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Current Affairs - 19 November 2025

TRADE INTELLIGENCE AND ANALYTICS PORTAL



- It is a **one-stop trade intelligence and analytics platform** that integrates multiple global and national databases.
- It is developed by the **Department of Commerce**.

Features of Trade Intelligence and Analytics Portal:

- It serves as a **centralized digital hub** that consolidates diverse trade databases—both global and bilateral—into a single integrated system.
- It offers more than 270 interactive visualisations across over **28 dashboards**.
- It provides **real-time, interactive insights** on **India and global trade**, commodities and sectoral analytics and market intelligence.
- It also includes **automated trade reports** and tracking of trade trends for the **production-linked incentive (PLI) sectors and critical minerals**.
- It also provides **tools to compare and contrast macroeconomic**, trade and investment indicators across countries.
- It incorporates **trade indices such as:**
 - **Trade Complementarity Index:** It assesses alignment between India's **export profile** and partner countries' **import needs**.
 - **Revealed Comparative Advantage index:** It highlights products where **India holds a competitive edge**.
 - **Trade Intensity Index:** It measures the strength of **bilateral trade relationships** relative to global flows.

Significance: Its new and more exhaustive capabilities of the TIA Portal significantly improve **accessibility and usability of trade data at one place**.



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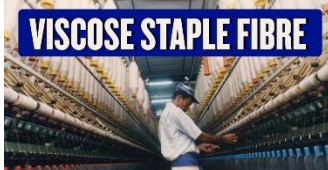
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VISCOSE STAPLE FIBRE



(VSF) with immediate effect.

Recently, the Central Government has revoked the Quality Control Order (QCO) requirement for Viscose Staple Fibre

- It is a **natural and biodegradable fiber** which has characteristics that are **similar to cotton**.
- It is produced by **regenerating natural materials**, such as cotton linter or wood pulp.
- **Production Process of Viscose Staple Fibre:**
 - It is made by **processing cellulose xanthate**, (main constituent of plant cell walls) which is extracted from wood and plant fibres into a viscous liquid.
 - It is then subjected to a **series of chemical processes** to make a fibre.

Characteristics of Viscose Staple Fibre:

- It is **used as a substitute for cotton or polyester** due to its favorable properties, such as good breathability, high moisture absorbency, and comfort.
- It is a **versatile fibre** which blends very well with other fibres.
- It has **excellent colour retention capacity** and is relatively light.
- Chemically, viscose resembles cotton, but it can also take on many different qualities depending on its manufacture.

Applications of Viscose Staple Fibre:

- It is a highly versatile material that is widely adopted in the **fashion & apparel industry**.
 - It is widely used for **home textiles, dress materials**, knitted wear and non-woven applications.
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TIME TO SORT OUT INDIA'S CEREAL MESS

Edible Oil Imports

- India's dependence on imports for pulses and edible oils is **persistent and costly**.
- According to the Agriculture Ministry's 2024–25 report, India imported **₹1.2 lakh crore** worth of edible oil and **₹30,000 crore** of pulses in 2023–24. Nearly **55%** of edible oil needs are met through imports.
- Global disruptions, especially from the Russia–Ukraine conflict, sharply increased import costs, even though the imported quantities remained within **135–157 lakh tonnes** annually over the past six years.
- Domestic oilseed production has stagnated despite steady cultivation area. Since 2014, annual production has crossed **400 lakh tonnes** only once, raising concerns about the long-term viability of the sector.

Systemic Questions Raised

- This situation raises several pressing questions. **First**, is India's rice procurement policy, justified historically for food security, still sustainable when stocks are far above requirement?
- Excessive emphasis on paddy encourages **monoculture**, undermines soil health, and worsens water scarcity, especially in regions like Punjab and Tamil Nadu.
- Second, why have policy efforts to strengthen pulses and oilseed production yielded **limited results**, failing to replicate the success of the 1960s Green Revolution?
- Third, should the country continue with the **centralised model** of procurement, storage, and transport by agencies like FCI, despite growing inefficiencies?

Leakages and Inefficiencies in the Public Distribution System

- Reports such as the one by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) have highlighted leakage rates of nearly **28%** in rice and wheat.
- Although authorities contest such findings, there is broad consensus that the **PDS still suffers from diversion**, identification errors, and logistical inefficiencies.



