

WHAT ARE SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES (SEZS)?



- SEZs are **special areas** within a country that **offer incentives to business and trade** regulations operating in those areas.
- SEZs typically offer **competitive infrastructure, duty-free exports, tax incentives**, and other measures designed to make it easier to conduct business.
- The main **objectives** of the SEZ are **generating additional economic activity, promoting exports** of goods and services from the country, **promoting foreign and domestic investment** and **creating more employment opportunities** besides the **development of infrastructure**
- The category 'SEZ' covers a **broad range** of zone types, few of which are **free zones (FZs), industrial estates (IEs), free ports, free trade zones (FTZs), and export processing zones (EPZs)**.
- **SEZs in India:**
 - Asia's **first EPZ** was set up in **Kandla, Gujarat, in 1965**, followed by seven more EPZs in the country.
 - The **SEZ policy** was introduced in **April 2000**, and it is envisioned to make SEZs a driver for economic growth supported by quality infrastructure and accompanied by an attractive incentives package, at the centre and state levels in the country.
 - The **eight pre-existing EPZs** located at Kandla and Surat (Gujarat), Mumbai (Maharashtra), Cochin (Kerala), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Falta (West Bengal), and Noida (Uttar Pradesh) were **converted into SEZs under this scheme**.
 - Later, the **SEZ Act, 2005** was passed by the Indian Parliament in May 2005, and the act, **supported by SEZ Rules**, came into effect on February 10, **2006**.
 - As of March 31, 2024, there are 280 operational SEZs in India.

- On June 9, 2025, India announced a series of **regulatory amendments** aimed at promoting SEZs focused on **semiconductor and electronic component manufacturing**.
 - One of the major revisions is the amendment to Rule 5 of SEZ Rules, 2006, which **reduces the minimum land requirement for SEZs dedicated exclusively to semiconductors or electronic components from 50 hectares to 10 hectares**.
 - Additionally, Rule 18 has been amended to **allow these SEZ units to sell their products in the domestic market**, subject to payment of applicable duties.
 - Further, an amendment to Rule 7 empowers the **SEZ Board of Approval to waive the requirement for land to be encumbrance-free in specific cases**. This provision **applies when the land is mortgaged or leased to central or state governments or their authorized agencies**, offering greater flexibility in land acquisition and development.

INDIA NEEDS A SINCERE AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

- In a country where every life lost in an aircraft accident should lead to truth, justice, and reform, **India's aviation safety apparatus has repeatedly failed its citizens**.
- Despite the veneer of institutional structure, **the system is plagued by opacity, conflicts of interest, and a deeply ingrained reluctance to confront inconvenient truths**.
- Therefore, **it is important to examine the flaws in India's aircraft accident investigation framework and proposes concrete reforms to restore integrity, transparency, and accountability**.

The Flaws in India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Framework

- **An Illusion of Autonomy**

CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK

Institute of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 16 June 2025

- India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), on paper, appears to be an autonomous body.
- **In reality, it operates under the control of the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA),** the very authority that oversees airlines, regulates the aviation sector via the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), and appoints top officials in both regulatory and investigative arms.
- **This setup presents a glaring conflict of interest,** where the regulator and the investigator are ultimately accountable to the same entity.
- **A System in Reactive Mode**
 - **The June 2025 aircraft accident** in Ahmedabad **should serve as a wake-up call.**
 - It is **only the latest in a series of troubling incidents,** ranging from helicopter crashes and flying school mishaps to ground handling failures and weather-related emergencies.
 - **These events expose the system's reactive tendencies.** India continues to firefight rather than anticipate and prevent risks.
 - The country's **increasing aviation sector has far outgrown the current National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP),** and the regulatory apparatus has not kept pace.

Lessons Ignored: The Seth Committee Report

- India has ignored valuable lessons from its past.
- **The 1997 Air Marshal J.K. Seth Committee Report was a bold attempt to highlight the aviation sector's structural deficiencies,** fragmented oversight, lack of independence, poor training, and regulatory capture.
- **But because it spoke uncomfortable truths, it was effectively buried.**
- **The issues it flagged remain unresolved,** perpetuating a cycle of superficial reviews and ineffective reforms.

WHAT IS THE G7 GROUPING?



- The **Group of Seven (G7)** is an **informal grouping of seven of the world's advanced economies**, including **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.**
- The **European Union (EU)** also participates in the Group and is represented at the summits by the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.
- G7 was **founded in 1975 in response to the oil crisis.**
- With the **inclusion of Russia in 1998**, the group temporarily became the **G8**. In 2014, the group returned to the **G7 format.**
- The G7 originally dealt exclusively with issues related to the development of the global economy.
- Over the years, it has broadened its **agenda**. It now **covers the entire spectrum of global issues**, such as foreign and security policy, trade, climate, and development.
- **Governance Structure:**
 - There is **no** **firmly** **established** **secretariat, procedural guidelines, or administrative structures.**
 - The **G7 presidency rotates each calendar year among the member states.** The **EU does not hold the rotating presidency** of the G7.
 - The **Summit**, the G7 Presidency's centerpiece, is **attended by the Heads of State and Government of the seven Member States, representatives of the European Union, and States and International Organizations** invited by the Presidency.
 - The changing **agenda** and thematic priorities of the G7 are **determined by the respective presidency.**
 - **Decisions are usually taken by consensus.**

CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK

Institute of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 16 June 2025

- The G7 Summit **concludes with the adoption of a communiqué** outlining important political commitments.
- These **communiqués**—and more broadly the **G7 decisions**—have a **significant influence on global governance** and decision-making processes.

