

## Current Affairs - 04 November 2024

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### WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN CITIES?

- With October 31 recognized globally as World Cities Day, this year's theme is "**Youth Climate Changemakers: Catalysing Local Action for Urban Sustainability**".
- With over **40% of India's population residing in urban areas across approximately 9,000 towns**, Indian cities face unique challenges exacerbated by rapid urbanization, socio-economic inequalities, and climate threats.

#### **Primary Challenges of Indian Urbanisation:**

- **Outdated Spatial Planning:**
  - India's urban planning often lags behind current needs, with many plans focusing on capital growth rather than human-centric development. Outmoded spatial plans fail to account for rising populations and housing demands.
- **Deindustrialization and Employment:**
  - Post-1980s deindustrialization in cities like Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Mumbai led to significant job losses, pushing displaced workers into peri-urban slums where nearly 40% of India's urban population now resides.

#### **Environmental Challenges and Climate Impact:**

- **Climate Vulnerabilities:**
  - Indian cities, particularly in the National Capital Region (NCR), experience severe air pollution, urban flooding, and the "urban heat island" effect.
  - Among India's ten most polluted cities, eight are located in the NCR, leading to substantial health risks and decreased quality of life.
- **Urban Flooding and Extreme Heat:**
  - The increase in impervious surfaces and poor drainage systems make Indian cities prone to urban flooding. The dense construction exacerbates heat levels, significantly impacting public health and productivity.

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### Social Inequality & Segregation:

- **Growing Inequality:**
  - Cities are witnessing widening socio-economic disparities, with luxury housing projects such as DLF's "The Dahlias" in Gurugram offering apartments starting at ₹100 crore, contrasting with millions living without basic shelter.
- **Community Segregation:**
  - Contrary to the notion that cities dilute social and religious differences, urban areas in India are becoming increasingly segregated along these lines, leading to community isolation and tensions.

### Governance & Decentralisation Issues:

- **Limited Local Authority:**
  - Despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment aiming for decentralized urban governance, most Indian cities lack control over urban planning and essential functions.
  - Only a few cities have implemented more than three of the 18 mandated functions outlined in the 12th Schedule.
- **Funding Constraints:**
  - Urban areas receive minimal financial support from intergovernmental transfers, with cities allocated only 0.5% of the GDP, limiting their capacity for sustainable development and infrastructure improvements.

### Conclusion:

- Indian cities face complex, interwoven challenges requiring coordinated national interventions and empowered local governance to create inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban environments.
  - Comprehensive solutions involving updated spatial planning, adequate resource allocation, and localized climate action are crucial to addressing these issues and ensuring a more equitable future for India's urban population.
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### WHAT IS IRON BEAM?



- The Iron Beam, also known as Magen or Light Shield, is a new laser-based missile defence system developed by Israel.
- It is a 100kW class High Energy Laser Weapon System (HELWS) that is expected to become the first operational system in its class.
- It is a directed-energy weapon air defence system that fires powerful beams of light that can destroy fast-moving projectiles.
- Built by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, Iron Beam was first unveiled in 2014.
- Its operational range extends up to 7 km (4.3 miles).

#### Advantages:

- With a continuous energy supply for the laser, the advantage lies in never depleting ammunition, ensuring a sustained capability for defense.
- The absence of conventional ammunition will directly result in significant cost savings.
- Complementing Israel's Iron Dome, it can be integrated with a range of platforms and can become part of any multilayer defence system.

#### Disadvantages:

- Diminished effectiveness during restricted visibility, such as heavy cloud cover or adverse weather conditions.
- It cannot operate effectively in wet conditions—the more moisture in the atmosphere, the more water particles absorb the laser's energy.
- Iron Beam requires a direct line of sight between the system and its target, making its placement far more critical.
- It also has a much slower rate of fire, requiring five seconds or so to transmit sufficient energy to destroy its target.



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### GLOBAL TUBERCULOSIS (TB) REPORT 2024



- It is an annual report published by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- It provides a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment of the TB epidemic and of progress in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease at global, regional, and country levels.

#### Highlights of the 2024 Report:

- It shows 8.2 million people were newly diagnosed with TB in 2023, a figure that represents the highest number of TB cases recorded by the WHO since it began global TB monitoring in 1995.
- It also marks a significant increase from the 7.5 million new TB cases reported in 2022.
- Although the estimated number of 1.25 million TB deaths in 2023 is down from the 1.32 million recorded in 2022 and continues a declining trend from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, that number still far surpasses the 320,000 COVID deaths officially reported to the WHO last year.
- The data show that 30 mostly low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) bear 87% of the global TB burden, with five countries—India (26%), Indonesia (10%), China (6.8%), the Philippines (6.8%), and Pakistan (6.3%)—combining for 56% of the burden.
- 55 percent of people who developed TB were men, 33 percent were women, and 12 percent were children and young adolescents.
- According to the report, a significant number of new TB cases are driven by five major risk factors: undernutrition, HIV infection, alcohol use disorders, smoking, and diabetes.
- In 2023, India was estimated to have had 27 lakh TB cases, of which 25.1 lakh persons were diagnosed and put on treatment.

