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Current Affairs - 05 February 2026

BHARAT TAXI



- Bharat Taxi is India's first **cooperative-led ride-hailing platform** registered under the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002**.

- It is a **government-supported initiative** developed under the Union Ministry of Cooperation and the **National e-Governance Division (NeGD)**.
- It is India's first cooperative taxi network, allowing **drivers to become shareholders and co-owners**.

Promoted: It is being jointly promoted by leading cooperative and financial institutions including **NCDC, IFFCO, AMUL, KRIBHCO, NAFED, NABARD, NDD Band NCEL**.

Key Features of Bharat Taxi Initiative:

- **Driver-Owned Fleet:** Drivers can **purchase shares and become cooperative members**, giving them transparency and decision-making power.
- **Zero Commission:** Unlike private cab aggregators that take a large cut, Bharat Taxi transfers the full fare to the driver.
- **Transparent, No-Surge Pricing:** Fares will remain predictable, with **no surge charges**.
- **Platform Integration & Technical Architecture:** Integration of the Bharat Taxi platform with national digital platforms such as DigiLocker, UMANG, and API Setu.
- **Security, Compliance & Infrastructure:** Ensuring adherence to Government of India's **data protection norms and cybersecurity standards** and advising on robust technical infrastructure.



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BRICS CENTRE FOR INDUSTRIAL COMPETENCIES



Recently, India joined the BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies (BCIC) at Vanijya Bhavan, New Delhi.

- It was launched in partnership with the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)**.

Objective: It serves as a **one-stop centre providing integrated support services** to manufacturing companies and **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** across BRICS countries.

- It is a **network-driven initiative under UNIDO**, supporting SMEs, industrial modernization, and digital transformation in BRICS.
- It focuses on **strengthening Industry 4.0 competencies**.
- **Implementation:** The **National Productivity Council (NPC)** has been designated as the India Centre for BRICS Industrial Competencies.

Key Facts about BRICS:

- It is a **group of major emerging economies** that work together for economic cooperation, development, and global governance reforms.
- The acronym '**BRIC**' was coined by **Jim O'Neill** (Goldman Sachs economist) in 2001 to denote four emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- **Aim:** To strengthen **South-South cooperation** and increase the voice of developing countries at the global level.

Member Countries: Brazil, Russia, **India**, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Indonesia.



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DENOTIFIED TRIBES IN INDIA - DEMAND FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION



- Denotified Tribes (DNTs) are communities that were historically labelled as “criminal tribes” under colonial rule.
- The **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**, empowered the British administration to notify entire communities as criminal by birth, subjecting them to surveillance, restrictions on movement, and social stigma.
- This law was later amended in 1924, further institutionalising discrimination.
- Following Independence, the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed in 1952, and the affected communities were officially “denotified”.
- Since then, these groups have been known as **Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)**.
- However, repeal of the law did not automatically translate into social acceptance or legal empowerment.
- The stigma of criminality continued through policing practices and social exclusion.

Socio-Economic Status of Denotified Tribes

- Denotified Tribes remain among the **most marginalised communities in India**, facing severe deficits in education, health, housing, and livelihood security.
- Many DNT communities follow nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles, limiting access to land ownership, ration cards, caste certificates, and welfare schemes.
- Studies and official committees have repeatedly highlighted that literacy levels among several DNT groups are extremely low, with some communities reporting negligible school completion rates.
- Economic survival often depends on informal labour, traditional occupations, or seasonal migration, making them vulnerable to exploitation.

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Administrative Classification and Policy Gaps

- Unlike Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), Denotified Tribes do not have a dedicated constitutional Schedule.
- Over time, many DNT communities were subsumed under SC, ST or OBC categories, while others were left completely unclassified.
- The **Idate Commission (2017)** identified around **1,200 denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities**, of which about **267 communities were not included in any constitutional category**.
- Even those included within SC, ST or OBC lists often fail to access benefits due to intense competition with relatively better-off groups.
- This administrative misclassification has resulted in policy invisibility, as there is no reliable population data on DNTs at the national level.

Government Initiatives for Denotified Tribes

- The Union government has introduced welfare measures, including the **Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs (SEED)**, covering education, health insurance, housing and livelihood support.
- However, utilisation remains low due to the absence of proper DNT certificates issued by States and Union Territories.
- Between 2020 and 2025, actual spending under SEED remained significantly below allocated amounts, reflecting implementation challenges rather than a lack of need.

Significance of the Demand

- A separate Census entry would provide credible population data, strengthening the basis for targeted welfare schemes, budgetary allocation, and political representation.
 - Constitutional recognition would acknowledge historical injustice and provide legal backing for affirmative action.
 - Without these reforms, DNTs risk remaining trapped between categories, unable to compete within SC, ST or OBC lists, yet lacking an identity of their own.
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JUDICIAL SCRUTINY OF META-WHATSAPP DATA PRACTICES IN INDIA

In a significant hearing, the Supreme Court of India sharply questioned the data practices of Meta, the parent company of WhatsApp, suggesting that the extraction of user data may resemble “theft” rather than voluntary exchange.

