Amazon basin (South America)**
- It is known for its beautiful purple flowers and broad, glossy leaves.
- **Habitat:** Prefers freshwater bodies such as lakes, rivers, and ponds but can also thrive in brackish water.
- **Negative Impacts**
 - Reduces oxygen levels, harming aquatic life.
 - Overgrows, choking native plants and reducing biodiversity.
- **Uses**
 - Can be harvested for sustainable products like crafts and furniture.
 - Absorbs heavy metals and toxins, reducing water pollution.
 - Usable for animal feed, compost, and bioenergy production.

Invasive Alien Species

- Plants, animals or other organisms that are introduced into an environment where they are not native and can cause harm to the environment, economy or human health.
- **E.g.** Water Hyacinth, Lantana camara, Congress grass, African Catfish etc.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Water hyacinth threatens the livelihoods of fishers](#)

ILO Report on International Migrant Workers

Context

International Migrants (IMs) made up **4.7% of the global labour force** in 2022, totaling **167.7 million**, which is **30 million more than in 2013**.

Key Contributions of International Migrants (IMs)

- **Global Labour Force Data:**
 - **Employed and Unemployed:** 155.6 million IMs were employed & 12.1 million IMs were unemployed.
 - **Gender-wise Representation:** IM men made up 4.7% of the global male labour force, while IM women made up 4.4% of the global female labour force.
- **Age Composition:**
 - **Prime-age workers (25-54 years)** accounted for 74.9% of IMs (125.6 million).
 - **Young workers (15-24 years)** made up 9.3% (15.5 million).
- **Economic Sectors Employing International Migrants:**
 - **Services Sector:** 68.4% of workforce IMs.
 - **Women IMs** were particularly prominent at 80.7%, compared to 60.8% of male IMs.
- **Host Countries Absorbing the Most International Migrant Workers:**
 - **High-Income Countries:** Hosted 68.4% of IMs (114 million), particularly in services sectors like care provision.
 - **Upper-Middle-Income Countries:** Absorbed 17.4% of IMs (29.2 million).

International Labor Organisation (ILO)

- **Established:** on April 11, 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles. (HQ: Geneva, Switzerland)
- **Members:** 187 member states (186 UN member states + the Cook Islands).
 - **India is a founding member of ILO.**
- It's a **specialised agency** of the United Nations (UN).
- It is the **only tripartite** UN agency. It brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 Member States.
- **Reports:**
 - World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO)
 - Global Wage Report
 - World Social Protection Report

Source:

- [The Hindu - ILO report](#)

Dead Olive Ridley turtles on Tamilnadu beaches

Context

In recent times a significant number of **olive ridley turtles** have been found dead along the Tamil Nadu coast, especially around **Chennai**.

Potential Causes of Death

- **Bycatch from Fishing Nets:**
 - Olive ridley turtles get trapped in fishing nets of commercial trawlers during mating, leading to **asphyxiation** due to difficulty reaching the surface for air.
- **Signs of Suffocation:**
 - Post-mortems show **lung lesions** and **swollen necks**, indicating drowning and suffocation.
- **Lack of Protective Measures:**
 - The absence of **turtle-excluding devices (TEDs)** in fishing nets contributes to higher turtle mortality rates.

About Olive Ridley Sea Turtles

- They are the **2nd smallest and most abundant** of all sea turtles found in the world.
 - **Smallest sea turtle in the world:** Kemp's ridley sea turtle.
 - **Largest Sea turtle:** Leatherback Turtle
- **Features:**
 - They are known for unique **arribadas (synchronised mass nestings)**, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.
 - **Females nest every year** and produce up to 100 eggs.
 - Males and females grow to the same size, but females have a slightly more rounded carapace.
 - They are **omnivorous**, meaning they feed on both plants and animals.
- **Distribution:** Mainly found in warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- **Major Sites in India:**
 - **Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary:** Located in the Kendrapara district of Odisha, this is the **world's largest nesting site** for olive ridley turtles.
 - **Rushikulya Beach:** Located in the Ganjam district of Odisha. The mouth of the Rushikulya River is the 2nd largest nesting site for olive ridley turtles in India.
 - Velas Beach, Versova Beach & Tarkli Beach (Maharashtra)
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
 - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule 1
 - **CITES:** Appendix I



Source:

- [Indian Express - dead olive ridley turtles](#)

SVAMITVA Scheme and its Benefits

Context

Recently the Prime Minister distributed over 65 lakh property cards to property owners in over 50,000 villages through video conferencing under SVAMITVA Scheme.