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### RESERVE BANK BRINGING BACK ITS GOLD ASSETS TO INDIA

#### **Rise in the RBI's domestic gold holding**

- As of September 2024, the RBI's domestic gold holding has increased to 510.46 metric tonnes, up from 295.82 metric tonnes in March 2022.
- Presently, around 324 metric tonnes of the RBI's gold remains under the custodianship of the Bank of England, a reduction from 453.52 metric tonnes in March 2022.

#### **Gold Kept in Bank of England**

- **One of the world's largest gold vaults**
  - The Bank of England hosts one of the world's largest gold vaults, second only to the New York Federal Reserve.
  - It stores around 400,000 bars of gold, holding gold for many central banks worldwide. This facility incurs a cost for gold safekeeping.
- **India's gold in Bank of England**
  - The RBI continues to retain 324 tonnes of its gold reserves under the protection of the Bank of England and the Bank for International Settlements, which collectively hold a substantial portion of India's gold abroad.
    - Around 20 tonnes are additionally managed through gold deposit schemes.
  - Storing part of India's gold in London provides the RBI with immediate access to the London bullion market, allowing for enhanced liquidity.
  - Historically, in 1991, India sent 47 tonnes of gold to the Bank of England during a balance of payments crisis to secure funds for repaying international creditors.

#### **RBI's strategy to bring back its gold assets to India**

- **Central Banks Buying Gold**
  - Since the U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia in 2022 following the Ukraine invasion, central banks globally have been increasing their gold reserves as a hedge against inflation and to decrease reliance on the U.S. dollar.

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- **Significance of this strategy**
    - **Sign of a strong economy**
      - In 1991, at the time of a severely difficult economic phase, RBI had to pledge some gold to raise funds. Now, bringing back gold reflects the recovery and a major change in the strength of Indian economy.
    - **Optimizing financial resources**
      - Since RBI has gold deposits mostly held internationally, the decision to bring back some of it will save the cost of storage, which is being paid to foreign banks.
    - **Strategic significance**
      - Globally, central banks are increasingly investing in gold as a safe-haven asset, partly as a strategy to reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar.
    - **Rise in safe-keeping capacity**
      - The RBI has been steadily repatriating gold from the Bank of England, citing improved domestic capacity for physical storage.
    - **Diversification**
      - Increasing gold reserves allows India to diversify its foreign exchange holdings, reducing reliance on any single currency and mitigating risks from currency fluctuations and economic instability.
    - **Hedge Against Inflation**
      - Gold acts as a hedge against inflation, retaining or appreciating in value when currencies lose purchasing power.
  - **Conclusion**
    - The RBI's recent transfer of gold from the UK marks a key step in strengthening India's economy.
    - This move preserves national assets, prepares for future economic challenges, and aligns with global central banks' recognition of gold's role in ensuring long-term stability.
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### INDIAN GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

Recently, the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister announced that the upcoming Durgesh Aranya Zoological Park will become India's first zoo to earn certification from the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC) for sustainable and eco-friendly infrastructure.



- It is part of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) which was formed in the year 2001. It is India's Premier certification body.
- The council offers a wide array of services which include developing new green building rating programmes, certification services and green building training programmes.
- The council also organises the Green Building Congress, its annual flagship event on green buildings.
- It is also among the 5 countries that are on the board of the World Green Building Council discussing global issues at COP and similar global platforms.
- The rating is based on six environmental categories which include sustainable station facility, health, hygiene and sanitation, energy efficiency, water efficiency, smart and green initiatives and innovation and development.
- Headquarter: Hyderabad.

Key facts about Durgesh Aranya Zoological Park

- It is located in the Bankhandi area of Kangra's Dehra assembly constituency of Himachal Pradesh.
- The Central Zoo Authority (CZA) has approved 34 enclosures within the park's Van Vaibhav Path and Biodiversity Court, which will house 73 animal species, including the Asiatic lion, hog deer, crocodile, monitor lizard, gharial, and various birds.
- The project aligns with the state government's focus on promoting eco-tourism and sustainable development, reinforcing Kangra's status as the "Tourism Capital" of Himachal Pradesh.

