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Current Affairs - 06 October 2025

WHAT IS THE PM-SETU SCHEME?

PM-SETU SCHEME



• **Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded ITIs (PM-SETU)** scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme with an investment of Rs 60,000 crore.

- The scheme aims to transform 1,000 Government ITIs across India into modern, industry-aligned training institutions.
- PM-SETU will follow a hub-and-spoke model, with 200 hub ITIs linked to 800 spoke ITIs.
- Each hub will be equipped with advanced infrastructure, innovation and incubation centres, production units, training of trainer facilities, and placement services, while the spokes will extend access and outreach.

The scheme will:

- Introduce new, demand-driven courses and revamp existing ones in collaboration with industry;
- Set up Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) with credible Anchor Industry Partners to manage clusters and ensure outcome-based training;
- Create pathways for long-term diplomas, short-term courses, and executive programs;
- Strengthen 5 National Skill Training Institutes in – Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Hyderabad (Telangana), Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Ludhiana (Punjab), as Centres of Excellence with global partnerships.

The initiative is backed by global co-financing from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, with the first phase focusing on Patna and Darbhanga ITIs.



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REDUCING JUDICIAL BACKLOGS IN INDIA

- India's justice delivery system faces an unprecedented backlog, with more than **4.5 crore cases pending** across various courts, as per the **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG)**.
- This rising pendency has raised serious concerns about accessibility, timeliness, and efficiency of justice.
- In response, the government has been emphasising the strengthening of **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** mechanisms, such as arbitration, mediation, conciliation, and Lok Adalats, as a means to promote faster, cost-effective, and socially inclusive justice delivery.

The Concept and Constitutional Basis of ADR

- **ADR** refers to a range of mechanisms that enable disputing parties to resolve conflicts outside formal court systems. It includes **arbitration, mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and Lok Adalats**.
- The **constitutional foundation** of ADR is enshrined in **Article 39A** of the Indian Constitution, which mandates the State to ensure equal access to justice and provide free legal aid.
- The **statutory backing** for ADR is found in **Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC), 1908**, which explicitly empowers courts to refer disputes for settlement through arbitration, mediation, or Lok Adalats.

About Lok Adalats

- One of the most effective ADR mechanisms in India is the **Lok Adalat**, established under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**.
- Guided by the principle of **access to justice for all**, Lok Adalats provide free, informal, and speedy resolution of disputes, particularly for economically weaker sections.
- The **first Lok Adalat** was held in Gujarat in 1999, and since then, several forms have emerged, **Permanent Lok Adalat, National Lok Adalat, and e-Lok Adalat**, to expand reach and efficiency.



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Mediation as a Tool for Social Transformation

- According to **former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud**, mediation is not merely a legal tool but a **platform for social change**.
- It aligns **social norms with constitutional values**, allowing individuals and communities to resolve disputes through mutual understanding rather than adversarial litigation.
- Mediation's key advantage lies in its **flexibility and interpersonal approach**. It allows parties to communicate directly, maintain relationships, and reach mutually acceptable solutions.
- This approach not only reduces pendency but also fosters community harmony and social cohesion.

The State of India's Judicial Backlog

- The **India Justice Report (2024)** paints a worrying picture of India's judicial backlog. With over **5 crore cases pending**, courts are under severe stress, especially at the district level, where **vacancy rates exceed 20%**.
- High Courts face a **33% judge vacancy**, and many States like **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh** have some of the highest pendency levels.
- In several High Courts and subordinate courts, a significant number of cases have been pending for **over 10 years**.

Importance of Strengthening ADR

- Strengthening ADR offers **three-fold benefits** to India's justice system:
 - **Reducing Pendency and Delays:** ADR diverts civil and commercial disputes away from the courts, allowing judges to focus on complex and high-stakes cases.
 - **Promoting Access and Inclusivity:** Mechanisms like Lok Adalats and community mediation bring justice closer to citizens, especially in rural and marginalised areas.
 - **Enhancing Global Confidence:** Efficient ADR frameworks can boost India's global image as an investor-friendly destination by ensuring quicker commercial dispute resolution.
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INDIA'S NUCLEAR REFORMS SET STAGE FOR PRIVATE-LED SMR REVOLUTION

Six major private sector companies — Reliance Industries, Tata Power, Adani Power, Hindalco Industries, JSW Energy, and Jindal Steel & Power — have formally expressed interest in setting up **small modular nuclear reactor (SMR)** projects under the ‘**Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMRs)**’ initiative by **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL)**.