- The dispute began in 2021, when WhatsApp introduced a “**take-it-or-leave-it**” privacy policy update. The revised policy enabled greater data sharing between WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta.
- Although WhatsApp maintained that end-to-end encryption continued to protect message content, regulators flagged concerns over the use of metadata for advertising and business profiling.
- **Competition Commission of India’s Intervention**
 - The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** viewed the update as an abuse of dominant market position.
 - Key observations included:
 - For most Indian users, opting out of WhatsApp is not a realistic choice
 - WhatsApp functions as India’s “digital town square”, making consent effectively coerced
 - Penalty imposed: ₹213.14 crore (≈ \$25 million) on Meta
 - Meta challenged the CCI order before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT).
- **NCLAT’s Nuanced Verdict**
 - The NCLAT delivered a split decision:
 - Upheld the CCI’s finding that Meta had abused its dominant position
 - Retained the monetary penalty
 - Set aside a critical CCI directive that would have barred Meta from sharing WhatsApp user data with its other entities for five years for advertising purposes

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Why Meta Took the Dispute to the Supreme Court?

- Dissatisfied with both the financial penalty and the reasoning adopted by the NCLAT, Meta appealed to the Supreme Court of India.
- Meta sought relief from what it viewed as excessive regulatory interference in its data-sharing practices and business model.

Supreme Court's Hard Line on Market Dominance

- The apex court showed little inclination to dilute scrutiny.
- Chief Justice remarked that opting out of WhatsApp in India is akin to “opting out of the country”, underlining the network effects that lock users into dominant digital platforms.
- This observation reinforced the idea that user consent in monopolistic markets may be illusory.

What Happens Next?

- **Court's Growing Discomfort with the 'Free Internet' Model** - The remark that users are “**not only consumers, but also products**” captures the court's unease with digital business models built on harvesting personal data. Targeted ads following private conversations are seen as intrusions, not innovation.
 - **Transparency vs Real Understanding** - The court signalled that formal consent does not equal informed consent in a country with uneven digital literacy.
 - **Ultimatum to Meta** - The court has issued a clear warning: Meta must give an undertaking to stop sharing personal data, or risk dismissal of its case and the imposition of “very strict conditions”.
 - **Message from the Judiciary** - The judiciary's stance is unmistakable—Indian users are no longer passive data sources. The long-tolerated model of invisible data extraction may be nearing its end.
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WHAT IS PROJECT VAULT?



- It is launched by the **United States** to **stockpile rare earths and critical minerals**, aiming to shield American companies from global supply disruptions.
 - It is a **public-private partnership** that will buy and store critical minerals and rare earth elements.
 - These minerals are used in products such as smartphones, batteries, jet engines, and electric vehicles.
 - The project is **similar to the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve**, which stores emergency oil supplies. However, instead of crude oil, Project Vault will focus on minerals.
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SAMRIDH PROGRAMME



- The **Startup Accelerator of MeitY for Product Innovation, Development, and Growth (SAMRIDH)** is a flagship programme of the **Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY)**.

Aim: It aims to support **existing and upcoming Accelerators** to select and accelerate potential IT-based startups to scale.

- Among others, the **program focuses on accelerating the startups** by providing customer connect, investors connect and connect to international markets.

Financial Support: It provides financial support to selected accelerators.

Implementation: It is being implemented by **MeitY Start-up Hub (MSH)**, Digital India Corporation (DIC).



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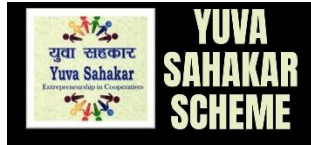
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YUVA SAHAKAR SCHEME



- Yuva Sahakar Cooperative Enterprise Support and Innovation Scheme” aims to encourage newly formed **cooperative societies with new and/or innovative ideas.**
- It encourages **young entrepreneur Cooperative Societies** which are in operation for a **minimum of 3 months.**
- **Loan facility:** The loan provided under the **scheme is a long-term loan** (up to 5 years) and as an incentive, NCDC **provides 2% interest subvention** on its applicable rate of interest on term loan for the project activities.
- **Implementation:** It is being implemented by **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)** across the country.

AI STACK



- An AI stack is the **complete set of tools and systems** that work together to **build and run AI applications.**
- It makes **artificial intelligence work in the real world**, from the apps people use every day to the data, computing power, networks etc.
- It is **made up of five layers:**
 - **Application Layer**
 - It includes AI-powered apps and services such as **health diagnostic tools**, farming advisory platforms, chatbots, and language translation applications.
 - **AI model layer**
 - It acts as the brain of AI systems. **AI models are trained on data to recognize patterns**, make predictions, and take decisions.

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- **Compute layer**
 - It provides the computing power required to train and run AI models.
 - **Data Centres and Network Infrastructure Layer**
 - Data centres are where AI systems are stored and operated, while networks like the internet, broadband, and 5G move data between users, computers, and AI models.
 - **Energy Layer:** It keeps the **entire AI stack running**. AI data centres consume large amounts of electricity because powerful computers are needed to train and operate AI systems.
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NALSAROVAR BIRD SANCTUARY



- It is located in **Gujarat**.
- Nal Sarovar literally **translates to 'Tap Lake'**.
- It is declared as a **Ramsar site**.

Flora:

- The **common aquatic plants** are **Cyperus sp., Scirpus sp., Typha unguistata, Eleocharis palustris, Ruppia, Potamogeton, Vallisnaria, Naias, Chara, etc.**
- It also includes **locally famous 'pilu' trees** which harbor a red berry type edible fruit.

Fauna:

- It is home to various species of birds, including **migratory birds** that travel from places as **far away as Europe and Siberia**.
 - Apart from these, **typical species like pelicans, ducks, herons, and storks** can be found easily.
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