WHAT IS THE SCORES PORTAL?



- SCORES, or the **SEBI Complaints Redress System**, is an online platform launched in 2011 that enables investors to **file and track complaints against listed entities** and SEBI-registered **market intermediaries**.
- As per the upgraded SCORES 2.0 framework, **complaints are automatically directed to the concerned entities**, which are **mandated to respond with an Action Taken Report (ATR) within 21 days**.
- If the investor is **dissatisfied with the response**, they may seek a **First Level Review within 15 days**.
 - During this review period, complaints **remain classified as pending**, even if an ATR has already been **submitted**.
 - In cases where the **grievance remains unresolved following the First Level Review**, investors have the **option to escalate the matter to SEBI for a Second Level Review**.
 - The **complaints may be closed** if the investor **opts for resolution through the Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) mechanism**.
- Thus, the SCORES Portal enables market intermediaries and listed companies to receive complaints online from investors, redress such complaints, and report redressal online.
- An investor who is **not familiar with SCORES** or does not have access to SCORES **can lodge complaints in physical form** at any of the offices of SEBI.
 - Such complaints would be **scanned and also uploaded in SCORES** for processing.

WHY THE CENTRE CAPPED MGNREGS SPENDING — AND WHY IT'S A PROBLEM

The Union Finance Ministry has, for the first time, capped MGNREGS spending at 60% of its annual budget for the first half of FY 2025-26.

Previously exempt due to its demand-driven nature, the scheme has now been brought under the Monthly/Quarterly Expenditure Plan (MEP/QEP), a spending control mechanism introduced in 2017.

MEP/QEP is a financial tool used by government ministries and departments to track and manage their spending against allocated budgets. It helps in forecasting cash flow, monitoring expenditure, and ensuring that spending aligns with budgetary provisions.

Finance Ministry's Rationale Behind MGNREGS Spending Cap

Chronic Budget Overruns

- Historically, over 70% of the MGNREGS budget gets exhausted by September, prompting supplementary allocations in December, which are usually depleted by January.

Mounting Pending Dues

- In the past five years, year-end pending dues have ranged between ₹15,000 crore and ₹25,000 crore.
- On average, 20% of the next year's budget goes toward clearing these dues.

Objective of the Spending Cap

- The Finance Ministry aims to regulate cash flow through the MEP/QEP mechanism to prevent early exhaustion of funds and avoid mid-year supplementary allocations.

Current Financial Snapshot (FY 2025-26)

- Budget: ₹86,000 crore
- Released so far: 28%
- Pending dues from FY 25: ₹19,200 crore
- Pending dues from FY 26 (as on June 12): ₹3,262 crore

GLOBAL EDUCATION MONITORING REPORT



- It is an annual publication **produced by UNESCO** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).
- It is an authoritative and evidence-based assessment of progress, challenges, and trends in education worldwide.
- The GEM Report was **launched in 2002** as the Education for All Global Monitoring Report and transitioned to its current name in 2016.
- Its primary purpose is to **monitor and analyze global education** trends and provide policy recommendations to governments and stakeholders to improve education systems and outcomes.

Highlights of the Report

- It has pointed out that by 2025, countries will be off-track by 75 million relative to their national targets.
- The **out-of-school model estimates** assume stable patterns of school-age population progression through the education system.
- The model used multiple data sources (administrative, survey and census) to generate internally consistent trends of regional and global averages.

UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK



- It was **created in 2004** to promote cooperation among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.
- It was launched to **promote UNESCO's goals of cultural diversity** and strengthen resilience to threats such as climate change, rising inequality, and rapid urbanisation.

Aim of UCCN

- The network is aimed at leveraging the **creative, social, and economic potential of cultural industries**.
- It encourages a culture of creativity in urban planning and solutions to urban problems.

Objective of the UCCN

- It allows member cities to **recognise creativity** as an essential component of urban development, notably through partnerships involving the public and private sectors and civil society.
- It envisages to **develop hubs of creativity and innovation** and broaden opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector.
- These cities have to achieve the UN agenda of sustainable development.

Indian cities in the UCCN

- **Ten Indian cities** are a part of the network. **Kozhikode** (Literature) and **Gwalior** (Music) feature in this list. Earlier, **Jaipur** (Crafts and Folk Arts), **Varanasi** (Music), **Chennai** (Music), **Mumbai** (Film), **Hyderabad** (Gastronomy), and **Srinagar** (Crafts and Folk Arts) have also held the spot.

GOAN FENI



- It is a traditional Indian **spirit native to Goa**, and is made from the fermentation and double distillation of **either cashew apples or coconut sap**.
- It's strong, clear liquor with a unique flavour.

History: Feni was **introduced to India by the Portuguese** missionaries in the 1600s when they came to trade. They brought **with them cashew plant trees** and also the method of distillation, which was then passed on to the locals.

- The people who made **feni were called bhatikars**, who used earthen pots or bhaties under a fire. Today, **copper pots** under the coil method are **used to make Feni**.

How is it prepared?

- As per a study, cashew feni production is a relatively laborious and lengthy process that does not require specialized equipment.
- It is a **four-step process** consisting of the harvesting of **cashew apples**, **juice extraction** through stomping with feet, natural fermentation in earthen pots, and subsequent distillation and condensation in a clay still over a low wood fire.
- The distilled Feni is then aged **for a couple of months and bottled**.