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Current Affairs - 22 January 2026

SHIFTING OF BORDER FENCE IN PUNJAB

Punjab Chief Minister said the Centre has agreed in principle to move the security fence closer to the India–Pakistan border, a step that could restore access to farmland lying beyond the fence.

The proposal, discussed earlier but never implemented, revives questions around its origins, security concerns, and why relief for border farmers has remained elusive.

Why Punjab's Border Fence Has Become a Farmers' Flashpoint?



- Punjab's 532-km border with Pakistan is secured by a barbed-wire fence that, due to uneven terrain, lies anywhere from a few feet to nearly 2 km inside Indian territory.

- As a result, about 21,500 acres of privately owned farmland and 10,000 acres of government land fall between the fence and the

International Border.

- Farmers cultivating this land face strict restrictions. Access gates open only for limited hours on fixed days, with caps on the number of people and tractors allowed.
- Each tractor must be escorted by two **BSF Kisan Guards**, further limiting daily access.
- Border farmers have long demanded that the fence be moved closer to the International Border to ease cultivation.

Why the Punjab Border Fence Was Built?

- The electrified barbed-wire fence along the Punjab–Pakistan border was first installed in 1988 across Gurdaspur, Amritsar and Ferozpur, at the height of militancy in the state. Its primary purpose was to curb infiltration, militancy and drug smuggling.
- At the time, farmers did not protest, as dissent was often viewed with suspicion during those volatile years.
- In 1992, farmers formed the **Border Area Sangharsh Committee** to raise their concerns, but the issue has remained unresolved.



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- With the later creation of Tarn Taran, Fazilka and Pathankot districts, the fence now affects border communities across six districts in Punjab.

Kapoor Committee and Farmer Compensation

- The Kapoor Committee, headed by then Punjab Chief Secretary S L Kapoor, was constituted in 1986 to examine the difficulties faced by farmers whose land lay beyond the border fence.
- It recommended compensating affected farmers, leading to the release of an inconvenience allowance of ₹2,500 per acre in 1988.
- However, farmers say this compensation has been irregular and not paid annually.

Farmers Seek Fence Shift Amid Evolving Security Landscape

- Punjab's border farmers argue that advances in surveillance and drone monitoring have changed the nature of border security, making the current fence alignment outdated.
- With hundreds of acres trapped behind the fence, farmers face daily checks, delays in using machinery, and hurdles in transporting crops.
- They say shifting the fence closer to the International Border would ease cultivation without compromising security, given improved monitoring and adequate defence resources.

Why the Border Fence Remains Unmoved?

- Despite repeated proposals, shifting the Punjab border fence has not materialised due to practical and administrative hurdles.
 - BSF officials say the nearly 40-year-old fence is in poor condition and moving it would require dismantling and rebuilding it with newly procured barbed wire.
 - Farmers, meanwhile, remain sceptical, noting that similar assurances have surfaced during elections in the past without any follow-through, including in 2023 when a possible fence shift was announced but never implemented.
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LOWERING THE AGE OF JUVENILITY FOR CRIMES IS A STEP BACK

- India's juvenile justice framework is rooted in the belief that children differ developmentally from adults and are capable of reform.
- However, after the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, the JJ Act, 2015 introduced the “**transfer system**”, allowing 16–18-year-olds accused of heinous offences to be assessed for adult trials.
- **Punitive Shift Without Evidence**
 - The introduction of the transfer system lacked empirical support.
 - It was opposed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee, which found it inconsistent with domestic and international juvenile justice standards.
- **Arbitrariness in Assessments**
 - Preliminary assessments by Juvenile Justice Boards focus on abstract notions like “mental capacity” and “understanding consequences,” rather than developmental stages or lived realities.
 - No reliable tools exist to measure such capacities retrospectively.
- **Inconsistent and Discriminatory Outcomes**
 - Decisions often hinge on subjective factors—such as remorse or awareness of wrongdoing—leading to unequal treatment of similarly placed children.
 - Outcomes depend more on discretion than conduct.
- **Risks of Expanding the Transfer System**
 - Lowering the age threshold to 14 would extend arbitrariness to younger children, undermining rehabilitation, reinforcing inequality, and weakening the core principles of care, reform, and reintegration in juvenile justice.