Around **16 sites across six states** — Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh — have been identified for these projects. The SMRs will be **built and operated under NPCIL’s supervision**, with the public sector retaining operational control and ownership, while private firms receive beneficial rights over the generated electricity for captive use.

The **private partners will fully finance the projects**, including capital and lifecycle costs, and **reimburse NPCIL** for its role in project execution and decommissioning. In exchange, they will secure **long-term, reliable power supply** for their energy-intensive industrial operations.

SMRs – The Future of Compact Nuclear Power

- Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), typically ranging from **30 MWe to 300 MWe** per unit, are emerging as a promising solution to make **nuclear power commercially competitive** amid growing delays in large-scale nuclear projects worldwide.
- With roughly one-third the capacity of conventional reactors, SMRs can still generate substantial low-carbon electricity, making them ideal for **energy-intensive industries** such as **steel, aluminium, and cement**.
- They also offer the flexibility to be installed at decommissioned thermal power plant sites, helping India reuse existing infrastructure while advancing its clean energy goals.

Nuclear Power for the AI and Data Revolution

- Globally, technology giants including Google and Microsoft are exploring nuclear power, including SMRs, to meet the **massive and round-the-clock electricity demands** of data centres driving the AI boom.



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- While renewables remain their primary energy choice, **intermittency issues**—such as the lack of sunlight or wind—and **insufficient grid-scale storage** have limited scalability.
- SMRs, offering **clean, reliable, and continuous power**, could bridge this critical gap, complementing renewables in future power grids.

India's SMR Ambitions: A New Chapter in Nuclear Innovation

- BSMR project marks India's strategic move to enter the manufacturing and innovation value chain of small modular reactors (SMRs).
- India aims to leverage SMRs not only to advance its clean energy transition but also to position itself as a global technology leader, using nuclear innovation as a pillar of its foreign policy and industrial diplomacy.
- New Delhi envisions SMRs as a technology of promise **capable of driving industrial decarbonisation** while offering baseload power essential for grid stability.
- **Technological Limitations and the PHWR Challenge**
 - Despite India's proven capability in building small 220 MWe Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs), its existing reactor technology is increasingly seen as outdated.
 - The PHWR design, based on natural uranium and heavy water, contrasts with the Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR) systems that now dominate global nuclear power.
 - These PWRs, which use light water as both coolant and moderator, have become the international standard for efficiency, safety, and scalability.
 - This technological gap underscores need for India to upgrade its nuclear reactor designs to remain globally competitive and fully harness the promise of SMRs.
- **SMR in Union Budget 2025–26**
 - A major announcement in the Union Budget 2025–26 was the launch of a **Nuclear Energy Mission** dedicated to advancing R&D of SMRs.
 - The government has earmarked ₹20,000 crore with the goal of developing and commissioning at least five indigenously designed SMRs by 2033.



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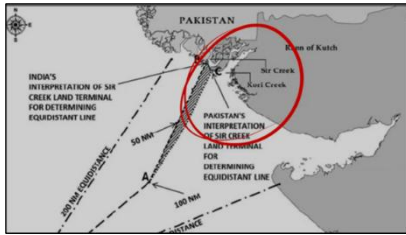


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SIR CREEK DISPUTE: THE UNFINISHED INDIA-PAKISTAN BOUNDARY

- Sir Creek is a narrow, less than **100 km-long tidal estuary** located between Gujarat's Rann of Kutch (India) and Sindh (Pakistan).



- It forms the westernmost border between the two countries, but control over it remains unresolved due to conflicting interpretations of maritime boundaries.

- **Colonial Roots of the Dispute**

- The origins of the dispute trace back to pre-Independence India, when the Maharaja of Kutch ruled the region.

- India claims that the boundary should lie along the mid-channel of Sir Creek, effectively dividing the creek and adjacent marshlands equally.
 - This claim is supported by a 1925 map and the Thalweg principle, which defines the border along the deepest navigable channel of a waterway.
- Pakistan, however, cites a 1914 resolution between the Rao of Kutch and the Sindh government, asserting that the eastern bank of the creek marks the boundary—giving it greater access toward Gujarat's coastal region.
- Pakistan also disputes India's reliance on the Thalweg principle, arguing that Sir Creek is non-navigable and hence exempt from that rule.

