

CONTROLLER GENERAL OF ACCOUNTS



Recently, the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) launched two major initiatives i.e. the Government Bank Dashboard and the Government Bank Manual in New Delhi.

- CGA is the **Principal Accounting Adviser** to the Government of India.
- It was **established in 1975** to administer matters pertaining to the **departmentalisation of the accounts of the Union**.
- The CGA is responsible for for the central government **exchequer control and internal audits**
- **Functions of Controller General of Accounts:**
 - The Office of CGA prepare **smoothly and annual analysis of expenditure**, revenues, borrowings, and various fiscal indicators for the Union Government.
 - It further formulates policies relating to general principles, forms, and **procedures of accounting for the Central and State Governments**.
 - It administers the process of payments, receipts, and accounting in the Central Civil Ministries/ Departments.
 - CGA is also responsible for coordination and monitoring the progress of the submission of **corrective/remedial action taken notes (ATNs)** on the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's (PAC) reports as well as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports through its web-based Audit Para Monitoring System (APMS).
 - It also looks after the pensions of Central government employees.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.

RICE FORTIFICATION SCHEME SUSPENDED

- Rice fortification was introduced as a nutritional intervention to address widespread anaemia and micronutrient deficiencies in India.
- Under this initiative, Fortified Rice Kernels (FRK), enriched with iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12, were blended with regular rice and distributed through welfare schemes.
- The scheme was implemented under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), as well as through the Public Distribution System (PDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
- The objective was to provide essential micronutrients to vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, by leveraging the existing foodgrain distribution network.

Government Decision to Suspend Fortification

- The Union Food Ministry announced that the process of rice fortification would be temporarily discontinued “until a more effective mechanism for delivery of nutrients to beneficiaries is identified.”
- The decision followed a review of the implementation of rice fortification under PMGKAY and allied schemes.
- The Ministry clarified that this suspension does not reduce foodgrain entitlements and will not affect operations under PDS, ICDS, or the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.
- Thus, beneficiaries will continue to receive their allocated foodgrains, albeit without fortification.

Findings of the IIT Kharagpur Study

- The government had commissioned IIT Kharagpur to assess the shelf life of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRK) and fortified rice under actual storage conditions across diverse agro-climatic zones.



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- The study concluded that factors such as Moisture content, Storage condition, Temperature, Relative Humidity and Packaging Material critically influence the stability and shelf life of fortified rice.
- The report found that FRK and fortified rice are susceptible to micronutrient reduction during prolonged storage and routine handling.
- Since rice in the central pool may remain in storage for two to three years, the effective shelf life of fortified rice was found to be shorter than expected, thereby limiting the intended nutritional outcomes.
- These findings raised concerns about whether beneficiaries were actually receiving the expected nutritional benefits.

Supply and Storage Context

- According to official data, against an annual allocation of 372 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) under PMGKAY and other welfare schemes, total availability in the central pool is projected at 674 LMT, including receipts from the Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2025-26.
- Large procurement volumes and extended storage duration increase the challenges associated with maintaining nutrient stability in fortified rice.
- The suspension reflects the difficulty of implementing nutrient-sensitive interventions within large-scale foodgrain logistics systems.

Broader Policy Implications

- India continues to face high levels of anaemia, particularly among women and children, as reflected in **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)** data.
 - The rice fortification initiative was seen as a scalable solution leveraging the PDS network.
 - However, the IIT study underscores the importance of:
 - Ensuring scientific validation of large-scale interventions
 - Accounting for storage and climatic variations
 - Monitoring nutrient retention over time
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ISRAEL-US JOINT MISSILE STRIKE IN TEHRAN

On February 28, 2026, Israel carried out a daylight strike on Tehran, calling it a pre-emptive operation. US President Donald Trump confirmed American involvement, stating that major combat operations had begun to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons.