About SVAMITVA Scheme

- SVAMITVA stands for **Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas**.
- It's a **Central Sector Scheme** launched on **National Panchayati Raj Day (24th April) in 2021**.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj
- **Stakeholders involved:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Revenue Department, State Panchayati Raj Department and Survey of India.
- **Important features:**
 - **"Record of Rights"** are provided to rural households using the latest Drone Technology and **Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) technology** for capturing images.
 - Such accurate maps provide a clear demarcation of land holdings in a very short frame of time compared to on ground physical measurement.
- **Current Achievement:**
 - 2 crore property cards have been issued so far.
 - States like Haryana and Uttarakhand have achieved full coverage.
 - **Future Target:** Aim to cover the entire country by FY 2025-26.

Benefits of SVAMITVA Scheme

- **Economic Empowerment:**
 - Rural residents can use property as a **financial asset** to secure loans.
 - Promotes **small businesses** among families, including farmers.
- **Increased Liquidity:**
 - Enhances the **market value** of land parcels and credit availability.
- **Improved Taxation and Governance:**
 - Property cards facilitate **accurate property tax determination** benefiting **Gram Panchayats**.
 - Helps eliminate **encroachments** and aids rural planning (e.g., construction permits).
- **Enhanced Land Records:**
 - Accurate and updated **GIS-based property maps** accessible at the **Gram Panchayat** level.

Source:

- [Indian Express - What is SVAMITVA Scheme](#)

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Abetment of suicide - why SC advised caution in using the provision

Context

The Supreme Court has emphasized the need to sensitize investigating agencies and courts regarding abetment of suicide cases under Section 306 of the IPC to prevent misuse of the legal provision.

About

- **Definition of Abetment:** Section 107 IPC (similar to Section 45 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) defines abetment as:
 - Instigating someone to do a thing.
 - Engaging in a conspiracy to do a thing.
 - Intentionally aiding the act or illegal omission.
- **Section 306 IPC:** Punishes abetment of suicide with imprisonment up to 10 years and a fine.
- **Proving Abetment:** Requires evidence that the accused directly instigated or aided the deceased to take their life.

Recent Supreme Court Ruling (October, 2024)

The Supreme Court established illustrative (not exhaustive) criteria for assessing cases of abetment to suicide:

- **Unbearable Harassment:** Whether the accused created a situation of “unbearable harassment or torture” that made suicide appear as the only escape for the deceased.
- **Exploitation of Vulnerability:** Whether the accused exploited the emotional vulnerabilities of the deceased, leading them to feel “worthless or undeserving of life.”
- **Threats and Intimidation:** If the accused issued threats of harm to the deceased or their family, or threatened financial ruin.
- **False Allegations:** If false allegations were made against the deceased, potentially damaging their reputation and leading to public humiliation and loss of dignity.

Supreme Court Precedents on Abetment of Suicide

- **M Mohan v The State (2011):**
 - Proof requires an active or direct act of instigation leaving no other option but suicide.
- **Ude Singh v State of Haryana (2019):**
 - Requires evidence of acts creating a situation perceived as inescapable by the deceased.

Source:

- [Indian Express - Abetment to suicide](#)

News in Shorts

Rise in Securities Transaction Tax (STT) collection

- STT collections surged over **75%**, reaching **₹44,538 crore** as of January, 2025, compared to **₹25,415 crore** in the same period in 2024. The collection exceeded the budget estimate of ₹37,000 crore for FY 2024-25.
- STT is a **direct tax** charged on the **purchase and sale of securities listed** on the recognized stock exchanges in India.
- It is **levied and collected** by the Union government.
- STT is not applicable to off-market transactions or to commodity or currency transactions.

