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## Current Affairs - 01 December 2025

### WHO IS A BOOTH LEVEL OFFICER (BLO)?



- The BLOs are **representatives of the Election Commission of India (ECI)** at the grass-root level who assist in updating the electoral roll using their local knowledge.
- They are local **government officials** who are familiar with the local electors and enrolled as voters in the same polling area.
  - Teachers, Anganwadi workers, Panchayat Secretary, Village Level Workers, Electricity Bill Readers, etc are **mainly appointed as BLOs**.
- BLOs are **not full-time electoral officials**.
  - **Section 13B (2)** of the **Representation of People Act, 1950** provision paved the way for the introduction of appointing a BLO for the **first time in August 2006**.
- **Roles of Booth Level Officer:**
  - They play a significant role in the **process of roll revision** and **collecting actual field** information with regard to the roll corresponding to the polling area assigned to them.
  - They maintain **accuracy and fidelity of the electoral roll** at the polling booth level.
  - **Distribution of Voter Slips:** An important role of the BLO is the **distribution of Voter Slips** to the voters' households before the poll day.
  - **Informing eligible voters for Postal Ballot:** BLOs inform the eligible Electors (senior citizens above 85 years & PwDs with benchmark certificate) about availing **Home Voting Facility** and Postal Ballot Facility by filling **Form 12D**.
  - **Promote use of Election Commission's IT applications:** BLOs **promote applications** launched by the ECI to facilitate voting and ensure an accurate electoral roll.
    - The popular voter oriented apps like **Voter Helpline App**, **e-VIGIL app**, **Know you candidate app**, **Saksham-ECI**.



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### INDIA NEEDS RESEARCH PIPELINES

- India's ambition to become a global innovation leader cannot rest on public funding alone.
- Countries that turned scientific capability into industrial strength aligned **predictable private R&D spending with university excellence** through long-term partnerships.
- India now faces the task of shifting corporate research from episodic CSR activities to **structured, multi-year commitments** that support laboratories, doctoral cohorts, and pilot-scale experimentation.

### Global Models of Industrial-Scale R&D

- Leading global firms invest in research at industrial scale. In 2024, **Meta spent about \$44 billion on R&D**, nearly one-third of its revenue.
- Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, IBM, and Microsoft also operate multibillion-dollar research programmes. In the United States, enterprises spent **roughly \$692 billion** on domestic R&D in 2022, close to 5% of net sales.
- Programmes such as the National Science Foundation's Industry-University Cooperative Research Centres and the **Semiconductor Research Corporation** convert this investment into university partnerships that generate talent, pre-competitive research, and long-horizon consortia.
- China's major firms show similar commitments. **Huawei invested 179.7 billion yuan in R&D in 2024**, amounting to **20.8% of revenue**, with more than half its workforce in research roles.
- **BYD spent 54.2 billion yuan**, an intensity of nearly 7%, reflecting deep integration of corporate research with universities through shared laboratories, joint centres, and structured talent pipelines.

### Scaling the System: Policy Pathways for India

- **Set sector-specific R&D intensity targets**



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- India should establish **three-year R&D-to-sales benchmarks** for key sectors, automotive, pharmaceuticals, electronics, defence, space, and energy, with targets that rise steadily.
  - **Shared IP frameworks** must reward both publication and commercialisation.
  - **Strengthen co-funded research and shared infrastructure**
    - Government should reward **co-funded projects**, where industry contributions flow through higher education institutions.
    - Multi-year projects must specify **open-data deliverables**, industry-relevant KPIs, and a commitment to collaborative use of university resources.
    - India should create university-managed pilot lines and testbeds that firms can access on a pay-per-use basis, and invest in **multi-university centres** built around portfolios of problems rather than isolated grants.
  - **Modernise Tax Incentives**
    - Weighted R&D deductions should be linked to clear outputs such as patents, standards contributions, clinical milestones, or field trials.
    - Incentives must encourage **collaboration with accredited HEIs** and the hiring of graduate researchers into industry roles.
  - **Build collaborative capacity within campuses**
    - Universities need programmes that train faculty and PhD scholars in industry collaboration, IP negotiation, and the management of translational research.
    - Policies should support **dual-track roles**, adjunct positions, and doctoral cohorts aligned with corporate technology roadmaps.
  - **Increase transparency and public accountability**
    - Listed firms should report total R&D expenditure and the share directed to Indian HEIs.
    - Publishing these results in **Indian languages** and practitioner-friendly formats can build public recognition for research careers and encourage boards to treat R&D as a strategic priority.
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### PARLIAMENTARY DECLINE IN INDIA - SHRINKING DELIBERATION AND RISING EXECUTIVE DOMINANCE

