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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 11 July 2026

SAMRIDDH GRAM



- It is a flagship **rural digital transformation initiative** of the **Department of Telecommunications** built on the **BharatNet network**.

Objective: It is envisaged as a **pioneering phygital (physical + digital) Services model** integrating on-ground presence with robust digital infrastructure to empower rural citizens.

- It is **aimed at transforming rural** India through a seamless integration of physical and digital services.
- At the heart of the **initiative are Samriddhi Kendras**, established as **one-stop village-level hubs** delivering integrated phygital services by combining reliable telecom connectivity, digital platforms and assisted physical service delivery.
- The Samriddhi Kendras will deliver a **comprehensive suite of services**
 - **Education & Skilling:** Smart classrooms, AR/VR-based learning, and digital skilling aligned with government schemes/initiatives.
 - **Agriculture:** IoT-based soil testing, drone support, and smart irrigation systems.
 - **Healthcare:** Teleconsultations, Health ATMs, and emergency care.
 - **e-Governance:** Assisted access to citizen services, documentation, and grievance redressal.
 - **E-Commerce:** Integration with ONDC and digital marketplaces for local entrepreneurship.
 - **Financial Inclusion:** Digital banking and payments
 - **Connectivity Backbone:** Strengthened BharatNet FTTH with a Village Area Network and public Wi-Fi hotspots.

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FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT-INDIA



- It was set by the **Government of India in 2004.**
- It is the **central national agency** responsible for receiving, processing, analyzing and disseminating information relating to suspect financial transactions.
- FIU-IND is an independent body **reporting directly to the Economic Intelligence Council (EIC)** headed by the **Finance Minister.**
- **Function of Financial Intelligence Unit-India:**
 - **Collection of Information:** It acts as the central reception point for receiving **Cash Transaction reports (CTRs), Non-Profit Organisation Transaction Report (NTRs), Cross Border Wire Transfer Reports (CBWTRs), Reports on Purchase or Sale of Immovable Property (IPRs) and Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs)** from various reporting entities.
 - **Analysis of Information:** Analyze received information in order to **uncover patterns of transactions** suggesting suspicion of money laundering and related crimes.
 - **Sharing of Information:** It **shares information** with **national intelligence/law enforcement agencies**, national regulatory authorities and foreign Financial Intelligence Units.
 - **Central Repository:** It establishes and maintains a national database on the basis of reports received from reporting entities.
 - **Coordination:** It coordinates and strengthens collection and sharing of financial intelligence through an effective national, regional and global network to combat money laundering and related crimes.
 - **Research and Analysis:** Monitor and identify strategic key areas on **money laundering** trends, typologies and developme

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TOWARDS A ROBUST LANDSLIDE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM IN INDIA

- Recent landslides in the Western Ghats (that struck the under-construction twin tunnel project in Wayanad, Kerala) and other parts of India have renewed focus on the urgent need for **effective** landslide early warning systems (LEWS).
- Experts argue that **scientific forecasting**, coupled with timely evacuation, can significantly reduce casualties in highly vulnerable regions such as the Western Ghats and the Himalayas.

Why Early Warning Systems Matter?

- Landslides are **predictable** to a considerable extent, particularly in identified high-risk zones.
- Early warning systems enable timely evacuation, **reducing loss** of life and property.
- Countries such as **Switzerland** have successfully prevented casualties through advance warnings and planned evacuations.
- In India, the 2024 Munnar landslides (Kerala) demonstrated the effectiveness of an early warning system, where evacuations based on scientific advice prevented fatalities.
- India's landslide vulnerability:**
 - According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), around **13%** of India's landmass (0.42 million sq km) is prone to landslides.
 - The Himalayan region and the Western Ghats are the most vulnerable zones.
 - Highly vulnerable regions:** Tehri Garhwal and Uttarkashi (Uttarakhand), Mandi and Shimla (Himachal Pradesh), Aizawl region (Mizoram), and parts of Manipur.
 - Relatively less vulnerable:**
 - Sikkim**, despite frequent attention, has comparatively lower vulnerability because road networks are less extensive.
 - Reduced mountain cutting and slope disturbance improve **geological stability**.

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Towards a Comprehensive National Landslide Warning System:

- Experts believe India can develop an effective nationwide LEWS **within two years**, provided adequate resources and institutional support are available.
- **Priority actions:** Identify high-frequency, high-impact landslide zones. Prepare detailed hazard zonation and risk maps. Install sensor networks at the most vulnerable locations.
- **Integrate:** Satellite monitoring, sensor-based observations, high-resolution weather forecasting, and GIS and remote sensing technologies.
- **Strengthen coordination:** Among IMD, NDMA, Geological Survey of India (GSI), State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs), and local administrations.

