

Current Affairs - 05 August 2025

ARTICLE 370 - JAMMU & KASHMIR SIX YEARS AFTER ABROGATION

- The abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, and the subsequent transformation of Jammu & Kashmir into a Union Territory (UT) was projected as a **move aimed at ensuring national integration, development, and peace.**
- Six years later, a **critical review reveals mixed progress** across politics, security, economy, and tourism, with persistent structural and governance challenges.

Political Developments - Democratic Revival with Limited Authority:

- **Resumption of electoral politics:**
 - National Conference (NC) leads the new elected government, seen as a return to democratic representation.
 - However, key powers (police, services) have been retained by the **Lieutenant Governor**, curbing the authority of the elected CM.
- **Push for statehood and symbolic politics:**
 - First cabinet decision: Resolution for restoration of full statehood.
 - CM Omar Abdullah reaffirmed special status and revived Martyrs' Day (July 13), stirring tensions with the Centre.

Economy - Investment, Revenue Surges:

- **Industrial investments:**
 - The government says **investment realisation in 2024-25 is 10 times** more than the pre-2020 period.
- **Revenue and GDP growth:**
 - The state's GDP doubled from Rs 1.17 lakh crore in 2015-16 to Rs 2.45 lakh crore in 2023-24, and hit Rs 2.63 lakh crore in 2024-25.
- **Power sector reforms:**
 - 5.74 lakh smart meters installed; transmission losses cut by 25%.
 - Winter capacity drops to 600–650 MW, requiring central allocations.
 - Rs 10,000 crore invested in power infra; generation to double by Dec 2026.

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- **Banking and fiscal health:**

- J&K Bank turned around from Rs 1,139 crore loss (2019-20) to Rs 1,700 crore profit (2023-24).
- **NPAs halved, but fiscal health fragile -**
 - The fiscal deficit remains high.
 - 70% of government expenditure depends on central grants.
 - Core sectors like agriculture and industry remain underperforming.

Tourism - High Growth Amid Security Fragility:

- **Boom followed by setback:**
 - Record 2.11 crore tourists in 2023, with tourism contributing 7% to GDP.
 - 75 new destinations opened; over 2,000 homestays registered.
- **Pahalgam attack's impact:**
 - Led to closure of 50 tourist spots, later reopened in phases (16 reopened).
 - Adventure tourism is restricted to areas with strong security presence.
- **Private investment challenges:**
 - Only five hotels joined the new industrial scheme.
 - Projects by Radisson and JW Marriott are exceptions.
 - Land availability cited as a key hurdle.

Conclusion:

- Six years post-abrogation of Article 370, **Jammu & Kashmir presents a complex picture** — notable gains in security and investment, but with persistent gaps in political autonomy, fiscal sustainability, and private sector confidence.
 - The Pahalgam attack has refocused attention on fragile peace, reminding stakeholders that **security and development must go hand-in-hand** for lasting integration and prosperity.
 - Unless **structural challenges are addressed** and **private investment catalysed**, the vision of economic integration and prosperity may remain unfulfilled.
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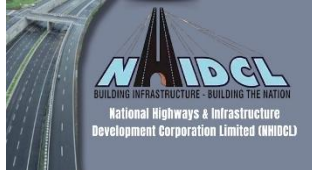
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NATIONAL HIGHWAYS & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (NHIDCL)



- It is a **Central Public Sector Undertaking (CPSU)** under the **Ministry of Road Transport & Highways**, Government of India.
- The company was **incorporated** on the 18th of July, **2014**, under the **Companies Act, 2013**.
- It is a **wholly owned Government entity**.
- It is **dedicated exclusively** to the task of **constructing/upgrading/widening National Highways in parts of the country which shares international boundaries with neighbouring countries** in order to promote regional connectivity on a substantial basis.
- NHIDCL's **domain extends** across the **Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands**; the state of **Uttarakhand**; and the entire **Northeastern Region (NER)**.
- Its **ambit** includes **tunnels, logistics hubs, interstate and international road linkages**, and advanced **mobility facilities** - all serving as the arteries of India's economic and geopolitical aspirations.
- As the **executing arm of the Government** of India's vision to realize the "**Act East Policy**," NHIDCL plays a pivotal role as the nodal agency in the Northeastern region.

UN WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME



- It is a **branch of the United Nations** that deals with **hunger eradication** and promotes **food security** in the world.