- Explosions were reported in Tehran, with smoke seen rising from several parts of the capital.
- Israel initially announced missile strikes on Iranian targets. A US official later confirmed the attacks were part of a joint military operation.
- Trump called the operation “massive and ongoing,” and the US Department of Defense named it **Operation Epic Fury**.

Iran’s Response

- Iran retaliated by launching missiles toward northern Israel. Air-raid sirens were activated, and Israeli air defence systems intercepted incoming projectiles.
- Iran expanded its response by targeting US-linked military facilities across the Middle East, including:
 - Al Udeid Airbase (Qatar)
 - Al-Salem Airbase (Kuwait)
 - Al-Dhafra Airbase (UAE)
 - US Fifth Fleet Headquarters (Bahrain)
- Reports also indicated explosions in Saudi Arabia and attacks on US bases in Jordan.

Trigger Behind The Attack: Breakdown of Nuclear Talks and Rising Tensions

- The escalation follows mounting strain over stalled US–Iran nuclear negotiations. A recent round of indirect talks in Geneva, mediated by Oman, failed to produce a breakthrough, though technical discussions are set to continue.
- Iran insists on its **right to enrich uranium** for peaceful purposes, while the US demands strict limits on its nuclear programme.

India's Diplomatic Test Amid Israel–Iran Escalation

- Less than two days after PM Modi's visit to Israel, India faced a major diplomatic challenge as US–Israel strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation widened the regional conflict.
 - With deep strategic, economic, and diaspora stakes in West Asia, New Delhi called for restraint, de-escalation, and dialogue.
 - **Diaspora and Evacuation Concerns**
 - India has significant diaspora exposure:
 - ~10,000 Indians in Iran
 - Over 41,000 in Israel
 - 8–9 million across the wider Gulf
 - Embassies issued advisories amid airspace closures and flight disruptions.
 - India's approach reflects past experience, including the evacuation of over 3,000 nationals during the previous Israel–Iran flare-up.
 - **Strategic and Economic Stakes**
 - Beyond citizen safety, India's energy security is at risk.
 - Nearly **60% of India's energy imports** come from the region, and threats to close the Strait of Hormuz raise concerns over oil supply disruptions.
 - The US role and President Trump's explicit stance on Iran further complicate India's balancing act between strategic partner Israel and longstanding partner Iran.
 - **A Tightrope of Strategic Autonomy**
 - India's response mirrors its approach to the Russia–Ukraine war: maintaining strategic autonomy, avoiding public condemnation, keeping communication channels open, and prioritising national interests.
 - However, as the Middle East conflict expands and US involvement deepens, India's room for calibrated neutrality may narrow.
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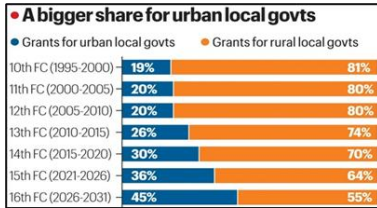
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16TH FINANCE COMMISSION PUSHES URBAN GOVERNANCE REFORM

- The 16th Finance Commission, chaired by Dr. Arvind Panagariya, submitted its report for the period 2026–27 to 2030–31, tabled in Parliament on February 1, 2026.
- The Commission has recommended that **41% of the divisible pool** of central taxes be devolved to states — the same share as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission.
 - The divisible pool excludes the cost of tax collection and revenues from cesses and surcharges.

16th Finance Commission Boosts Urban Local Governments

- The **Finance Commission (FC)** is a constitutional body that recommends how tax revenues should be shared between the Centre and states.
- Reconstituted every five years, it also provides grants to local governments.



- Since the 10th FC — after the introduction of urban local bodies and panchayats as the third tier — such grants have been a regular feature.
- The 16th Finance Commission has significantly raised the share of grants for urban local governments to 45%, up from 36% under the 15th FC and 26% under the 13th FC.
- In absolute terms, it has recommended ₹3.56 lakh crore for urban local bodies — more than double the 15th FC’s ₹1.55 lakh crore and nearly 15 times the allocation of the 13th FC (post-2011 Census).
- These allocations determine the financial capacity of the lowest tier of government to address local infrastructure, service delivery, and grassroots governance challenges as India’s urban population continues to grow.
- **Uneven Distribution Across States**
 - Grants are distributed according to the 16th FC’s population-based formula, resulting in varied outcomes for states.
 - Kerala’s allocation increased by over 400%.