- **An Unresolved Boundary**

- Despite multiple rounds of talks, the Sir Creek dispute remains unsettled, largely because resolving it would directly influence the maritime boundary and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claims in the Arabian Sea.

Why Sir Creek Matters: Strategic and Economic Stakes for India and Pakistan

- Though small in size, Sir Creek lies at the **heart of an unresolved border dispute** between India and Pakistan.
- Its **strategic location and economic potential** make it vital for both nations, preventing a lasting settlement despite decades of dialogue.



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- **Strategic Importance: A Gateway to Karachi and Beyond**
 - Defence Minister Rajnath Singh underscored Sir Creek's strategic value, calling it critical to Pakistan's defence of Karachi, the country's economic and naval hub.
 - Following Operation Sindoor, Pakistan has strengthened its military presence in the region by constructing bunkers, radars, and forward bases capable of launching drones and infantry operations.
 - India has responded by maintaining a strong defensive deployment to deter any misadventure.
 - Beyond military concerns, **Sir Creek poses a terrorism risk** — the 2008 Mumbai attacks exposed vulnerabilities in coastal surveillance, as the attackers infiltrated India via sea routes from Pakistan.
- **Economic Importance: Energy, Fishing, and Maritime Rights**
 - Sir Creek's economic value further complicates the dispute.
 - The region is believed to **contain untapped oil and gas reserves**, which could be crucial for both economies. For India, currently diversifying away from Russian oil, such reserves represent a strategic energy alternative.
 - The creek also supports rich fishing grounds, sustaining communities in Gujarat and Sindh. However, the absence of a defined boundary leads to frequent arrests of fishermen who unintentionally cross into each other's waters, creating humanitarian and diplomatic tensions.
- **Impact on Maritime Claims**
 - The definition of the Sir Creek boundary directly affects the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of both nations in the Arabian Sea.
 - EEZs, extending 200 nautical miles (370 km) from a country's coast, determine control over marine resources and seabed minerals.
 - Hence, settling the Sir Creek dispute is not merely a territorial issue—it is key to defining **sovereign maritime rights and accessing significant energy and resource wealth in the northern Arabian Sea.**



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ASOLA BHATTI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



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- Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary covering 32.71 sq.km. area on the Southern Delhi Ridge of Aravalli hill range on Delhi-Haryana border lies in Southern Delhi as well as northern parts of Faridabad and Gurugram districts of Haryana state.
- The sanctuary is part of the Southern Ridge and has biodiversity significance as it merges with the Indo-Gangetic Plain.
- It is an important part of the North Aravalli Leopard Wildlife Corridor, which starts from Sariska National Park in Rajasthan, passes through various districts of Haryana, and finally meets the Delhi Ridge.

Vegetation:

- As per Champion & Seth (1968), the vegetation falls under the Northern Tropical Thorn Forests
- The native plants exhibit xerophytic adaptations such as thorny appendages, wax-coated, succulent, and tomentose leaves.

Flora:

- The sanctuary's flora includes trees like the Neem, Peepal, and Jamun.
- The sanctuary is also known for its huge collection of medicinal plantations.

Fauna:

- The sanctuary is also home to mammals like the Nilgai, Indian Porcupine, Indian Hare, and Indian Grey Mongoose.
 - The sanctuary has over 200 species of birds, including the Indian Peafowl, Red Junglefowl, and the Indian Grey Hornbill.
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EXERCISE KONKAN-25



- It is a **bilateral naval exercise** between the Indian Navy and Royal Navy of UK.
- The exercise will be **conducted in two phases**.
- The **harbour phase** of the Exercise will include professional interactions between naval personnel, cross deck visits, sports fixtures, and cultural engagements.
- The **sea phase** will encompass complex maritime operational drills focusing on **anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine exercises**, flying operations and other seamanship evolutions.
- Both participating nations will deploy frontline assets, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, submarines, and integral and shore based air assets.
- The Indian side will be represented by the carrier battle group of the **indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant** in company with other surface, sub-surface and air combatants.

This exercise is a reaffirmation of the shared commitment to ensuring **secure, open and free seas** and will exemplify the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership outlined in 'India-UK Vision 2035'.

Significance: Exercise Konkan 2025 will serve as a platform to consolidate strategic ties, enhance interoperability and contribute to regional maritime stability.
