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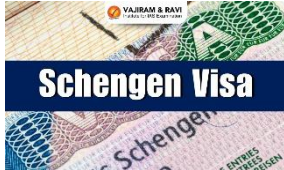
Institute of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 31 July 2025



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WHAT IS A SCHENGEN VISA?



- A Schengen visa is an **entry permit** that **allows non-EU nationals** to **temporarily visit or transit** through the **Schengen Area**, which comprises 29 European countries.
- **Within this area**, there are **no internal borders**, allowing for unrestricted movement between the countries.
- The visa is **valid for up to 90 days** within a **180-day period**, which begins the day you enter a Schengen country.
- You can **enter and leave the area multiple times**, but the **total stay must not exceed 90 days** within the 180-day period.
- Schengen visas are issued for various **purposes**, such as **tourism, business, visiting family, medical treatment, and participation in cultural or sporting events**.
- The visas do **not give the right to work**.

Which Countries Issue Schengen Visas?

- There are currently **29 European countries** in the Schengen.
- Members of this area include **25 of the 27 EU member states** (except for **Cyprus and Ireland**) and **all members of the European Free Trade Association** (**Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland**).
- Being part of this area means that countries:
 - **Do not carry out checks at their internal borders**, except in cases of specific threats;
 - Carry out **harmonized controls at their external borders**, based on clearly defined criteria.

The Cascade Visa Scheme:

- The cascade visa scheme **rewards “trusted travellers”** with a documented travel record.



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- Indian citizens who have obtained two Schengen visas within the past three years are now eligible for a two-year multi-entry visa.
- This can later be upgraded to a five-year visa, provided their passport is valid for the full term.
- During its validity, the visa allows holders to travel freely across the Schengen area, mirroring the travel rights of visa-free nationals.
- However, the visa does **not grant the right to work and still limits stays to 90 days within any 180-day period.**
- It applies a tiered structure for visa validity based on prior usage:
 - 1-year visa if the traveller used 3 Schengen visas in the previous two years.
 - 2-year visa if they used a 1-year multiple-entry visa in the previous two years.
 - 5-year visa if they used a 2-year multiple-entry visa in the previous three years.

TSUNAMI



- A tsunami is a series of waves generated by a large and sudden displacement of the ocean.
- Tsunamis can have **devastating** and wide-ranging effects, especially in coastal regions.
- The word tsunami is composed of the Japanese words "tsu" (which means harbor) and "nami" (which means "wave").
- Large earthquakes below or near the ocean floor are the most common cause (about 80% of all known tsunamis are triggered by earthquakes), but landslides, volcanic activity, certain types of weather, and meteorites can also cause tsunamis.
 - Not all earthquakes cause tsunamis; they **must be strong and shallow** (at least 6.5 magnitude and less than 70 km from the Earth's surface), and **move the seafloor vertically.**

- Tsunamis radiate outward in all directions from their source and can move across entire ocean basins, around islands, and into bays, sounds, and up rivers.
- Out in the depths of the ocean, tsunami waves do not dramatically increase in height.
- But as the waves travel inland, they build up to higher and higher heights as the depth of the ocean decreases.
- The speed of tsunami waves depends on ocean depth rather than the distance from the source of the wave.
- Tsunami waves may travel as fast as jet planes over deep waters, only slowing down when reaching shallow waters.

Tsunamis can have heights of up to 30 m (98 ft) and reach speeds of 950 km per hour.

- It is hard to see that a tsunami is approaching. The most obvious sign is when coastal water retreats just before the waves reach the shore.

SKILL IMPACT BOND



- It is an innovative financing tool aimed at improving employment outcomes for young people,
 - Under this initiative, first skills are provided to young people, and then jobs are provided to them or they are made capable to perform better within their current jobs.
- India's Skill Impact Bond (SIB) was launched in November 2021.
- It is the country's first development impact bond focused on employment.
- It is backed by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship through the National Skill Development Corporation,
- Its objective is to benefit 50,000 young Indians over four years, with 60% of the beneficiaries being women.
- This innovative outcomes-based financing tool uses private sector capital and expertise, focusing on job placement and retention rather than merely on training and certification.