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Crop Diversification as a Strategic Imperative

- In light of these challenges, crop diversification emerges as a **critical pathway forward**.
- However, farmers' hesitation to diversify is rooted in real concerns: **market risks**, **uncertain returns**, and inadequate institutional support.
- **Overcoming such resistance requires a combination of:**
 - Area-specific market studies
 - Financial incentives and transitional support
 - Reliable procurement mechanisms for alternative crops
 - Technical guidance and risk-mitigation strategies
- Given India's rice surplus, enabling **free export of rice**, rather than imposing sudden restrictions, would help stabilise domestic prices and offer farmers more flexibility.

Strengthening Farmer-Centric Institutions: FPOs, SHGs, and Cooperatives

- A promising avenue for reform lies in empowering **Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)**, self-help groups, and cooperative societies.
- These institutions can **bridge the gap between farmers and markets**, reduce reliance on middlemen, and improve supply chain organisation.
- Currently, FPOs are still emerging, but their potential is considerable:
 - They can facilitate direct linkages between farmers and industries (e.g., papad manufacturers sourcing blackgram directly).
 - They can provide crucial services such as **soil health** awareness and crop diversification training.

Conclusion

- Collaborative efforts involving farmers, agricultural scientists, food security experts, and policymakers are essential to redesign a system that is financially prudent, environmentally sustainable, and **nutritionally balanced**.
 - Only through such a collective and forward-looking approach can India ensure that its food security strategy remains robust, **equitable**, and **sustainable** in the decades to come.
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UNPACKING THE GLOBAL 'HAPPINESS' RANKINGS

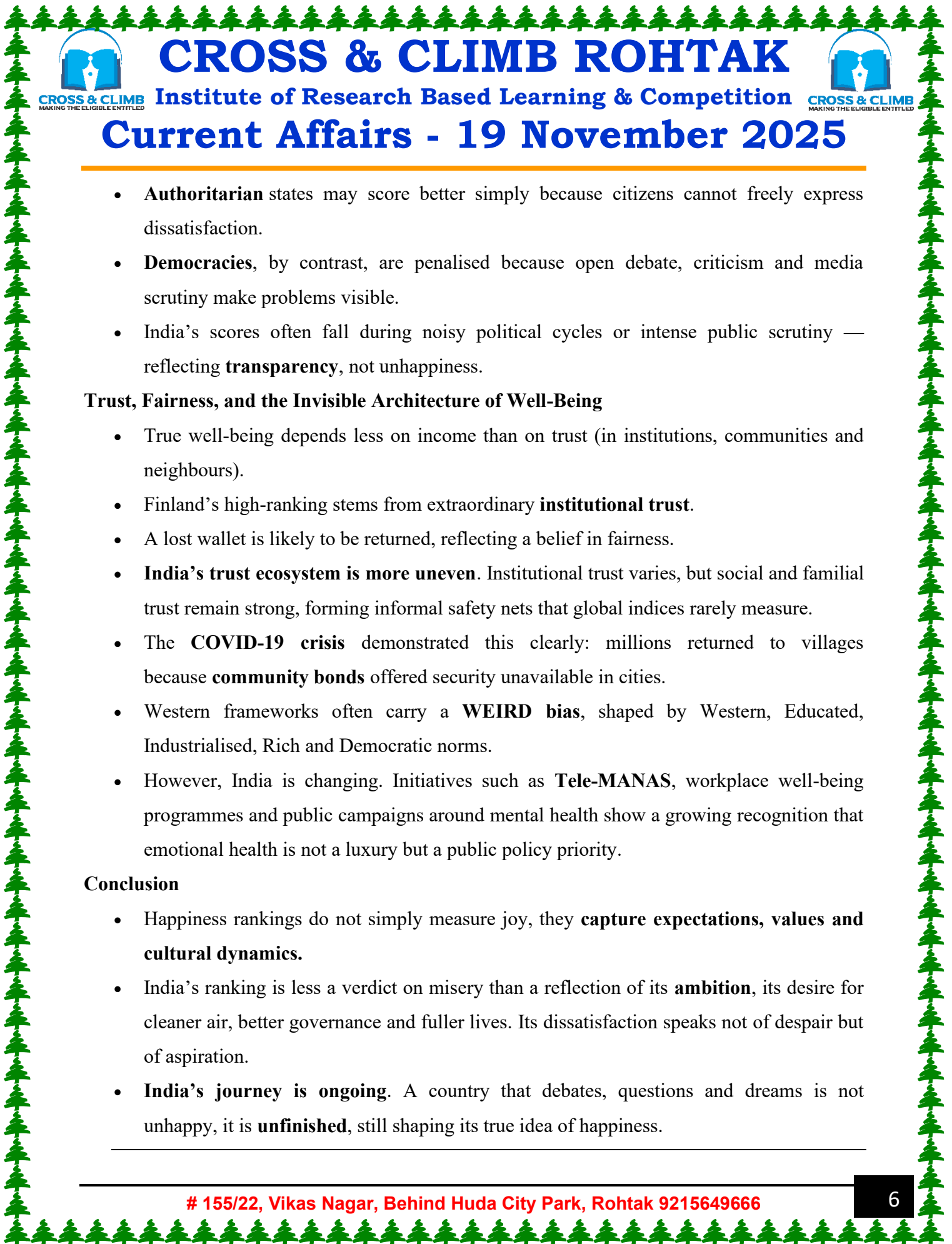
- The **2025 World Happiness Report** again ranks **Finland** as the world's happiest nation, while **India sits at 118** and Pakistan, despite severe crises, places higher at 109.
- These contrasts raise a deeper question: What does global happiness really measure? And why do economic realities tell a different story? India, a rapidly expanding economy of **\$3.7 trillion**, trails far behind Pakistan, which survives on **IMF**
- Understanding this gap requires examining how happiness is defined, reported and perceived.