Sources:

- [Indian Express - Securities transaction tax](#)

Exercise La Parouse

- It is a **multilateral naval exercise** conducted to strengthen maritime security and enhance interoperability among participating navies.
- **Members:** **India, France (Host Nation), U.S.A.** , Canada, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and UK.
- **Location:** Conducted in the **Malacca, Sunda and Lombok straits**, key chokepoints between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.
- This one is the **4th edition** of the exercise.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Nine Navies hold joint drills](#)

Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi

- Sembiyan Mahadevi was **Queen consort and empress of the Chola Empire from 949 CE – 957 CE** as the wife of **Gandaraditya Chola**.
- She was one of the most powerful empresses of the Chola empire.
- She constructed numerous temples and gave generous gifts to many temples in South India over a period of sixty years.
- She was mother of **Uttama Chola**.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Queen Sembiyan was the real founder of the Chola Empire](#)

Editorial Summary

Hamas and Israel agreed to a ceasefire

Context

After 15 months of war, Israel and Hamas have agreed on a phased ceasefire deal in the Gaza strip.

3 Phases of the Ceasefire Deal in Gaza

Phase 1:

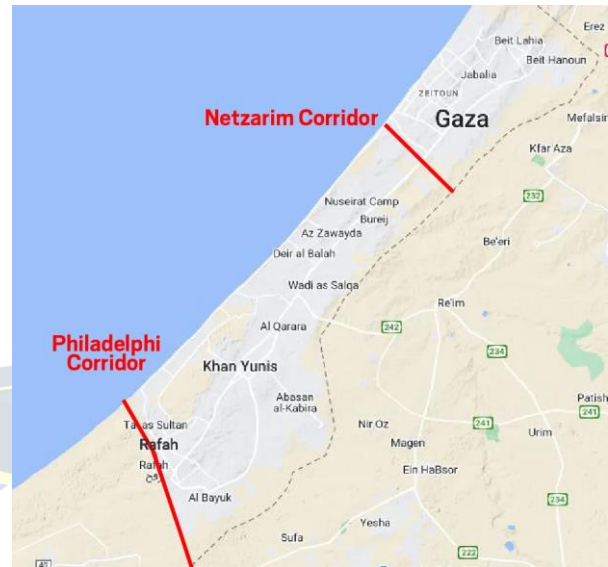
- Hamas will release 33 hostages.
- Israel will release 900 to 1,650 Palestinian detainees, including those detained since October 7, 2023.
- The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) will withdraw from central Gaza and the Netzarim Corridor (a 2-4 km-wide security clearing dividing Gaza). The IDF will also withdraw from the Philadelphi Corridor, the buffer zone along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Phase 2:

- Further exchanges of hostages and prisoners will occur.
- Both sides are expected to announce a **permanent end to hostilities**.

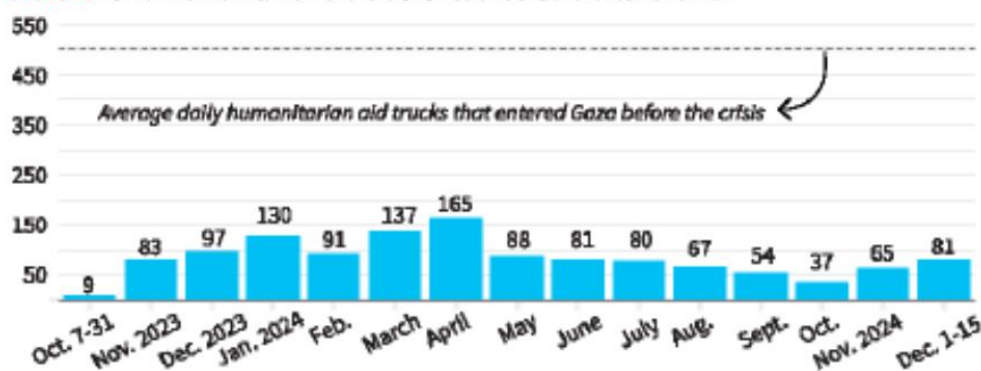
Phase 3:

- Discussions will begin on the governance of Gaza, focusing on forming a united administration under the Palestinian Authority.
- Reconstruction of Gaza will start, and Israel is expected to withdraw all its troops.