- **How does it work?**
 - There are **‘risk investors’** usually from the private sector who provide funding to service providers (organisations that deliver skills training and support job placement).
 - Then there are **outcome funders** who repay the **‘risk investors’** if the programme has met its employment targets. There is also a third-party evaluator who verifies employment outcomes.
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DIGITAL PAYMENTS INDEX



- It has been constructed by the **Reserve Bank of India** to measure the extent of digitisation of payments across the country.
 - It was first **launched in January 2021**.
 - It is **based on multiple parameters** and reflects the expansion of various digital payment modes accurately.
 - It is a first-of-its kind index to measure the spread of digital payments across the country.
 - **Base Year:** It has been constructed with **March 2018** as the base period, i.e., the DPI score for **March 2018 is set at 100**.
 - The **DPI index comprises five broad parameters** that enable the measurement of deepening and penetration of digital payments in the country over different time periods. The parameters include:
 - Payment enablers (25 per cent weightage in the index)
 - Demand-side and supply-side payment infrastructure factors (10 per cent each)
 - Payment performance (45 per cent)
 - Consumer centricity (5 per cent)
 - Each of the parameters has sub-parameters, which, in turn, consist of various measurable indicators.
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CRIB BLOOD GROUP



- It is part of the **Cromer (CR) blood group system** and, in recognition of its origin, has been officially named **CRIB**, with 'CR' representing 'Cromer' and 'IB' standing for 'India', 'Bangalore'.
- This historic announcement was made at the 35th Regional Congress of the **International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT)** held in Milan, Italy.
- It is a new blood group, previously unidentified anywhere in the world.
- After ten months of research and molecular testing, international experts identified a new antigen in the Cromer (CR) blood group system.
- The blood group nomenclature is decided by the **International Society of Blood Transfusion**.
- Identifying new antigens like **CRIB enhances global transfusion safety**, improves compatibility testing, and lays the foundation for better donor matching in future medical emergencies.
- **Cromer blood group system involves 12 high-prevalence and 3 low-prevalence antigens** on decay-accelerating factor (DAF).

What are rare blood types?

- Rare blood type is when a person's blood type is present in only **0.1% of the population**.
- If a Rare type patient develops an antibody, they can only receive blood from another Rare Type donor.
- It poses serious challenges in emergency transfusions, organ transplants, and complex surgeries.

POCSO ACT

- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is a special law enacted to safeguard **children (individuals below 18 years of age)** from sexual offences.
- It provides a comprehensive legal framework to address sexual abuse, harassment, and exploitation of minors.
- **Key features of the Act**
 - **Gender-neutral protection:** Applies to both boys and girls.
 - **Wide range of offences:** Covers penetrative and non-penetrative assault, sexual harassment, and pornography involving children.
 - **Special courts:** Mandates the establishment of child-friendly Special Courts for speedy trial.
 - **Mandatory reporting:** Any person who has knowledge of child sexual abuse is legally required to report it.
 - **Presumption of guilt:** The accused must prove innocence, reversing the general legal principle of “innocent until proven guilty.”
 - **Confidentiality:** Protects the identity of the child during investigation and trial to avoid further trauma.
 - **Support for Victims:** It provides a framework for supporting and rehabilitating victims of sexual offenses.
 - **Child-Friendly Procedures:** The act emphasizes child-friendly procedures for recording statements, medical examinations, and court appearances.

Judicial Discretion and Bail in POCSO Cases

- Offences under the **POCSO Act are cognizable and non-bailable**, meaning arrests can occur without a warrant and bail is not guaranteed.
- However, the Act does not lay down specific bail criteria.

- Courts rely on **Section 483 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023** (formerly Section 439 CrPC), which considers factors like the gravity of the offence, potential punishment, flight risk, and risk of evidence tampering.
- Over time, courts have introduced additional considerations.
 - In **Dharmander Singh (2020)**, the Delhi High Court listed factors like the ages of the victim and accused, their age gap, relationship dynamics, coercion, and post-offence conduct—though not binding, they serve as a guide.
 - In **Deshraj @ Musa vs State of Rajasthan (2024)**, the Supreme Court granted bail to an 18-year-old in a consensual relationship with a 16-year-old, given the minor age gap, time spent in custody, and slow trial progress.
- These cases underscore that bail in POCSO matters ultimately depends on judicial discretion balancing individual liberty with victim protection.