Beyond GDP: The Mirage of Measurement

- The World Happiness Report relies on the **Cantril Ladder**, a self-reported scale supported by variables such as GDP, life expectancy, social support, freedom, generosity and corruption perception.
- While these markers seem comprehensive, they **overlook a critical truth**: happiness is profoundly shaped by expectations and cultural context.
- Countries with **lower expectations** often report higher well-being because citizens adapt to hardship.
- In contrast, societies with rising aspirations, like India, **experience dissatisfaction** not because lives worsen but **because expectations rise** faster than outcomes.
- This form of **restlessness** signals ambition rather than despair. The **United States illustrates this paradox**: despite immense wealth, it ranks only 24 due to declining trust and rising social anxiety.

The Politics of Perception: When Data Becomes Distortion

- A 2022 paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister showed that indices like Freedom House rely on small pools of Western experts, embedding **subjective** and sometimes **ideological**
- The World Happiness Report shares this **vulnerability**.



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- **Authoritarian** states may score better simply because citizens cannot freely express dissatisfaction.
- **Democracies**, by contrast, are penalised because open debate, criticism and media scrutiny make problems visible.
- India's scores often fall during noisy political cycles or intense public scrutiny — reflecting **transparency**, not unhappiness.

Trust, Fairness, and the Invisible Architecture of Well-Being

- True well-being depends less on income than on trust (in institutions, communities and neighbours).
- Finland's high-ranking stems from extraordinary **institutional trust**.
- A lost wallet is likely to be returned, reflecting a belief in fairness.
- **India's trust ecosystem is more uneven**. Institutional trust varies, but social and familial trust remain strong, forming informal safety nets that global indices rarely measure.
- The **COVID-19 crisis** demonstrated this clearly: millions returned to villages because **community bonds** offered security unavailable in cities.
- Western frameworks often carry a **WEIRD bias**, shaped by Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic norms.
- However, India is changing. Initiatives such as **Tele-MANAS**, workplace well-being programmes and public campaigns around mental health show a growing recognition that emotional health is not a luxury but a public policy priority.