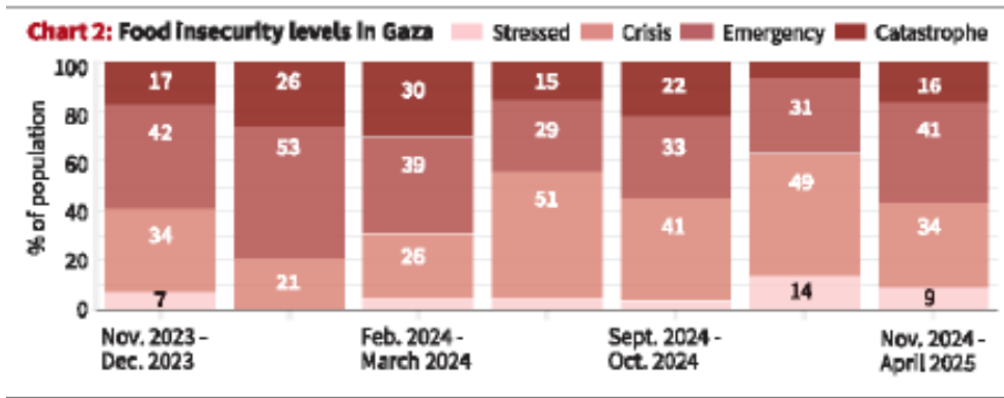


Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza

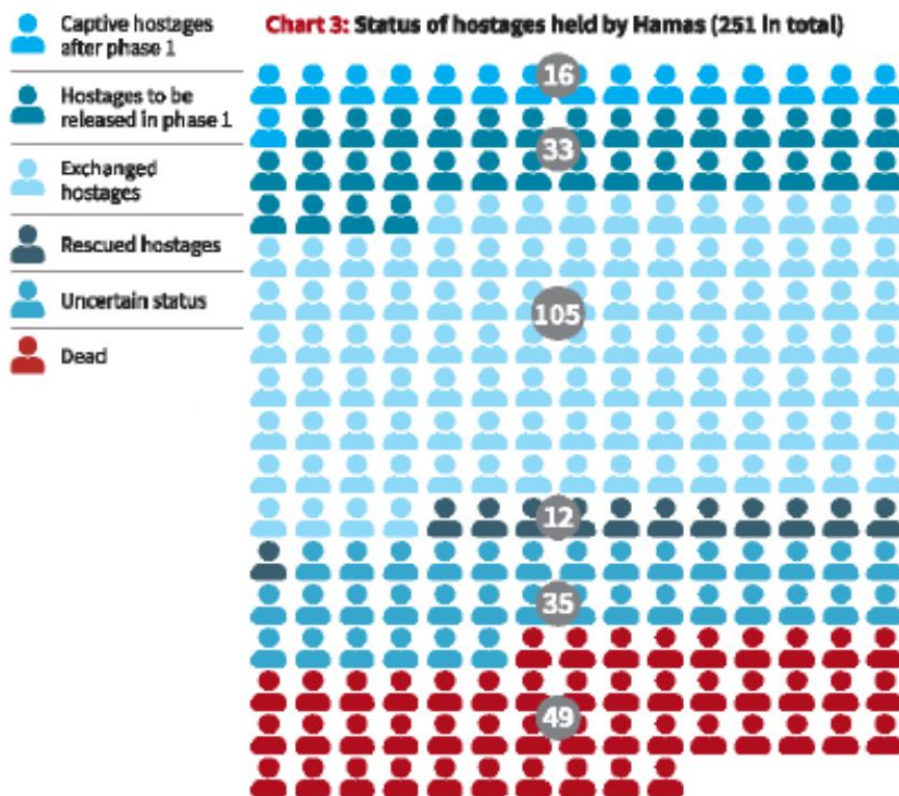
Chart 1: Fewer humanitarian aid trucks reached Gaza after the war