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### DIGITAL ARREST SCAMS: ED FILES CHARGE SHEET

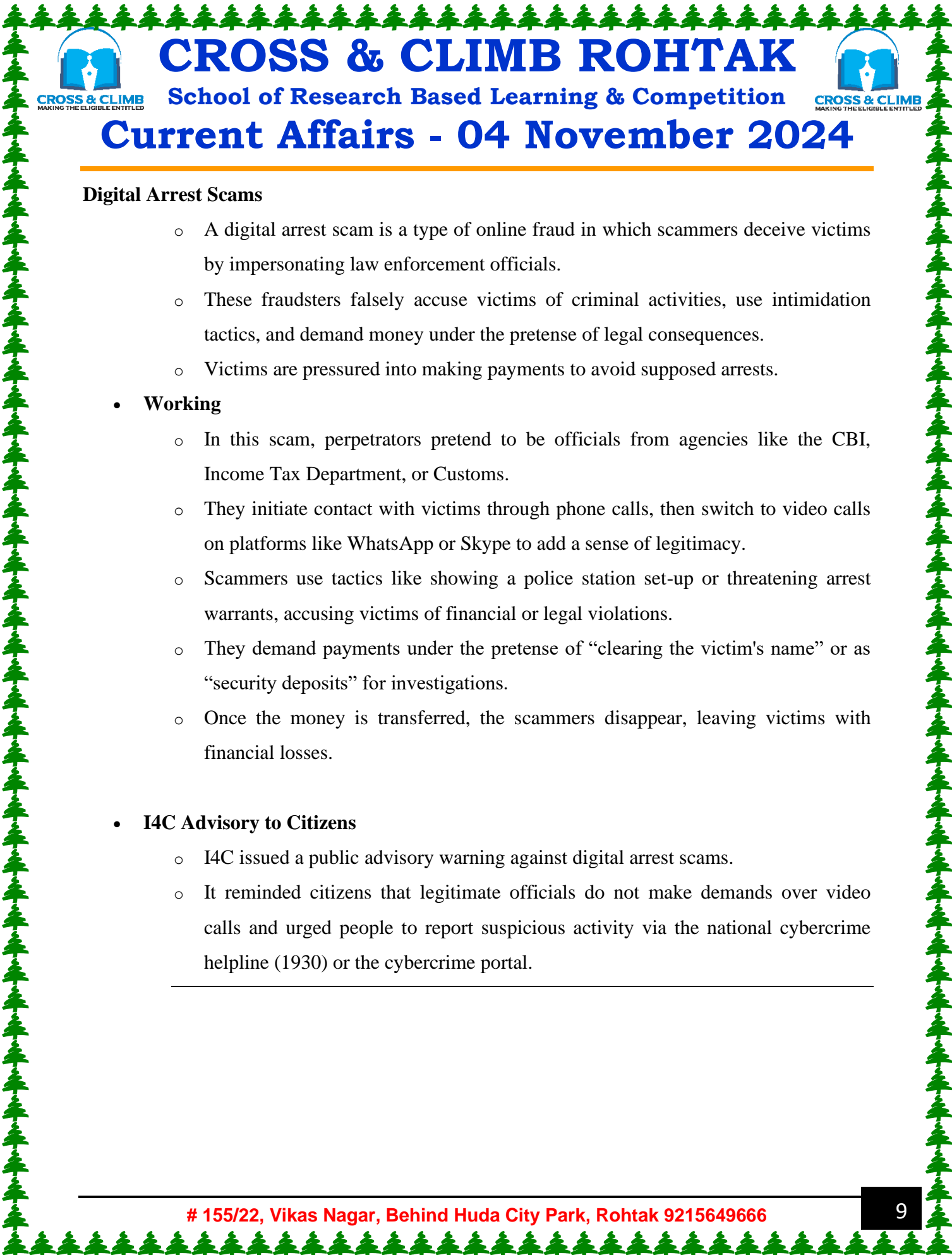
The Enforcement Directorate (ED) recently filed a prosecution complaint under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) against eight individuals involved in cyber scams. These accused allegedly defrauded people via fake IPOs and stock investments, primarily using social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram.

Also, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) has issued a new advisory warning against digital arrests.

#### **Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C)**

- I4C is an initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs to deal with cyber crime in the country in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.
- I4C focuses on tackling all the issues related to Cybercrime for the citizens, which includes:
  - improving coordination between various Law Enforcement Agencies and the stakeholders,
  - driving change in India's overall capability to tackle Cybercrime.
- The I4C was dedicated to the Nation in January 2020.
- **Objectives of I4C**
  - To act as a nodal point to curb Cybercrime in the country.
  - To strengthen the fight against Cybercrime committed against women and children.
  - Facilitate easy filing Cybercrime related complaints and identifying Cybercrime trends and patterns.
  - To act as an early warning system for Law Enforcement Agencies for proactive Cybercrime prevention and detection.
  - Awareness creation among public about preventing Cybercrime.





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### Digital Arrest Scams

- A digital arrest scam is a type of online fraud in which scammers deceive victims by impersonating law enforcement officials.
  - These fraudsters falsely accuse victims of criminal activities, use intimidation tactics, and demand money under the pretense of legal consequences.
  - Victims are pressured into making payments to avoid supposed arrests.
  - **Working**
    - In this scam, perpetrators pretend to be officials from agencies like the CBI, Income Tax Department, or Customs.
    - They initiate contact with victims through phone calls, then switch to video calls on platforms like WhatsApp or Skype to add a sense of legitimacy.
    - Scammers use tactics like showing a police station set-up or threatening arrest warrants, accusing victims of financial or legal violations.
    - They demand payments under the pretense of “clearing the victim's name” or as “security deposits” for investigations.
    - Once the money is transferred, the scammers disappear, leaving victims with financial losses.
  - **I4C Advisory to Citizens**
    - I4C issued a public advisory warning against digital arrest scams.
    - It reminded citizens that legitimate officials do not make demands over video calls and urged people to report suspicious activity via the national cybercrime helpline (1930) or the cybercrime portal.
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