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- It is the world's largest humanitarian agency and **was established in 1961.**
- The organization's work is guided by **Sustainable Development Goal 2**, which aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030.
- It operates in more than 120 countries, provides food assistance during emergencies and works with communities to enhance nutrition and generate resilience.
- **Funding:** WFP is funded by voluntary donations from governments, corporates and private donors.
- It is a member of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- India is a member of this organization and WFP has been **functioning in India since 1963.**
- WFP was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 2020.**
- **Reports by WFP:** Report released by the WFP is the **Global Report on Food Crisis** which describes the scale of acute hunger in the world.
- **Headquarters:** Rome, Italy.

AYURVEDA AAHARA



- Ayurveda Aahara refers to **food products developed in line with the holistic dietary principles of Ayurveda**, one of the world's oldest systems of health and wellness.
- These preparations emphasise balance, seasonal suitability, and using natural ingredients and herbs known for their therapeutic benefits.
- This significant step brings India's time-honoured food wisdom into the mainstream, following the introduction of the **Food Safety and Standards (Ayurveda Aahara) Regulations in 2022**. These regulations recognise foods based on recipes, ingredients, and processes from authoritative Ayurvedic texts, and the new list brings unprecedented clarity and confidence to consumers and businesses alike.



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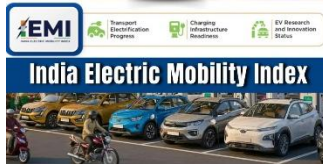


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- The list, issued under Note (1) of Schedule B of the regulations, draws directly from classical **Ayurvedic texts listed in Schedule A**, ensuring the authenticity and traditional basis of these food formulations.
- This initiative aims to **assist Food Business Operators (FBOs)** by providing a clear and credible reference for the **manufacture of Ayurveda Aahara products**.
- This initiative marks a pivotal moment in **enhancing regulatory clarity for industry stakeholders** while promoting the widespread adoption of Ayurveda-based nutrition for better public health outcomes.

INDIA ELECTRIC MOBILITY INDEX



- It is a first-of-its-kind tool developed to comprehensively track and **benchmark the progress of States and Union Territories (UTs)** in achieving their **Electric Mobility goals**.
- The India Electric Mobility Index (IEMI) tracks, evaluates and scores all Indian States and UTs out of **100 across 16 indicators under three-core themes**:
 - **Transport Electrification Progress** to capture demand-side adoption,
 - **Charging Infrastructure Readiness** to track allied charging infrastructure development and
 - **EV Research and Innovation Status**: Covers supply-side ecosystem R&D efforts.
- It enables evaluation across States and Union Territories, identifying key drivers of success as well as areas requiring targeted interventions. The Index aims to inform decision-making, foster healthy competition among states, and promote sharing of best practices.
- The Index underscores the **importance of state-level coordination**, integrated planning, and cross-sectoral collaboration in achieving India's electric mobility vision.



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- By identifying strengths and gaps, the Index aims to support states in aligning with national goals while addressing local needs.
- It provides a transparent, comparative framework to assess progress across key themes such as electrification, infrastructure, and innovation.
- It enables states to benchmark their efforts, identify gaps, and learn from each other's successes.

SUPREME COURT EMPOWERS POLLUTION CONTROL BOARDS TO IMPOSE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPENSATION

The Supreme Court ruled that Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) are empowered to impose environmental compensation on polluting entities as part of their statutory mandate under the Water Act and Air Act.

A bench comprising Justices PS Narasimha and Manoj Misra clarified that **PCBs can demand restitutionary or compensatory damages** through fixed monetary sums or bank guarantees as preventive measures against potential environmental harm.

PCBs' Statutory Authority to Levy Compensation

- The Supreme Court expanded the powers of PCBs, affirming their authority to impose and collect restitutionary and compensatory damages for restoring polluted air and water bodies.
- The judgment clarified that PCBs can demand fixed sums of money or bank guarantees as ex-ante preventive measures under **Sections 33A (Water Act, 1974) and 31A (Air Act, 1981)**.
- **Scope and Limits of Compensation Powers**
 - the Court cautioned that such compensation cannot be levied for every statutory violation.
 - It is applicable only when **actual environmental damage has occurred or is imminent**.