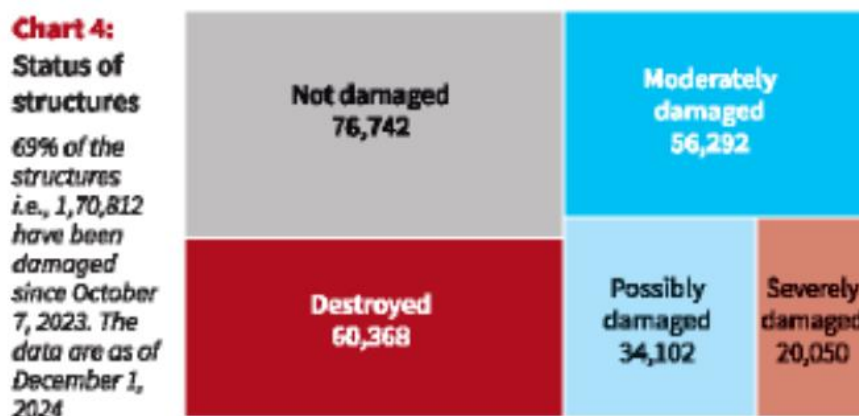
- **Collapse of Aid Supplies:** The daily number of humanitarian aid trucks entering Gaza dropped drastically from 500-600 to just a fraction after October 7, 2023.



- **Severe Food Insecurity:** By December 2023, 85% of Gaza’s population was facing 'crisis', 'emergency', or 'catastrophic' levels of food insecurity according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.



- **Hostage Crisis:** As of January 15, 2025, 98 hostages remained, with fewer confirmed alive, out of 251 originally taken by Hamas on October 7, 2023.



- **Widespread Structural Damage:** By December 1, 2024, **69% of structures in Gaza were damaged:**
 - **60,368 structures** destroyed.
 - **20,050 severely damaged** and over 90,000 either moderately or possibly damaged.
 - North Gaza and Rafah experienced the highest increase in damage, with Jabalya municipality reporting **1,339 newly damaged structures**.

What the Agreement Means for Hamas

- **Time to Recover:** The ceasefire gives Hamas a chance to rebuild its organization and leadership after heavy losses from Israeli attacks.
- **Recruiting New Fighters:** Hamas has replaced the fighters it lost during the war.
- **Political Goals:** Hamas aims to secure a role in Gaza's future government, similar to Hezbollah's position in Lebanon after the 1989 Taif Agreement.
- **No Role for the Palestinian Authority:** The deal does not mention the Palestinian Authority returning to Gaza, which strengthens Hamas's hold on the region.

What the Agreement Means for Israel

- **Some Successes:** Israel has weakened Iran's influence and killed important Hamas leaders.
- **Unfinished Goals:** Israel has not fully removed Hamas from Gaza, which was one of its main aims.
- **Hostage Release:** Getting all the hostages back will be a big win, especially since Israeli families have been protesting for their release.
- **Political Challenges:** The deal could upset Netanyahu's far-right supporters, who may see the prisoner exchange as unfair.
 - Opposition leaders accuse Netanyahu of delaying the hostage deal for political reasons.
- **International Support:** Future help from leaders like Donald Trump might influence how Netanyahu handles the ceasefire.

Sources:

- [The Hindu: Pyrrhic peace](#)
- [The Hindu: What the ceasefire deal means for Palestine and Israel](#)
- [Indian Express: What are the key takeaways from the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement?](#)

Recasting Insolvency Resolution

Context

- The **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016**, was introduced as a significant economic reform to streamline insolvency resolution in a **structured and time-bound manner**.
- Initially seen as a tool to improve India's business environment and hold defaulters accountable, issues related to **institutional capacity** and **procedural inefficiency** have emerged.
- The **Supreme Court judgment in the Jet Airways case** highlighted structural weaknesses in the insolvency regime.