Adolescent Crime: Claims vs Evidence

- **Rising Crime Narrative Questioned** - The proposed Bill claims a rise in serious crimes by 14–16-year-olds to justify lowering the age threshold. However, official data does not support this assertion.



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- **What NCRB Data Shows** - In 2023, cases involving Children in Conflict with the Law formed just 0.5% of total crimes.
 - Nearly 79% of apprehended children were aged 16–18, while only 21% were between 12–16, contradicting claims about younger adolescents driving crime.
- **Structural Vulnerability, Not Criminality** - Many adolescents enter the justice system due to poverty, neglect, and unmet welfare needs. Often, they are both in conflict with the law and in need of care and protection.
- **Risks of Lowering the Age Threshold** - Reducing the age limit would pull vulnerable children into harsher punitive processes without improving the system's ability to distinguish vulnerability from culpability.
- **Harmful Impact of Adult Criminal Processes** - Exposure to adult trials disrupts education, harms cognitive development, creates stigma, and causes psychological trauma.
 - Illegal detention in police stations and adult prisons shows systemic failure, not the need for harsher laws.

Prioritising Reform Over Punishment

- The Bill pushes juvenile justice toward earlier punishment, shifting focus away from early intervention, family support, education, mental health care, and systemic reform.
- Diluting child-centred protections undermines core principles of child rights.
- Addressing serious harm requires strengthening institutions and communities, not withdrawing safeguards from children least equipped to face punitive consequences.

Conclusion

- Lowering the age of juvenility prioritises punishment over protection, ignoring evidence, developmental science and systemic failures, and risks harming vulnerable children instead of strengthening institutions meant to support them.
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BHITARKANIKA NATIONAL PARK



- It is located in the Kendrapara district of Odisha.
- The mangrove swamp situated on the delta formed by the three rivers, namely **Brahmani, Baitarani, and Dhamra**, the park houses an array of creeks, backwaters, estuaries, deltas, and mudflats.
- The national park is surrounded by the **Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary**. **Gahirmatha Beach and Marine Sanctuary** lie to the east, and separates a swamp region covered with a canopy of mangroves from the Bay of Bengal.
- It is India's second largest mangrove ecosystem after the Sunderbans.
- **Proximity to the Bay of Bengal** makes the soil of the area enriched with salt.
- The vegetation and species of the sanctuary are those that are mainly found in the tropical and subtropical intertidal regions.
- It is also designated as a **Ramsar site**.

Flora:

Mangrove species, casuarinas, and grasses like the indigo bush.

Fauna:

- It is home to the largest congregation of the endangered saltwater crocodile in the country.
 - The **Gahirmatha Beach** is the largest colony of the **Olive Ridley Sea Turtles**.
 - It is also home to numerous animals like **hyenas, wild boar, Chitals, Sambar, Spotted Deer, Wild Boar, Jungle cat, Wild Pigs, etc., and migratory birds**, which make it their home during the winter season, lending a vibrant hue to the ecosystem.
 - It is also home to eight varieties of **Kingfisher birds**, which is also a rarity.
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ATAL PENSION YOJANA



- It was launched by the **Government of India**.
- It was designed to encourage **voluntary savings for retirement** by offering defined pension benefits, linked to the age of joining and **amount of contribution**.

Key Features of Atal Pension Yojana:

- **Target Group:** It is aimed at workers in **the unorganised sector**.
 - It was initially available to all citizens of India between **18 and 40 years of age**.
 - Later, it mandated that individuals **paying income tax are not eligible** to join the scheme.
- **Guaranteed Pension:** Subscribers can opt for a fixed pension ranging from **₹1,000 to ₹5,000 per month**, depending on the contribution made.
- **Government Co-Contribution:** For subscribers who enrolled between June 1, 2015, and March 31, 2016, and met certain criteria, the government contributed 50% of the subscriber's amount or ₹1,000 per annum for five years.
- It is administered by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**.