#### Declining Health of Parliament:

- **Routine disruptions and falling productivity:** According to the PRS Legislative Research's monsoon session data (between July 21 and August 21) -
  - The Lok Sabha (LS) functioned just 29% of its scheduled time and the Rajya Sabha (RS) for 34%.
  - **Question Hour**, the institution's core mechanisms of accountability, were also badly hit (LS completing only 23% while the RS managed only 6% of its scheduled Question Hour time).
- **Bills passed with minimal debate:**
  - **Regulation of Online Gaming Bill:** Cleared in one day, with 6 minutes (LS) and 23 minutes (RS) of discussion.
  - **Merchant Shipping Bill 2024:** 20 minutes (LS), 10 minutes (RS).
  - **Operation Sindoor:** 50% of LS time spent on it alone.

#### Institutional Concerns Raised:

- **Warnings from constitutional experts:**
  - **P.D. T. Achary:** Declining deliberation undermines the “very purpose of Parliament”. Passage of Bills without debate is a “mockery of legislative business” under **Article 107**. He advocates dialogue between the PM and Leader of Opposition.
- **Views from MPs:**
  - **Manish Tewari (Congress):** Parliament became a **rubber-stamp** Standing Committees becoming redundant. Presiding officers' neutrality diminishing.
  - **Syed Naseer Husain (Congress):** The government holds primary responsibility for enabling debate. Opposition protests when discussions are denied.
- **Government's position:** Opposition blamed for disruptions, driven by “failed leaders”.

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### Deeper Causes of Institutional Erosion:

- **Anti-Defection Law:**
  - **From stability to suppression:** Intended to curb defections, the law now erodes independence of MPs. MPs function as subjects of party whip, not representatives of people.
- **Executive dominance over legislature:** Parliament becoming an **approval body** rather than a deliberative body. Opposition's notices, adjournment motions often dismissed; question hour and zero hour frequently disrupted; committees weakened, reducing expert scrutiny.
- **Erosion of constitutional offices' neutrality:** Presiding officers perceived as partisan. Constitutional conventions not upheld resulting in institutional imbalance.

### Challenges and Way Forward:

- **Breakdown in government–Opposition communication:** Dialogue mechanisms between PM, LoP, and House leaders.
- **Declining sittings and productivity:** Mandatory minimum sittings (e.g., 120 days/year) to prevent rushed legislation without debate.
- **Weakening of Standing Committees:** Make committee referral mandatory for all major Bills. Enhance transparency and expert consultation.
- **Absence of Deputy Speaker (Constitutional requirement under Article 93):** Strengthen conventions on Deputy Speaker election.
- **Dominance of party whip due to anti-defection law:** Limit whips to confidence motions and money bills. Restore legislative independence and conscience vote.
- **Partisanship of presiding officers:** Clear norms for impartial conduct of Speaker and Chairperson.
- **Marginalisation of Question Hour and Zero Hour:** Ensure full Question Hour and functioning of Zero Hour.
- **Institutional imbalance favouring the executive:** Institutionalise Prime Minister's Question Hour (weekly). Require executive testimony before committees.

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### SEEDS BILL EXPLAINED: TOUGHER PENALTIES AND NEW QUALITY REGULATIONS

- The current Seeds Act regulates only notified seed varieties, and registration is not mandatory.
- Several categories — including green manure seeds, commercial crops, and plantation crops — fall outside its scope.
- Penalties are outdated and minimal, limited to six months' imprisonment and a ₹1,000 fine. These regulatory gaps have driven longstanding demand for an updated law.

#### **Problem of Spurious and Substandard Seeds in India**

- Complaints about low-quality and fake seeds are frequent, and the Agriculture Ministry has repeatedly highlighted the issue.
- Between 2022 and 2025, 43,001 seed samples were found **non-standard** out of nearly 6 lakh samples tested.
  - West Bengal accounted for the highest share at 62%, followed by Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh.
- During the same period, authorities also took extensive action: 12,287 warnings, 12,915 stop-sale orders, 1,914 FIRs/cases, and 164 forfeitures, underscoring the scale of the problem.

#### **Key Features of the New Seeds Bill, 2025**

- The Draft Seeds Bill, 2025 aims to overhaul India's seed laws by replacing the **Seeds Act, 1966** and **Seeds Control Order, 1983**.
- The government says it will improve seed quality, curb counterfeits, and protect farmers.
- **Mandatory Registration of Seed Varieties**
  - All seed varieties (except traditional farmers' varieties and export-only seeds) must be registered. Varieties must undergo Value for Cultivation and Use (VCU) testing at multiple locations.
  - Only seeds meeting minimum germination and purity standards can be sold.