Key Issues in the IBC Framework

- **Institutional Burden:**
 - **NCLT and NCLAT's Dual Role:** Handle both corporate insolvencies (IBC) and cases under the Companies Act, creating a **dual burden**.
 - **Outdated Structure:** NCLT, conceived in 1999 and operationalised in 2016, reflects outdated economic realities.
 - Sanctioned strength of **63 members**, many of whom serve across multiple benches, creates a bottleneck.
 - **Operational Inefficiencies:** Several NCLT benches do not operate full working days.
 - **Delays in resolutions:** Average time for insolvency resolutions rose to **716 days in FY2023-24**, from **654 days in FY2022-23**.
- **Deficiency in Domain Expertise:** Current appointments overlook the need for **specialised knowledge** in high-stakes insolvency matters.
 - The **Supreme Court in Jet Airways case** criticised this, noting that members lack the expertise to handle complex cases.
- **Procedural Inefficiencies:** Mandatory hearings for all applications, even progress reports, lead to unnecessary delays.
 - **Limited use of alternative dispute resolution methods** exacerbates system overload.
 - Bureaucratic inefficiencies:
 - Registries wield excessive powers to delay or refuse case listings.
 - Instances of NCLT/NCLAT members defying Supreme Court orders threaten judicial integrity.
- **Widespread Delays:** The **Supreme Court** warned that excessive discretion in extending timelines risks making the IBC **obsolete**.

Proposed Reforms and Recommendations

- **Hybrid Model for Appointments:** A model that values both **judicial experience** and **domain expertise** is crucial.
- **Specialised Benches:** Categorise cases to improve both efficiency and expertise, particularly for **mergers and amalgamations**.
- **Infrastructure Overhaul:** Prioritise courtrooms, qualified staff, and robust support systems to sustain operations.
- **Procedural Innovations:** **Mandatory mediation** prior to submitting insolvency applications could ease the load.
 - Reduce unnecessary hearings and promote **alternative dispute resolution mechanisms**.
- **Adherence to Timelines:** Sensitise NCLT/NCLAT to follow IBC timelines, as emphasized in **Jet Airways case**.
- **Focus Beyond Debt Resolution:** Evolve IBC to drive **economic rejuvenation** and attract **foreign investment**.

Source: [The Hindu: Recasting insolvency resolution](#)

The impact of H-1B visas on the tech industry in U.S.

Context

The recently announced H-1B Visa New Rules 2025 provide a major benefit by bringing an innovative update to the visa renewal procedure.

Impact of H-1B Visas on the U.S. Tech Industry

- **Wage Increases and Productivity**
 - **Study by Giovanni Peri (2013):** This study titled "STEM Workers, H-1B Visas, and Productivity in U.S. Cities" found that H-1B workers positively influenced wages for native college-educated workers and overall productivity in 219 U.S. cities from 1990 to 2010.
 - A 1% increase in the foreign STEM share of employment resulted in a 7-8% increase in wages for native college graduates.
 - Non-college-educated native workers saw a 3-4% wage increase for every 1% rise in foreign STEM employment.
 - The influx of foreign STEM workers accounted for 30% to 50% of aggregate productivity growth in the U.S. during this period.
- **Complementarity with Native Workers:**
 - **Follow-up Study by Caiumi and Peri (2022):** This research highlighted that immigrants often specialize in different occupations compared to native workers, allowing them to complement rather than compete with each other in the labor market.
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship:**
 - **Research by William Kerr:** Skilled immigrants significantly contribute to U.S. patent activity, particularly in emerging technologies.
 - **Jennifer Hunt's Findings:** H-1B workers transitioning to permanent residency tend to be innovative and entrepreneurial, often starting companies that create jobs for U.S. citizens.