Exit and withdrawal options

- **Exit at age 60:** Full pension begins.
- **Exit before age 60:** Permitted only in cases of death or terminal illness.
- **Voluntary Exit:** Allowed, but the subscriber only receives the contribution made (with interest) and government co-contribution (if any) is forfeited.



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WHAT IS BORAX?



- Borax, also known as **sodium tetraborate decahydrate**, is a **powdery white mineral**.
- It's a **combination of boron, sodium, and oxygen**.
- **Chemical Formula: $\text{Na}_2\text{B}_4\text{O}_7 \cdot 10\text{H}_2\text{O}$**
- It is **used** in many ways—as a **component of glass and pottery glazes** in the **ceramics industry**, as a **solvent for metal-oxide slags** in **metallurgy**, as a **flux in welding and soldering**, and as a **fertilizer additive**, a **soap supplement**, a **disinfectant**, a **mouthwash**, and a **water softener**.
- Borax **occurs naturally in evaporite deposits** produced by the **repeated evaporation of seasonal lakes**.
- Borax can also be **produced synthetically from other boron compounds**.
- Naturally occurring borax is refined by the process of **recrystallization**.

ICE CLOUD



- It is an **indigenous, comprehensive digital platform** for conducting **complex scientific research** using **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **High-Performance Computing (HPC)**.
- It provides **ease of access to computational resources**.
- It is built **indigenously** to provide **cloud services for research and development** that is **reproducible**.
- It now offers an **open-access platform** equipped with **supercomputers** and tools for **software development**, **AI**, **quantum technologies**, **simulation studies** and more.
- The platform is available to **students, scientists, researchers, start-ups and others**.
- ICE offers an **array of services** — **storage**, **bioinformatics tools**, **virtual hosting**, **pipeline execution**, **AI visualisation**, **development environments on the cloud** and **seamless collaboration features**.



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- Use Cases of ICE Cloud: Research Institutes, Researchers, Developers and Industry
- It was funded by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) to support scientific research.

SMALL INDUSTRIES DEVELOPMENT BANK OF INDIA



Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the equity support of Rs.5,000 crore to Small Industries Development Bank of India

(SIDBI).

- It was set up by the Government of India under an act of the Parliament, as a wholly owned subsidiary of IDBI Bank.
- **Mandate:** It is mandated to serve as the Principal **Financial Institution** for executing the triple agenda of **promotion, financing and development** of the MSME sector and coordination of the functions of the various Institutions engaged in similar activities.

Functions of Small Industries Development Bank of India:

- Offers direct loans and refinancing to banks and NBFCs.
- Promotes entrepreneurship and MSME growth
- Provides venture capital and technology support

Financial support to MSMEs is provided by way of

- Indirect/refinance to banks/Financial Institutions for onward lending to MSMEs
- Direct finance in niche is as like risk capital, sustainable finance, receivable financing, service sector financing, etc.
- SIDBI was made responsible for administering the **Small Industries Development Fund** and the **National Equity Fund** that were administered by IDBI before.
- **Major Stakeholders in SIDBI:** Government of India (GOI), State Bank of India (SBI), LIC, and NABARD are among the major stakeholders in the SIDBI.
- **Headquarters:** Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.



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STEEL SLAG



- Steel slag is an **industrial byproduct** obtained from the **steel manufacturing**
- It is produced in large quantities during steel-making operations that **use electric arc furnaces**.
- It can also be produced by **smelting iron ore in a basic oxygen furnace**.
- **Composition:** Primarily, slag consists of calcium, magnesium, manganese and aluminium silicates and oxides in various combinations.
- The cooling process of slag is responsible mainly for generating **different types of slags** required for various end-use consumers

Applications of Steel Slag:

- **Environmental Remediation:** It has found **use as a barrier material remedy for waste sites** where heavy metals tend to leach into the surrounding environment.
 - Steel slag forces the heavy metals to drop out of solution in water run off because of its high oxide mineral content.
 - It has been used **successfully to treat acidic water discharges** from abandoned mines.
 - It can replace coarse aggregate due to a higher impact and crushing strength, better anti-skid capacity.
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