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## Current Affairs - 14 October 2025

### RTI @20 - FROM EMPOWERMENT TO EROSION

- As India marked **20 years of the Right to Information (RTI) Act (2005)** on October 12, 2025, the town of **Bewar, Rajasthan**, celebrated **30 years of its people's struggle** that gave birth to one of the most empowering democratic legislations in India.
- Yet, this anniversary coincided with growing apprehension over the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA), 2023, which **threatens to undermine the spirit and effectiveness of the RTI Act.**

### **Bewar - The Birthplace of India's Transparency Movement:**

- **Genesis of the RTI movement:**
  - The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Bewar (became a district in 2023) spearheaded the demand for transparency in governance in the **1990s**.
  - In 1996, citizens gathered at Chang Gate, Bewar, **demanding access to information on public expenditure** — a moment that catalysed India's RTI revolution.
- **Commemorating a democratic milestone:**
  - Bewar now calls itself "**RTI City**".
  - To honour its role, the municipality has resolved to **build a memorial** and RTI Museum at Chang Gate.
  - The museum will **document people's participation in governance** and serve as a hub for democratic education.
  - **The first RTI Mela**, organised by MKSS and the School for Democracy, aims to institutionalise transparency as a cultural ethos.

### **RTI - A Pillar of Participatory Democracy Empowering Citizens:**

- The RTI Act, 2005, transformed governance by **shifting power** from bureaucracy to the citizenry.



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- It operationalised the “**Right to Know**” as an extension of the Right to Life (**Article 21**).
- The law’s **Section 8(1)(j)** balanced the right to privacy with public interest, ensuring that personal information related to public duty could not be withheld.
- Importantly, it **equated citizen and legislator rights**: “Information that cannot be denied to Parliament or a State Legislature shall not be denied to any citizen.”

### Way Forward:

- **Restoring balance between privacy and transparency**: Introduce a clear definition of “personal information” that protects privacy without shielding corruption.
- **Strengthen independent oversight**: Empower the Central and State Information Commissions to interpret and apply the “public interest override” autonomously.
- **Institutionalise transparency education**: Promote awareness through RTI Melas, public campaigns, and inclusion in curricula to nurture democratic citizenship.
- **Legislative review and public consultation**: Revisit the DPDPA provisions through parliamentary committees and stakeholder engagement.
- **Leverage digital governance for transparency**: Ensure digital data protection and open data coexist, through privacy-by-design and public disclosure protocols.

### Conclusion:

- **Beawar’s journey reflects the people’s determination** to democratise governance and claim their constitutional right to know.
  - The **DPDPA** threatens to reverse two decades of progress, **replacing openness with opacity**.
  - Yet, as Beawar reminds us, **laws may be weakened**, but **movements cannot be silenced**.
  - The **defence of transparency and accountability** is, ultimately, the **defence of Indian democracy**
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### WHAT IS THE INTEGRATED ALERT SYSTEM (SACHET)?



In a session on disaster risk reduction (DRR) at the ongoing G20 ministerial meeting in Durban, India's Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister outlined India's multi-agency architecture integrating meteorological, hydrological, seismic, and oceanographic institutions through a Common Alert Protocol-compliant Integrated Alert System.

SACHET is a disaster early warning platform envisioned by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to provide real-time geo-targeted alerts to citizens.

- It was developed by the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), the premier R&D center of the Department of Telecom.
- It is based on the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) recommended by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).
- It integrates multiple stakeholders to bridge communication gaps and employs multiple technologies, including SMS, Cell Broadcast, Mobile App, TV, Radio, Social Media, RSS Feed, Browser Notification, and Satellite, for enabling effective communication and ensuring last-mile reachability.
- This system is already operational in all States and Union Territories (UTs) of India and sends various disaster- or emergency- related alerts through SMS to mobiles of citizens affected in a particular geo-targeted area.
- Users can receive alerts for their current location or subscribe to any state/district in India to receive alert notifications.
- The SACHET mobile app provides warnings from authorized Government sources and authorities to warn the public of a possible disaster situation.
- Furthermore, the app provides weather reports and forecasts from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) for day-to-day weather updates.