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- The Court directed that these powers must be exercised only after framing **subordinate legislation** (rules and regulations) under both Acts.
- These rules must ensure adherence to **principles of natural justice**, providing a fair process before imposing compensatory measures.
- **Jurisprudence Backing the Ruling**
 - The judgment drew on landmark cases like **Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum** (1996) and **Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action** (1996).
 - The judgements in these cases emphasized environmental restitution as a constitutional and statutory obligation, distinct from punitive sanctions.

Principles Laid Down by the Court

- The Court established key principles guiding PCBs:
 - **Distinction Between Remedial and Punitive Measures:** Restitutionary compensation is preventive/remedial, not punitive. Fines or imprisonment are punitive and require judicial procedures.
 - **Non-Punitive Nature of Compensation Orders:** Monetary compensation for environmental damage is not punitive if imposed under regulatory powers.
 - **Polluter Pays Principle:** This principle is part of Indian law and applies when:
 - Environmental thresholds are breached, causing damage.
 - Environmental damage occurs even if thresholds are not breached.
 - Potential environmental risks are identified, irrespective of breaches.
 - **Duty of Preventive Action:** PCBs must act proactively (ex-ante), even without proven damage, using their powers under Sections 33A and 31A to avert potential environmental harm.

Broad Mandate and Regulatory Responsibilities

- The Apex Court highlighted that PCBs possess **expansive regulatory powers** under the Water and Air Acts, including authority to **shut down industries, stop essential services**, and issue remedial directions to prevent and control pollution.
 - These powers come with **enormous responsibilities** to uphold environmental protection.
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ETHANOL BLENDING - A CLEANER STEP WITH MILEAGE AND MAINTENANCE

TRADE-OFFS

- India's transition toward energy self-reliance and carbon reduction has achieved a landmark with the nationwide rollout of E20 fuel, petrol blended with 20% ethanol.
- The target, initially set for 2030, has been met five years ahead of schedule in 2025.
- While the move bolsters energy security, supports sugarcane farmers, and cuts crude oil imports, it has raised concerns among vehicle owners and experts regarding its effects on fuel efficiency, engine health, and long-term maintenance.

Ethanol Blending and Its Policy Context

- Ethanol is an alcohol-based biofuel typically derived from sugarcane, maize, or other biomass sources.
- Its blending with petrol reduces carbon emissions and helps India reduce dependency on imported fossil fuels.
- The government's Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme, launched in 2003 and accelerated over the past decade, first achieved a 10% ethanol blending (E10) milestone in 2022.
- In 2025, the E20 rollout was declared complete nationwide.
- The achievement aligns with India's broader renewable energy and energy security ambitions under the National Bio-Energy Programme.

Environmental and Economic Gains

- The **E20 programme is estimated to reduce India's crude oil import bill by over Rs. 50,000 crore annually** and reduce carbon dioxide emissions significantly.
- It also provides economic support to farmers by increasing the demand for sugarcane and other feedstock crops.
- However, while macroeconomic and environmental benefits are substantial, E20's implications for individual vehicle performance and user costs present a complex trade-off.

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Impact on Fuel Efficiency

- One of the most debated impacts of ethanol blending is the drop in mileage.
- **Ethanol contains about 30% less energy per litre than petrol.** This energy deficit translates into increased fuel consumption per kilometre driven.
- **Central Govt's View:** The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) has clarified that the mileage loss is “marginal”, around 1-2% for E10-designed vehicles calibrated for E20 and 3-6% for others. With proper engine tuning, the Ministry says efficiency losses can be minimised.

Corrosion and Compatibility Issues

- The more serious concern relates to vehicle maintenance. **Ethanol is hygroscopic**, meaning it absorbs moisture from the atmosphere. This can lead to:
 - **Corrosion** of metal components such as fuel tanks, fuel lines, injectors, and exhausts.
 - **Degradation** of rubber and plastic components like seals, gaskets, and hoses.
 - **Alteration of air-fuel ratio**, affecting combustion and performance, especially in engines without calibrated ECUs.
- Experts from firms like Primus Partners and FADA (Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations) have warned that **older vehicles not designed for E20 may suffer from increased wear and tear, leading to higher maintenance costs.**

Future Outlook and Higher Blends

- While the E20 transition is already posing technical challenges, discussions have begun on potential future blends like E30 or E40. Experts caution that higher blends will necessitate:
 - Dual fuel dispensing infrastructure at petrol pumps.
 - Retrofitting of older vehicles or phase-outs.
 - Regulatory clarity and greater consumer awareness.
 - Until such safeguards are in place, expanding beyond E20 may increase the burden on both consumers and service providers.
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