

INTERNATIONAL TIGER DAY, 2025



- It is observed on **July 29** each year.
- It serves as a platform to **raise awareness about tiger conservation.**
- It is celebrated worldwide to promote comprehensive efforts in safeguarding tigers and their natural habitats, fostering harmonious coexistence between humans and tigers.
- **Theme of International Tiger Day 2025: “Securing the future of Tigers with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities at the heart”.**
- **History of International Tiger Day:**
 - Global Tiger Day, commonly referred to as International Tiger Day, was **established during the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit in Russia in 2010.**
 - The summit brought together **13 tiger-range countries, including India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Malaysia, and Russia,** following alarming reports that only around 3,000 tigers remained in the wild.
 - The participating nations **adopted the “Tx2” goal** at the summit, which aimed to **double the global tiger population by 2022** through joint conservation efforts and stronger protection laws.
 - The **29th of July was chosen** as International Tiger Day because it represents the **halfway point between the first and last days of the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit** and the ongoing international campaign to rescue tigers.

Tiger Population in India:

- India now supports the **world’s largest tiger population.**
- While holding **only 18% of the world’s tiger habitat,** and facing the highest human density among tiger-range countries, India accounts for **75% of the world’s wild tigers.**
- **More than 3,600 tigers** now roam the country’s forests, **double the number** recorded just over a decade ago.

- These tigers live across 138,200 sq.km. of forest, roughly half the size of the UK, often sharing the land with 60 million people.
- This success comes from decades of conservation efforts, particularly under a national initiative known as **Project Tiger**.

WHAT IS BIGHA?



- Bigha is a **traditional unit of land measurement** commonly used in **India, Bangladesh, and Nepal**.
- Popular in states where **farming is common**, it helps **measure large agricultural land tracts as well as residential land**.
- The states which use Bigha for land measurement are **Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand**.
- **Historical Context:**
 - The origins of Bigha trace back to **ancient South Asian practices**.
 - **Before the introduction of modern units** like the acre or hectare, **landowners and farmers relied on Bigha** to calculate land for cultivation, taxation, and trade.
 - Over time, it became deeply rooted in the cultural and economic fabric of these regions.
- The **exact measurement** of bigha **differs from state to state**. For instance, in West Bengal and Assam, one bigha equals about 14,400 sq.ft., while in Punjab, it measures approximately 9,070 sq.ft.
- There is **no national standard for the size of a bigha**, and it is **typically smaller than an acre**, which is 43,560 sq.ft. or 4,047 sq.m.
- Bigha is common among farmers when measuring plots and negotiating land prices.
- A bigha is **often divided into smaller subunits**, such as ‘biswa’, ‘katha’ and Nalli.
- **Bigha in Bangladesh and Nepal:**



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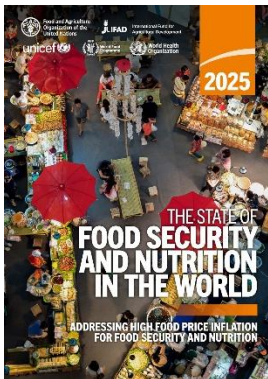
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- **Bangladesh:** Standardized under **British rule** at 14,400 square feet (1,340 square meters).
- **Nepal:** A bigha equals about 6,772.63 square meters, with **local variations**.

EXERCISE DIVYA DRISHTI



- It is a **high-altitude technology demonstration exercise** conducted by the **Indian Army** in East Sikkim.
- It was designed to test new technologies that are designed to **improve battlefield awareness, real-time surveillance, and quick decision-making**.
- Troops from the **Trishakti Corps**, which is headquartered in Sukna on the outskirts of Siliguri, used a mix of ground-based systems and aerial platforms, including UAVs and drones, to create realistic battle scenes.
- A key highlight was the **use of AI-enabled sensors** linked with advanced communication systems.
 - This setup **ensures smooth and secure data flow** among command centres, improves situational awareness, and enables faster and better decisions by creating a strong sensor-to-shooter link.
- The exercise was taken up to **check out the army's preparedness in using AI** and some **other modern technologies** in a realistic battle situation.



SOFI REPORT 2025

- It is an annual report prepared by five UN agencies: **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**, **IFAD** (International Fund for Agricultural Development), **UNICEF** (UN Children's Fund), **WFP** (World Food Programme), and **WHO** (World Health

Organization).