- Maharashtra saw a rise of over 300%.
- Odisha's allocation grew by only 13%.
- Bihar experienced an 8% reduction.

16th FC's Financial Cushion

- The increased **45% share for urban bodies** is seen as a buffer against future demographic revisions.
- If Census 2027 data shows higher urbanization — say 48% — the enhanced allocation would prevent urban governments from being financially underprepared, unlike earlier cycles when allocations were lower (36% or 26%).
- The 16th Finance Commission's recommendations reflect India's accelerating urban transition, though variations in state-level allocations highlight ongoing complexities in balancing demographic trends and fiscal federalism.

FOREST OWLET



Recently, in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh forest owl has been spotted 113 years after it was last seen.

- It is a member of the **typical owl family, Strigidae.**
- **Habitat:** It is mainly found in **tropical and subtropical moist lowland woods**, dense deciduous woodlands, open dry deciduous teak woods and tropical and subtropical dry forests.
- **Distribution:**
 - It is endemic to the **forests of central India.**
 - It was observed in **Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra**, and Gujarat, and at a few locations in the Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra.
- **Features of Forest Owllet:**
 - It is a typical owllet with a rather unspotted crown, presence of full throat collar, thickly feathered legs, heavily banded wings, and a tail.

- These **birds are diurnal** and have been observed to hunt during the day.
- They **eat rodents**, reptiles such as lizards and skinks, and insects.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
 - **CITES:** Appendix I

FOOTBALL FOR SCHOOLS (F4S) PROGRAMME



- It is run by **Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)** in **collaboration with UNESCO**.

Aim: It aims to contribute to the **education, development and empowerment** of children.

Objective: It seeks to make **football more accessible to both boys and girls** around the world by incorporating football activities into the education system, in partnership with relevant authorities and stakeholders.

- The programme has been designed to promote **targeted life skills and competencies** through football and contribute to **the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and other priorities.
- The F4S Programme is aligned with:
 - Global sport, education and health policies, including UNESCO's Kazan Action Plan, the Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework of Action, and the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA).
- In India, the programme is implemented by the **Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education (DoSEL)**, with support from the **All India Football Federation (AIFF)** and the **Sports Authority of India (SAI)**.



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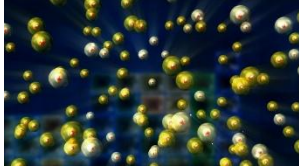
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WHAT IS CARBON-14?



- Carbon has three main isotopes: carbon-12, carbon-13, and carbon-14. The first two are stable.
- Carbon-14 is a radioactive isotope of carbon.
- It is created in the atmosphere through the bombardment of nitrogen by cosmic rays.
- It has six protons and eight neutrons in its nucleus.
- It is used in radiocarbon dating to determine the age of organic substances by measuring its decay over time.

What is Radiocarbon Dating, or Carbon-14 Dating?

- It is a method that provides objective age estimates for carbon-based materials that originated from living organisms.
- It is based on the fact that living organisms—like trees, plants, people, and animals—absorb carbon-14 into their tissue.
- When they die, the carbon-14 starts to change into other atoms over time.
- Carbon-14 has a half-life of approximately 5,730 years (i.e., half the amount of the isotope present at any instant will undergo spontaneous disintegration during the succeeding 5,730 years).
- Because carbon-14 decays at this constant rate, an estimate of the date at which an organism died can be made by measuring the amount of its residual carbon-14.
- Over the years, carbon-14 dating has also found applications in geology, hydrology, geophysics, atmospheric science, oceanography, paleoclimatology, and even biomedicine.