Consent and Legal Grey Zones Under POCSO

- The POCSO Act does not recognise consent from individuals below the age of 18, treating all sexual activity with minors as an offence, regardless of whether it was voluntary.
- This creates a **legal grey area**, particularly in cases involving consensual adolescent relationships that are later criminalised.
- While courts have started considering such nuances during bail hearings—especially when the alleged victim confirms the consensual nature of the relationship in a magistrate’s statement—bail remains difficult in the early investigation phase.
- Courts often wait for critical evidence and victim testimony before granting relief, leading to prolonged custody for the accused.
- Due to this, Senior Advocate Indira Jaising has urged the Supreme Court to lower the age of consent to 16, citing infringement of adolescent rights.
- However, the Centre opposed this, warning that reducing the age could weaken protections for minors and potentially increase vulnerability to abuse.

INDIA-U.S. TRADE STANDOFF ESCALATES - TARIFFS, PENALTIES, AND STRATEGIC DILEMMAS

- **Ongoing negotiations:** India and the U.S. have been in talks since February 2025 to finalize a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) aimed at establishing a mutually beneficial trade framework.
- **Mini-deal attempts:**
 - Alongside the broader BTA, efforts were underway to create a “mini-deal” to roll back retaliatory tariffs.

New Tariff Measures:

- **Announcement by U.S. President:** Trump declared a 25% tariff and an unspecified “penalty” on Indian imports, effective August 1, 2025.
- **Reasons cited:**
 - High Indian tariffs and non-tariff barriers.
 - India’s continued defense and energy purchases from Russia (India is the second-largest buyer of Russian oil after China).
 - Geopolitical concerns over India’s ties with Russia during the Ukraine conflict.
 - Penalty tied to Trump’s pressure campaign to force countries to reduce dependence on sanctioned Russian oil and arms.
- **Public statement:** Trump criticized India’s trade practices on Truth Social, labeling them “strenuous and obnoxious.”

India’s Response:

- **Commerce Ministry reaction:** The Indian government is “studying the implications” and reiterated its commitment to a fair and balanced trade agreement.
- **Protection of domestic interests:** The ministry emphasized safeguarding the interests of farmers, MSMEs, and entrepreneurs, drawing parallels with its stance during the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) negotiations.

Global Context - Trump's Retaliatory Trade Policy:

- **Liberation day tariffs:** In April 2025, Trump imposed blanket tariffs on countries he accused of levying disproportionately high tariffs on U.S. goods.
- **90-day pause and bilateral deals:** A pause was provided to negotiate individual deals. Agreements were reached with -
 - **UK:** Reduced car tariffs to 10% and removed aerospace tariffs
 - **Indonesia & Philippines:** 19% tariff
 - **Japan & EU:** 15% tariff
- **India left out:** India's inability to secure a deal has now subjected it to higher tariffs and potential trade isolation.

Key Concerns for India:

- **Strategic autonomy vs. trade realpolitik:** The case underscores challenges India faces in balancing strategic autonomy (especially defense and energy ties with Russia) and economic pragmatism in dealing with major powers.
- **China's first-mover advantage:**
 - China has already concluded advanced-stage negotiations and could secure better terms, including waivers on secondary tariffs.
 - China cut tariffs on U.S. goods from 125% to 10%; the U.S. reciprocated by cutting tariffs from 145% to 30%.
- **Impact on MSMEs and agriculture:** Heightened tariffs may affect exports from India's MSME sector and agricultural goods, which are highly price-sensitive.

Conclusion:

- While New Delhi's refusal to accept a one-sided deal has protected key domestic sectors, **the pressure to conclude a deal** has intensified due to mounting external tariffs and strategic maneuvering by China.
- The final shape of the India-U.S. deal may now hinge on **top-level intervention**, especially a conversation between PM Modi and President Trump, with the goal of minimizing economic damage while preserving strategic interests.