- It presents the latest data and analysis on **hunger, food security and nutrition worldwide.**

Key Highlights of SOFI Report 2025:

- Despite some recent progress, **global hunger in 2024 remained well above pre-pandemic levels and even higher than in 2015.**
- An estimated 96 million more people were suffering from chronic hunger today compared to 2015.
- It is now estimated that about 2.3 billion people in the world were moderately or severely food insecure in 2024.
- **Asia accounted for the highest number of undernourished people at 323 million, followed by Africa (307 million) and Latin America and the Caribbean (34 million).**
- Although hunger levels declined in Southeast Asia, Southern Asia, and South America, the report noted persistent or rising food insecurity in several other regions like Africa.

SETUBANDHA SCHOLAR SCHEME



- It is the first **national-level programme** to formally **integrate traditional scholars** into the research ecosystem of IITs, without insisting on conventional degrees.
- It aims to **bridge India's age-old gurukul tradition** with modern scientific and academic inquiry.
- It is backed by the **Ministry of Education** and implemented by the **Indian Knowledge System (IKS)** division of the Central Sanskrit University (CSU),
- The scheme **offers fellowships of up to Rs 65,000 per month** across 18 interdisciplinary fields - from **ayurveda to cognitive science, and architecture to political theory, grammar to strategic studies, performing arts to mathematics, physics, and health sciences.**

- **Eligibility:** It is based on a **minimum of five years** of rigorous study in a recognised gurukul and demonstrable excellence in Shastras or traditional knowledge.
- The maximum age to apply is 32 years.
- Scholars selected **under Category 1** (equivalent to postgraduate level) will receive a monthly fellowship of **Rs 40,000** and an annual **research grant of Rs 1 lakh**.
- Those under **Category 2** (equivalent to PhD level) will be **awarded Rs 65,000 monthly** and an **annual grant of Rs 2 lakh**.
- It is a **major shift in India's education policy**, opening up elite research pathways for scholars from non-formal backgrounds rooted in classical learning.

MERA GAON MERI DHAROHAR INITIATIVE



- It is a pan-India initiative of **Ministry of Culture** under **National Mission on Cultural Mapping** and was launched on 27th July 2023.
- It was launched **as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'**.
- The main objective of the project is to **culturally map India's 6.5 lakh villages**, spanning across all States and Union Territories, on a comprehensive virtual platform.
- The core idea behind this project is to **encourage appreciation for India's culture** and traditions, paving the way for economic growth, social harmony, and artistic development in rural communities.
- It is aimed at mapping India's **intangible cultural assets**.
- The programme is being implemented by the **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)** under the National Mission on Cultural Mapping (NMCM).
- Under the MGMD, information is collected under seven broad categories as given below:
 - Arts and Crafts Village
 - Ecologically Oriented Village
 - Scholastic Village linked with Textual and Scriptural Traditions of India

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- Epic Village linked with Ramayana, Mahabharata and/or Puranic legends and oral epics
 - Historical Village linked with Local and National History
 - Architectural Heritage Village
 - Any other characteristic that may need highlighting such as fishing village, horticulture village, shepherding village etc.
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GRASSLAND BIRD CENSUS IN KAZIRANGA

- Grassland birds in India are a unique group of avian species adapted to live in open, grassy habitats.
- These birds play a critical ecological role as indicators of healthy ecosystems, reflecting the overall status of grassland habitats.

Kaziranga's Grassland Bird Census: A Conservation Milestone

- Recently, a collaborative survey was conducted in Assam's Kaziranga National Park to record its grassland bird population.
- The initiative was led by forest officials, scientists, and conservationists, and was sparked by the research of Chiranjib Bora, a doctoral student studying the endangered **Black-breasted Parrotbill**.
 - Funded by the **INSPIRE fellowship** from the Department of Science & Technology, his project used **acoustic monitoring tools** to document bird species in Kaziranga, 70% of which is grassland.
- The survey aimed to monitor elusive and rapidly declining grassland bird species, many of which are hard to detect due to their small size and camouflaged appearance.
- It focused on 10 priority species that are either globally threatened or endemic to the Brahmaputra floodplains, such as the Bengal Florican, Swamp Francolin, and Finn's Weaver.
- In total, 43 species were recorded, including 1 Critically Endangered, 2 Endangered, and 6 Vulnerable species, as per the IUCN Red List.