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### VIRTUAL MUSEUM OF STOLEN CULTURAL OBJECTS



- It is an **innovative digital platform** which reconnects communities with their stolen cultural treasures.
  - **Aim:** The project aims at designing the **first virtual immersive reality museum** of stolen cultural objects at a global scale.
  - It will contribute to **raise awareness among the general public** to the consequences of illicit trafficking of cultural property and contribute to the recovery of stolen objects.
  - It was launched at the **World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2025)**.
  - The museum is financially supported by the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**, and the project was developed in **collaboration with the INTERPOL**.
  - The digital museum currently displays almost 240 missing objects from 46 countries.
  - **Sculptures from Indian temple**
    - The museum depicts two **objects submitted from India**: Two 9th-century sandstone sculptures from **Mahadev Temple, Pali, Chhattisgarh**
    - The first, a **Nataraja figure**, is described as showing Shiva in his cosmic dance.
    - The second figure, **of Brahma, the creator**, is shown **seated in lalitasana** with three visible faces and four arms holding sacred emblems like a rosary and the Vedas.
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### LEAPS 2025



- LEAPS is a flagship initiative of the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry,



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- **Aim:** It aims to **benchmark logistics excellence**, strengthen India's competitiveness, and align with the vision of the **National Logistics Policy (NLP) and PM GatiShakti**.
- LEAPS 2025 has been conceptualized to acknowledge and celebrate best practices, innovation, and leadership within India's logistics industry.
- It covers a wide spectrum of **logistics players**, including **air, road, sea, and rail freight operators; warehousing; multimodal transporters; MSMEs; Startups; and Academia**.
- The initiative also **emphasizes sustainability**, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices, and Green Logistics, encouraging collaboration between Government, Industry, and Academia to enhance efficiency, transparency, and resilience in the logistics ecosystem.

### What is PM Gati Shakti?

- It aims to **understand current gaps in logistics connectivity** and facilitate the development of logistics infrastructure (creating connectivity between roadways, rail transport, waterways, and air transport) so as to reduce logistics costs.
- The programme has an **estimated cost of ₹100 trillion**.

### BLUE FLAG CERTIFICATION



- It is a globally recognized **eco-label accorded by the Foundation for Environment Education in Denmark (FEE)**.
- It is awarded to beaches that meet **33 criteria** related to **cleanliness, beauty, and environmental sustainability**.
- The Blue Flag programme was **started in France in 1985** and in areas outside of Europe in 2001.
- It is one of the world's most recognised **voluntary awards for beaches, marinas, and sustainable tourism boats**.
- It promotes **sustainable development** in freshwater and marine areas through four main criteria: water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety.



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- **Mission:** The mission of Blue Flag is to promote sustainability in the tourism sector, through environmental education, environmental protection and other sustainable development practices.
- The other Indian beaches in the blue list are Shivrajpur-**Gujarat**, Ghoghla-Diu, Kasarkod and Padubidri-**Karnataka**, Kappad-Kerala, Rushikonda- **Andhra Pradesh**, Golden-Odisha, Radhanagar- **Andaman and Nicobar**, Kovalam in **Tamil Nadu** and Eden in **Puducherry** beaches, Minicoy Thundi Beach, Lakshadweep, Kadmat Beach.

### A GREEN TRANSITION ACCELERATING AT EXPRESS SPEED

- The successful July 2025 trial of **India's first hydrogen-powered coach** at the Integral Coach Factory marks a major milestone in Indian Railways' green transformation.
- Aiming for **net-zero carbon emissions by 2030**—decades ahead of national targets—the initiative reflects a broader overhaul of operations, infrastructure, and financing.
- As one of the world's largest rail networks carrying 24 million passengers and 3 million tonnes of freight daily, this shift will play a crucial role in advancing India's sustainable development and achieving national climate goals.
- This article highlights Indian Railways' rapid and comprehensive green transformation aimed at achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030.

### **Indian Railways' Green Transformation: Toward a Climate-Positive Future**

- Over the past decade, Indian Railways has **electrified nearly 45,000 km of its broad-gauge network**, achieving over **98% electrification** and drastically cutting diesel dependence and emissions.
- This transition is reinforced by **renewable energy adoption** — with 553 MW of solar, 103 MW of wind, and 100 MW of hybrid capacity already operational.
- More than 2,000 stations and service buildings now run on solar power, and several railway facilities, including in the **Northeast Frontier zone**, have earned the Bureau of Energy Efficiency's "**Shunya**" net-zero certification.