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- **Stronger Market Controls and Traceability**
  - Seed dealers must obtain a state registration certificate for selling, importing or exporting seeds. Each seed container must carry a QR code generated through the **central Seed Traceability Portal**.
- **Easier Compliance for Large Companies**
  - A new **Central Accreditation System** allows nationally accredited firms to operate across states without additional approvals — a move critics say benefits big agribusinesses.
- **Higher Penalties**
  - Minor offences attract fines starting at ₹1 lakh.
  - Major offences, including selling spurious or unregistered seeds, carry penalties of up to ₹30 lakh and three years' imprisonment.
- **Farmers' Rights**
  - Farmers may grow, save, exchange, share and sell farm-saved seeds (but not under a brand name).
  - New central and state seeds committees will oversee implementation.

### Major Concerns Raised by Critics

- **No Easy Compensation for Farmers** - Crop failure due to faulty seeds still requires farmers to seek compensation through courts — an expensive, time-consuming process. Critics say the Bill lacks a farmer-friendly grievance mechanism.
  - **Community Seed Keepers Excluded** - Collectives like FPOs, women's seed groups, and traditional seed networks will be treated as commercial entities, subject to heavy compliance burdens.
  - **Corporate Bias and Digital Burden** - Mandatory digital reporting, QR tracking and online submissions are difficult for small rural seed keepers with low digital access.
  - **Risk of Foreign Seed Entry** - Foreign organisations may be recognised for VCU testing. Critics fear this could allow genetically modified or patented seeds into India without strong domestic evaluation.
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### RAMBAN SULAI HONEY



- Ramban Sulai Honey, produced in the **Ramban District of Jammu and Kashmir**, is known for its **rich taste, aromatic floral undertones, and high nutritional value.**
- **Extracted from Sulai plants** growing in the **Himalayas**, it is valued for its **medicinal properties and purity.**
- The bees forage on the nectar of snow-white blossoms of Sulai during the months of August to October to produce this well-rounded, naturally sweet honey with floral undertones.
- This **crystal-clear honey, ranging from white to amber**, contains **essential minerals, enzymes, and vitamins** that enhance its health benefits.
- Due to superior bee strains and favourable climatic conditions, the **honey yield in Ramban is significantly higher** than in other regions.
- It earned a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2021.**
- The Government of India declared Ramban Sulai Honey as the **district's "One District, One Product."**

### DARJEELING MANDARIN ORANGE



**Darjeeling  
Mandarin  
Orange**

- It is grown in the hills of **Darjeeling in West Bengal.**
- The Mandarin Orange (*Citrus reticulata* Blanco) is a **major cash crop** of the Darjeeling Hills.
- It is the **third product from the region**, after Darjeeling Tea and Dalley Khursani chilli, to get the tag. It is **commonly known as "suntala"**, and is the pride of Darjeeling hills due to its delightful aroma and flavour.
  - It grows well in all **frost free tropical and sub-tropical regions.**
  - **Temperature:** Ranging from **10–35°C** is suitable for cultivation of the crop.
  - **Soil:** It requires medium or **light loamy soils.**



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### What is Geographical Indication Tag?

- It is used for **products with a specific geographical origin**, possessing unique qualities or reputation due to that origin.
- This is typically used for **agricultural products**, foodstuffs, beverages, handicrafts and industrial products.
- The Geographical Indications of Goods (**Registration and Protection**) Act, 1999 seeks to provide for the registration and better protection of geographical indications relating to goods in India.
- This GI tag is **valid for 10 years** following which it can be renewed.

### KEY FACTS ABOUT SARISKA TIGER RESERVE



**SARISKA TIGER RESERVE**

- **Location:** It is located in the Alwar district, Rajasthan.
- It is a part of the Aravali Range and the Kathiawar-Gir dry deciduous forests eco-region.

- It became a Tiger Reserve under Project Tiger in 1979.
- It holds the distinction of being the **world's first reserve to successfully relocate tigers after local extinction due to poaching in 2004.**
- It is also famous for **old temples, palaces, and lakes** such as Pandu Pol, Bhangarh Fort, Ajabgarh, Pratapgarh, Siliserh Lake, and Jai Samand Lake.
- **Topography:** It possesses a rocky landscape, scrub thorn arid forests, grasses, hilly cliffs, and semi-deciduous wood.
- **Vegetation:** The vegetation of Sariska corresponds to **Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests** and **Northern Tropical Thorn**

**Flora:** The area of this reserve is covered with **dhok trees**.

Other species found include **salar, kadaya, gol, ber, Banyan, gugal, bamboo, kair, adusta**, etc.

**Fauna:** A variety of other wild animals, like the **leopard, sambhar, chital, nilgai**, four-horned antelope, wild boar etc are found in the reserve apart from the tiger.