Innovative Acoustic Monitoring in Kaziranga Bird Survey

- The Kaziranga grassland bird survey stood out for its use of passive acoustic monitoring.
- Traditional visual counting was ineffective for these small and shy birds, so acoustic recorders were strategically placed on tall trees near grasslands during their breeding season (March to May), a time when birds are most vocal.
- These devices captured bird songs over three consecutive days at 29 locations using six recorders.
- The recorded audio was then **analyzed using spectrograms**—graphical representations of sound—and a machine learning tool called Birdnet to accurately identify bird species based on their calls.
- This method enabled researchers to detect species that might have gone unnoticed using conventional techniques.

Grassland Birds as Ecosystem Health Indicators

- The survey's findings underscore the ecological significance of grassland birds, which serve as vital indicators of habitat health.
- Their presence confirms that the grasslands of Kaziranga are thriving.
- A key highlight was the discovery of a breeding colony of the **endangered Finn's Weaver**, a species endemic to the Brahmaputra floodplain.
- For the first time, researchers located over 85 nests of this rare bird atop trees in Kaziranga, shedding light on its nesting behavior and strengthening conservation efforts in the region.

Multiple Threats to Grassland Bird Habitats

- Kaziranga's grassland birds face serious threats due to both **human activities and natural processes**.
- Over the past 40 years, Assam has lost around 70% of its grasslands. Key drivers include overgrazing, conversion of grasslands into agricultural land, and ecological succession, where grasslands naturally transition into forests.

FISCAL HEALTH OF INDIAN STATES IN FY2025 - TRENDS, CONCERNS, AND OUTLOOK

Fiscal Trends in FY2025 (Provisional Actuals):

- **Widening fiscal deficit:**
 - **Fiscal deficit** is the excess of total expenditure of the Government over its non-debt receipts (revenue receipts, miscellaneous capital receipts and recovery of loans and advances).
 - It normally **represents the net incremental liabilities** of the Government or its additional borrowings.
 - FY2025 fiscal deficit of 17 states rose to ₹9.5 trillion (3.2% of GSDP) from ₹7.8 trillion (2.9% of GSDP) in FY2024.
 - The deterioration was largely driven by **an increase in revenue deficit**, with a smaller contribution from capital spending.
- **Surge in revenue deficit:**
 - **Revenue deficit** is the excess of revenue expenditure of the Government over its revenue receipts. It leads to increase in borrowings without corresponding capital/asset formation.
 - Revenue deficit **nearly doubled** to ₹2.1 trillion (0.7% of GSDP) in FY2025 from ₹1.1 trillion (0.4% of GSDP) in FY2024.
 - This resulted from -
 - **Slower growth in revenue receipts** (6.3% in FY2025 vs 7.9% in FY2024).
 - **Stable revenue expenditure growth** at 9% year-on-year (YoY).
- **Negative implications of rising revenue deficit:**
 - In contrast to the Centre's fiscal compression, states witnessed revenue pressure.
 - Higher share of revenue deficit in total fiscal deficit indicates **less room for productive capital expenditure**.

- Capex share in fiscal deficit declined to 78% in FY2025, below the 80–90% trend in FY2022–24.

Capital Expenditure Dynamics:

- **Overall capex performance:**
 - **Total capital spending** - ₹7.4 trillion in FY2025 PA, ₹678 billion higher than the amount spent in FY2024.
 - However, the **incremental capex** of the states in FY2025 PA was sharply lower than the incremental spending of Rs 910-1,120 billion during FY2022-FY2024.
 - Capex fell short of Revised Estimates by ₹1.1 trillion.

Budgeted Projections for FY2026 and Future Outlook:

- **FY2026 capex targets:**
 - For the budget estimates of FY2026, 17 states have indicated capital spending of Rs 9.5 trillion, 29.2% higher on a YoY basis or an incremental spending of Rs 2.1 trillion in FY2026, relative to the FY2025 PA.
 - This seems **a little unrealistic** given that it is double the average incremental capital expenditure of Rs 1 trillion during FY2022-FY2024.
- **Long-term challenges and reforms:**
 - Recommendations of **Finance Commission, Pay Commission**, and changes in GST compensation cess will significantly impact state finances.
 - **Policies** incentivising capex over revenue expenditure within the fiscal space are crucial.