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- Innovation in clean traction includes India's first hydrogen-powered train under the “Hydrogen for Heritage” initiative, which plans to deploy 35 such units.
- Complementary measures are also planned. These measures include:
  - shifting freight from road to rail to reach a 45% modal share by 2030,
  - blending biofuels,
  - constructing green buildings, and
  - operating Dedicated Freight Corridors.
- These measures are expected to prevent 457 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over 30 years.

### Climate Finance Fuels Indian Railways' Green Transition

- India's decarbonisation of rail transport is being driven by a strong climate finance framework.
- Since FY2023, the government has issued ₹58,000 crore in **sovereign green bonds**, allocating around ₹42,000 crore for electric locomotives and metro and suburban rail expansion—embedding climate goals within capital budgeting.
- The Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) has been central to this transition, beginning with its \$500 million green bond in 2017 for locomotive procurement and later extending a ₹7,500 crore loan to NTPC Green Energy to develop renewable capacity.
- Multilateral support, such as the World Bank's \$245 million Rail Logistics Project loan in 2022, has further bolstered India's low-carbon transport infrastructure.

### Making Electrification Truly Green

- To sustain real emission reductions, railway electrification must be matched by renewable energy sourcing.
  - Drawing traction power from India's coal-heavy grid weakens climate gains.
  - Procuring renewable electricity directly from solar and wind producers through long-term contracts can ensure that “**green trains**” are powered by genuinely clean energy.
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### INDIA-CANADA RELATIONS REVIVED

- India and Canada share a long-standing relationship built on **shared democratic values, Commonwealth ties, and people-to-people connections.**
- Diplomatic relations were established in **1947**, soon after India's independence, with cooperation historically spanning **education, agriculture, nuclear energy, and trade.**

#### Trade and Economic Relations

- Bilateral trade between the two nations has grown steadily. In **2024, two-way trade stood at \$33.9 billion**, with Canada's merchandise exports to India valued at **\$5.3 billion.**
- India imports Canadian commodities such as **fertilisers, pulses, and energy products**, while exporting **pharmaceuticals, textiles, and IT services.**
- Canada's pension funds are among the largest foreign investors in India, particularly in **infrastructure and renewable energy.**
- **Indian Diaspora and Cultural Linkages**
  - The **Indian diaspora in Canada**, numbering over **1.6 million**, represents one of the largest and most influential immigrant communities.
  - Indian-origin Canadians play a major role in politics, business, and academia.
  - Educational partnerships are also strong, with **over 3 lakh Indian students studying in Canada**, making India the top source of foreign students there.
- **Recent Strains in Relations**
  - Despite historic goodwill, ties suffered a major setback in **2023**, when then Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau accused the Indian government of involvement** in the killing of Khalistani separatist **Hardeep Singh Nijjar**. India rejected the allegations as "absurd and politically motivated," leading to the **downgrading of diplomatic relations**, suspension of trade talks, and expulsion of diplomats.



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- However, with the **change in Canada's leadership** under Prime Minister **Mark Carney**, both sides have sought to move forward, emphasising mutual respect, sovereignty, and constructive engagement.

### Diplomatic and Strategic Significance

- The meeting underscored a mutual desire to **rebuild trust** and **de-risk the bilateral relationship** from the fallout of earlier controversies.
- The **joint statement** highlighted “**respect for each other's concerns and sensitivities**”, a veiled acknowledgement of India's stance on **Khalistan-related extremism** on Canadian soil.
- The leaders also discussed **Canada's possible participation in India's upcoming AI Summit**, and an invitation for **Prime Minister Mark Carney to visit India in early 2026**.

### Broader Context and Global Implications

- Both sides emphasised that the **revival of India-Canada relations** comes at a crucial time amid **global geopolitical uncertainty** and **shifting economic alliances**.
  - As members of the **G20 and the Commonwealth**, India and Canada share common interests in **multilateral reform, climate action, and Indo-Pacific stability**.
  - By strengthening trade, technology, and clean energy partnerships, the two democracies aim to **restore strategic stability**, create **resilient supply chains**, and **expand opportunities** for mutual growth and innovation.
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