Challenges and Way Forward:

- **Absence:** Of comprehensive mapping of high-risk landslide hotspots. Develop an **integrated** National Landslide Early Warning System combining sensor-based monitoring with probabilistic forecasting models.
- **Limited deployment of sensor networks:** Expand landslide susceptibility mapping using remote sensing, GIS and AI-based analytics.
- **Dependence on short-term rainfall forecasts:** Accelerate development of high-resolution rainfall forecasting by IMD.
- **High costs of monitoring infrastructure:** Prioritise vulnerable infrastructure, transport corridors and densely populated hill settlements.
- **Need:** For greater inter-agency coordination and sustained investment. Promote community awareness, evacuation drills and local disaster preparedness.

Conclusion:

- With climate change increasing the frequency of extreme rainfall events, landslides are becoming a growing disaster risk in India.
- A combination of above suggestions can transform landslide management from **reactive relief to proactive risk reduction**, saving lives and protecting critical infrastructure.

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AI PLUS DPI - INDIA'S NEXT LEAP IN STATE CAPACITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

- India's Digital Public Infrastructure (**DPI**)—built around Aadhaar, UPI, GST, FASTag, and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)—has significantly improved governance, reduced leakages, and expanded financial inclusion.
- The next transformative phase lies in **integrating** Artificial Intelligence (**AI**) with DPI, enabling higher state capacity, better public service delivery, and accelerated economic development under the government's Jan Vishwas approach.

From Digital Identity to Intelligent Governance:

- Japan's pension fraud involving deceased beneficiaries highlight how India's Aadhaar-enabled authentication has curbed similar leakages.
- Over the past decade, DPI has -
 - Improved efficiency in welfare delivery through DBT.
 - Reduced fraud in government expenditure.
 - Enabled India to account for nearly 42% of global digital payment transactions through UPI.
 - Expanded digital governance at an unprecedented scale.
- **The next step** is to combine this digital infrastructure with AI for smarter governance.

Why India is Uniquely Positioned for AI?

- **World's largest natural data laboratory:** India has transformed from a data-poor to a data-rich economy due to three major reforms introduced around 2016 -
 - Jio (mass internet access),
 - UPI (digital payments), and
 - GST (formalisation of the economy).
- These have generated massive real-time datasets, for example,
 - **UPI:** Around 23 billion monthly transactions, producing valuable behavioural and financial data.

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- **GST:** Nearly 20 crore payment records, providing real-time insights into production, consumption and supply chains.
- **FASTag:** Around 4.5 billion annual transactions, generating logistics and mobility data.
- **Aadhaar:** More than 27 billion annual authentications, enabling a 16-fold expansion in DBT beneficiaries.
- Unlike traditional surveys that are delayed and incomplete, these datasets enable continuous evidence-based policymaking.
- However, **India still requires** better academic research, stronger think tanks, open public data ecosystems, and improved data governance.

Conclusion:

- By integrating AI with DPI, India can strengthen state capacity, improve public service delivery, accelerate formalisation, generate quality employment, and achieve inclusive economic growth.
- Realising this vision will require stronger interoperability, robust data governance, research ecosystems, and citizen-centric digital services grounded in trust and transparency.

HOW INDIA WITHSTOOD THE CRISIS IN WEST ASIA

- India imports nearly **90% of its crude oil** and depends heavily on the Gulf for **oil, gas, and fertilizers**, making it seemingly vulnerable.
- India, the world's third-largest oil importer, faced serious exposure when the crisis hit.
- The Indian crude basket crossed \$120 per barrel, LPG cylinder costs rose above ₹1,600, and war-risk premiums spiked sharply.
- Despite this, India contained inflation better than most peers:
 - **Petrol** prices rose just 7.5% in India, compared to 14% in Germany, 19% in UK, 45% in US, over 50% in Pakistan and Philippines, and nearly 90% in Myanmar.
 - **Diesel** prices rose only 8% in India, versus about 85% in the UAE.

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- **LPG** cylinders stayed at ₹942 (₹642 for Ujjwala beneficiaries), cheaper than in Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and far below prices in the US, Australia, and Canada.
- This stability came at a **fiscal cost**: state-run Oil Marketing Companies absorbed ₹74,781 crore in losses on petrol, diesel, and LPG sales up to June 30, shielding households from the full price shock.