Broader Economic Impact

- According to the American Immigration Council, immigrant workers create new job opportunities through various mechanisms:
 - They fill different skill gaps, increasing overall labor market efficiency.
 - Their spending boosts consumer demand, leading businesses to expand operations domestically.
 - Immigrants frequently start new businesses, further enhancing job creation.
 - New ideas and innovations from immigrants drive economic growth.

Source: [The Hindu: The impact of H-1B visas on the tech industry in U.S.](#)

Indian Economy – Cyclical Slowdown or Structural Challenges?

Context

The Indian economy is currently facing significant challenges that raise questions about whether it is experiencing a cyclical slowdown or if it is returning to its pre-pandemic growth trajectory.

Current Economic Growth Trends

GDP Growth Projections

- **Projected Growth Rate:** India's GDP is expected to grow at 6.4% in the fiscal year 2024-25, marking the slowest pace since the pandemic-induced contraction of 5.8% in 2020-21.
 - This represents a decline from 8.2% growth in 2023-24 and falls short of earlier government forecasts of 6.5%.
- **Contributing Factors:** The slowdown is primarily attributed to weaker growth in gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), which is expected to drop from 9% to 6.4%, and inventory growth declining from 5.9% to 4.5%.
 - In contrast, private consumption expenditure (PFCE) and government spending are projected to increase

Key Challenges and Indicators

- **Weak Consumption Base**
 - Limited upward mobility and stagnant real wage growth restrict discretionary spending.
 - The hollowing out of the consumption base is evident in specific markets:
 - **Small car sales (sub ₹10 lakh segment):**
 - Share declined from **73% in 2014-15** to **46% in 2024-25**.
 - **Maruti Suzuki:** Sales of mini and compact cars in the first half of 2024 lower than 2017-18 levels.
 - **Premiumisation in the corporate sector** reflects a shrinking market, focusing on the top consuming cohort.
- **Labour Market Issues**
 - Limited creation of **productive employment opportunities**.
 - Rising numbers of self-employed individuals in **informal establishments** or as **unpaid family help**.
 - Formal employment largely driven by **manpower suppliers and low-skill services** (e.g., contractors, security services).
 - Real wage growth remains muted.
- **Rising Household Debt**
 - **Household debt** rose to **43% by June 2024**.
 - **60% of borrowers** with personal loans already have **more than three active loans**, reflecting financial strain.
 - Increased debt has failed to significantly boost consumption.

Investment and Policy Challenges

- **Muted Investment Activity**
 - **New project announcements** slowing as per CMIE data.
 - **FDI levels** remain below recent highs.
 - India Inc. expresses concerns over shrinking middle-class demand and questions growth figures.
- **Policy Uncertainty and Government Inaction**
 - **RBI's monetary policy** has been excessively tight, eroding export competitiveness by delaying rupee adjustments.

- Government perceived as avoiding risks and shifting responsibility for economic momentum to the central bank.
- **Industrial Policy Concerns**
 - Industrial policy initiatives like **PLIs** (Production-Linked Incentives) yet to deliver robust results.
 - Shift by major business houses from **industrial sectors to services** signals underlying issues in the manufacturing ecosystem.

Structural and Distributional Challenges

- **Unequal Growth Structure:** Growth post-pandemic primarily benefits a small, highly skilled segment of the labour force.
 - Limited pathways for **upward mobility** restrict broader consumption and economic dynamism.
- **Export Competitiveness Issues:** Rupee's delayed adjustment has weakened export competitiveness, further hindering recovery.
- **Sectoral Weaknesses:** GCC boom stabilizing at lower levels exposes deeper **economic faultlines**.
 - Informal employment and weak real wage growth hinder structural transformation.

Conclusion

- While the economy shows signs of recovery, the evidence suggests **structural challenges** rather than a purely cyclical slowdown.
- Limited job creation, muted wage growth, shrinking middle-class demand, and subdued investment are significant obstacles.
- The government must adopt targeted reforms to boost **productive employment**, enhance **consumption capacity**, and address **policy uncertainty** to reinvigorate growth.

Source: [Indian Express: A restricted upward mobility](#)