Conclusion

- Happiness rankings do not simply measure joy, they **capture expectations, values and cultural dynamics**.
 - India's ranking is less a verdict on misery than a reflection of its **ambition**, its desire for cleaner air, better governance and fuller lives. Its dissatisfaction speaks not of despair but of aspiration.
 - **India's journey is ongoing**. A country that debates, questions and dreams is not unhappy, it is **unfinished**, still shaping its true idea of happiness.
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CENTRE PROPOSES RS. 30,000-CRORE MODIFIED UDAN SCHEME

- The refreshed and expanded UDAN framework focuses on strengthening regional aviation infrastructure, making air travel affordable, and supporting airlines to operate in difficult terrains. Out of the **30,000 crore** proposed:
 - Rs. 18,000 crore is allocated for **new airport development**, including greenfield airports, refurbishment of existing airstrips, and construction of heliports in hilly areas.
 - Rs. 12,000 crore is earmarked for **Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** to encourage airlines to operate flights on regional routes despite low initial demand.
- The scheme will particularly target:
 - Hilly and remote regions,
 - Aspirational districts,
 - North-Eastern states,
 - Small towns with limited or no air connectivity.

Evolution of the UDAN Scheme

- The UDAN scheme was launched in October 2016 as part of the **National Civil Aviation Policy**, with the objective of democratizing air travel by making flights accessible to the “common citizen.”
- PM Modi inaugurated the first UDAN flight from Shimla to Delhi in April 2017. The initial support for the scheme was Rs. 8,000 crore. Since then, 649 out of 915 valid routes have been operationalised.
- These routes have connected 92 unserved and underserved airports, including 15 heliports and 2 water aerodromes, facilitating over 1.56 crore passengers across 3.23 lakh UDAN flights.
- Despite progress, several identified airports remain non-operational due to land, technical, or regulatory hurdles, necessitating a redesigned approach.



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Objectives of the Modified UDAN Framework

- **Connecting 120 Additional Destinations**
 - The revamped scheme aims to add **120 new destinations** over the next decade, expanding the national aviation map extensively.
- **Enabling Four Crore Additional Passengers**
 - The government plans to enable **four crore passengers** to benefit from regional flights over the next 10 years, significantly boosting domestic aviation.
- **Supporting New Infrastructure**
 - The modified version will support:
 - **Small airports and airstrips,**
 - **Helipads** in hilly terrains,
 - **Water aerodromes,** ensuring holistic coverage across diverse geographies.
- **Enhanced Private Sector Participation**
 - The new guidelines seek to overcome earlier constraints and bring in more private players by simplifying processes related to aircraft leasing, operator permits, and route bidding.

Need for the Modified Scheme

- Several challenges have hampered UDAN's full-scale implementation:
 - Land unavailability and delays in state government clearances,
 - Operational constraints at small airports lacking navigational or terminal facilities,
 - Shortage of suitable aircraft, particularly 20-70 seater turboprops,
 - Maintenance and leasing issues for regional carriers,
 - **Low passenger demand** in remote locations requires long-term subsidy support.
 - The modified UDAN scheme has been structured to address these gaps through a more flexible funding model and better coordination between the Centre, states, airport operators, and airlines.
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ARMY TACTICAL
MISSILE
SYSTEMS
(ATACMS)

WHAT IS THE ARMY TACTICAL MISSILE SYSTEM (ATACMS)?

• It is a series of **surface-to-surface ballistic missiles** developed in the **United States**.

- It is manufactured by the US defense company **Lockheed Martin**.
- ATACMS was first developed by the U.S. in the 1980s to rival the former Soviet Union's long-range artillery and missile systems.
- It is also **designated M39 by the US Army**, and its **Department of Defence (DoD) designation is MGM-140**.
- The missile **first saw use during the 1991 Persian Gulf War**.
- This weapon's **known operators** other than the US are **Bahrain, Greece, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates**.
- **Features:**
 - ATACMS are 24/7, all-weather, surface-to-surface, **inertially guided ballistic missiles**. **Range:** It has a range of about **190 miles (305 km)**.
 - **Propulsion: Single-stage, solid propellant**.
 - These missiles are **fired from either the tracked M270 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) or the wheeled M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS)**.
 - Each one costs around **\$1.5m (£1.2m)**.
 - They can be configured to **carry two different types of warhead**.
 - The **first is a cluster fitted with hundreds of bomblets** designed to destroy lighter-armoured units over a wide area.
 - The **second type is a single warhead**, a 225 kg high explosive variant of which is designed to destroy hardened facilities and larger structures.
 - ATACMS missiles **travel at high altitudes before descending at immense speeds**, making them difficult to intercept.