Weathering the Storm: Four Key Factors

- **Strategic relationships as energy security**: Sustained engagement with Iran and Gulf partners kept communication channels open. Iran facilitated movement of Indian ships, and Gulf producers continued supplying energy.
- **Diversified supplier base**: Energy partnerships with Russia, the US, Africa, and Latin America gave India flexibility that earlier crises lacked.
- **A decade of energy planning**: Higher ethanol blending, expanding renewable energy capacity, larger strategic reserves, and stronger refining capacity built layered resilience over time.
- **Whole-of-government coordination**: The Ministries of External Affairs, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Indian Navy, and the National Security Council Secretariat worked together to monitor risks and protect supplies.

The Way Ahead

- The crisis demonstrated that resilience is built through years of preparation, not panic responses.
- Strategic foresight, diplomatic outreach, and institutional coordination together turned a potential shock into a managed outcome, one that could underpin India's 'Viksit Bharat' ambitions amid growing global uncertainty.

Conclusion

- India's calm handling of the West Asia crisis was no accident.
- It was the fruit of patient diplomacy, diversified energy sourcing, and coordinated governance, proof that true security lies in preparation, not improvisation, and a template for navigating future global shocks.

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PRATAPGAD FORT



Pratapgad Fort

- Pratapgad, also known as **Pratapgarh**, is a large **hill fort** located in the Satara district of **Maharashtra**.
- The fort lies at an altitude of 1080 m and is **built on a spur** that **overlooks the road between the villages of Par and Kinesvar**.
- **History:**
 - Maratha king **Shivaji Maharaj** had **commissioned Moropant Pingle**, his prime minister, to **commence the construction** of this fort to **defend Nira and the Koyna River banks** and also to **guard the Par pass**.
 - The construction of the fortress was **completed** in the year **1656**.
 - The fort stands as the witness of the historic **Battle of Pratapgarh** between **Shivaji and Afzal Khan**, the **commander of the Bijapur Sultanate**, on 10th November **1659**.
 - The Battle of Pratapgad marked the **rise of Shivaji Maharaj** as a powerful and independent ruler in the Deccan region.
 - **After the Battle** of Pratapgad, the **Afzal Tower** was **constructed** outside the fort as a lookout for enemies.
 - It is said that **Afzal Khan's head is buried under the Afzal tower** which is also known as **Afzal Buruj**. Afzal Khan's tomb is situated to the northwest of Afzal Buruj.
 - **In 1818**, the **Maratha forces** had to **surrender the Pratapgad Fort** after **losing the third Anglo-Maratha War**.
- **Features:**
 - The fort is divided into two parts, the **lower fort** and the **upper fort**.
 - The **upper fort** was built **upon the crest of the hill**.
 - It is roughly square, 180 m long on each side. The upper fort comprises several buildings, including a Mahadev Temple.

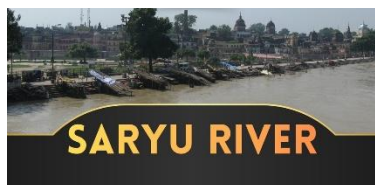
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- The **lower fort** situated at the southeast end of the fort is **defended by tall towers** and strongholds, which are 10-12 m high.
- The lower fort is around 320 m long and 110 m wide.
- It houses Bhavani Temple on the eastern side. It is believed that Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaja was blessed with a shining sword at this temple.
- A **17-foot-tall bronze figure of Shivaji** was erected and unveiled by Jawaharlal Nehru on 30th November 1957 to commemorate and pay homage to Shivaji Maharaj.

KEY FACTS ABOUT SARYU RIVER



- It is a river that flows through the states of **Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh**.
- It is also known as the **Sarayu or Sarju River**.
- This river is of ancient significance. It is mentioned in ancient Indian texts like the **Vedas and the Ramayana**.
- The famous **city of Ayodhya** is located right on the banks of the Sarayu River.
- **Course:**
 - It **rises** at **Sarmul** (or Sarmool), which is located in the extreme north of the district Bageshwar of **Uttarakhand** on the **southern slope of a ridge of the Nanda Kot**.
 - It flows through the **Kumaon Himalayas** before **flowing into the Sharada River** at Pancheshwar at the **India-Nepal border**.
 - **Sharada River** (also known as the **Kali River**) then **flows into the Ghaghara River** in Sitapur District, **Uttar Pradesh**.
 - **Lower Ghaghara** is **popularly known as Sarayu in India**, especially while it flows through the city of Ayodhya.
 - **Length:** Approximately **350–400 kilometers** long.