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REGULATING REGISTERED UNRECOGNISED POLITICAL PARTIES: PLUGGING THE GAPS IN POLITICAL FUNDING

A recent media investigation has revealed that six **Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs)**, all based in Gujarat, received donations of around Rs 1,700 crore in 2023-24. This is more than the combined donations of five nationally recognised parties, excluding the BJP, which received Rs 1,480 crore in the same period.

The revelation has raised serious concerns about opaque political funding and the misuse of tax exemptions by non-serious parties.

What Are Registered Political Parties?

- Political parties are associations or bodies of individuals formed by citizens.
- **Section 29A** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act) lays down the requirements for registering a political party with the Election Commission (EC).
- After scrutiny of the documents submitted, the EC registers the party as RUPP.
- RUPPs enjoy **three key benefits**:
 - Tax exemption on donations received under Section 12 of the Income Tax Act, 2025.
 - A common symbol for contesting general elections to the Lok Sabha or State Assemblies.
 - Twenty "star campaigners" during election campaigns.
- In return, RUPPs must fulfil certain obligations:
 - Maintain details of individual donors contributing more than Rs 20,000 in a financial year and submit them to the EC annually.
 - Under Section 29C of the RP Act, failure to do so leads to loss of income tax exemption.
 - Accept donations above Rs 2,000 only through cheque or bank transfer, as required by the Income Tax Act, 2025.

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The Problem of "Letter Pad Parties"

- As per the EC notification, India had more than 2,800 RUPPs as of July, but only around 750 contested the 2024 general elections.
- The rest have earned the moniker "letter pad parties", existing largely on paper.
- The core issue is the EC's limited power. The RP Act **does not explicitly empower** the EC to de-register a party that fails to contest elections, conduct inner-party elections or file required returns.

Way Forward

- **Empower the EC to de-register parties.** The Law Commission, in its 255th report, recommended amendments to allow de-registration of a party that fails to contest elections for ten consecutive years.
 - These reforms would enable action against non-serious parties that serve merely as a front for illegal financial transactions.
 - **Strengthen enforcement.** Even if de-registration powers are granted, parties may contest a few seats simply to meet the statutory requirement while continuing to misuse tax exemptions. Strict action against wrongdoing would act as a deterrent.
- **Introduce a vote threshold for tax exemptions.** The EC had earlier suggested that tax exemptions be given only to parties that win seats in the Lok Sabha or State Assemblies.
 - Analysts consider this undemocratic and extreme, since many parties contest elections consistently without winning.
 - Instead, they propose a vote percentage threshold, similar to the 1 per cent vote threshold used for allotting common symbols to RUPPs.

Conclusion

The RUPP framework was designed to nurture political participation, but weak statutory provisions and poor compliance have turned it into a loophole for opaque funding.

Empowering the EC to de-register non-serious parties, strengthening enforcement and linking tax exemptions to a reasonable vote threshold would restore integrity to political funding without stifling genuine small parties.

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BRICS AT 20: WHY INDIA SHOULD STEER THE GROUPING BEYOND "CONFRONTING THE WEST"

BRICS vs G7: The Numbers

- In 2000, Brazil, Russia, India and China together held roughly 23 per cent of global GDP (PPP), while the G7 held nearly 52 per cent.
- By 2024, the positions had reversed. The expanded 11-member BRICS accounted for about **36.8 per cent**, while the **G7's share fell below 29 per cent**.
- Other key comparisons:
 - **Population:** BRICS ~3.7 billion (49.5 per cent of world); G7 ~771 million (10 per cent)
 - **Nominal GDP:** BRICS ~\$28.5 trillion; G7 ~\$46.6 trillion
 - **Land area:** BRICS ~39.7 million sq km; G7 ~21.7 million sq km
 - **Oil production:** BRICS ~43.6 per cent of global output
 - **Natural gas:** BRICS ~36 per cent of global production
 - **Rare-earth reserves:** BRICS ~72 per cent of global reserves
 - **Agriculture:** BRICS produces 42 per cent of world wheat, 52 per cent of rice, 46 per cent of soybeans
 - **Growth:** BRICS projected at 3.8 per cent in 2025 and 3.7 per cent in 2026, over three times the G7 average
- BRICS accounts for roughly a quarter of global trade.
 - Intra-BRICS merchandise trade reached \$1.17 trillion in 2024, a 13-fold rise from \$84 billion two decades ago.
 - The bloc holds \$5.2 trillion in foreign reserves and produces 78.2 per cent of global mineral coal.
- However, **per capita GDP tells a different story:** the G7 averages around \$53,000 while BRICS averages roughly \$8,200.
- The bloc's weight comes from population and resource scale, not individual prosperity.

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Evolution of BRICS

- BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) began in 2006, following a Goldman Sachs projection identifying these economies as future growth engines.
- It evolved from a foreign ministers' dialogue into a leaders' forum. The first summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009.
- South Africa joined in 2010.
- In 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were added.
- Indonesia became the 11th member in January 2025.

The Dollar Question

- US President Donald Trump has threatened 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS nations if they create a new currency. This has largely shelved the idea of a single BRICS currency.
- Members have instead moved towards bilateral settlement in national currencies:
 - Russia and China settle over 90 per cent of trade in ruble and yuan.
 - Russia and India have moved about 90 per cent of direct payments to national currencies through Special Rupee Vostro Accounts authorised by the RBI.
 - India and the UAE have run a rupee-dirham system since July 2023.
 - India and Indonesia operationalised a rupee-rupiah framework in July 2026, with local-currency trade rising 163 per cent to \$8.45 billion in 1st two months of 2026.

Pakistan's Membership Bid

- Pakistan applied for membership in November 2023, but its bid remains contentious due to recurring balance-of-payments crises, IMF dependence, its record on terrorism, political instability and weak policy continuity.
- Its dependence on China could increase Beijing's influence, and it has limited capacity to contribute to the BRICS agenda.

Conclusion

The Iran-Israel-US conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war will test India's ability to secure a joint declaration. Beyond geopolitics, the summit will focus on resilient supply chains, reform of global financial institutions, strengthening the NDB and expanding intra-BRICS trade.

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RIVER-LINKING IS NOT THE SOLUTION

- At the Southern Zonal Council meeting, held recently in Mamallapuram, Union Home Minister Amit Shah stressed the need for early resolution of water disputes in the southern region.
- He also spoke of linking major rivers from the Brahmaputra to the Godavari and the Cauvery, claiming this could ensure India faces no water shortage for 100 years.

Why River-Linking Is Problematic?

- If routine disputes take years to resolve, the complications of inter-linking rivers would be far greater.
- Proponents, including Tamil Nadu, argue that river-linking would not disturb natural flows but only divert surplus water. Many experts are not convinced, for several reasons:
 - Once linking is allowed, beneficiary regions may demand water even during distress periods, eventually depriving original beneficiaries of their share.
 - There are serious concerns about adverse ecological consequences.
 - Kerala has strongly opposed the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link, warning that it would harm the Vembanad wetland system, into which the Pamba and Achankovil rivers drain.
- The National Water Development Agency counters that it has accounted for improving river flows during lean periods.

India's Limited Experience with Inter-Basin Transfers

- In the last 130-odd years, India has seen only a handful of inter-basin transfer projects, mostly in south India.
- The successful examples include:
 - Mullaperiyar dam
 - Parambikulam-Aliyar project
 - Krishna Water Supply Project
 - Indira Gandhi Canal Project

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- After 2014, the Union government formed a **Special Committee** for Interlinking of Rivers, which has held over two dozen meetings. Yet there has been little progress.
- In 2024, PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the Rs 44,000 crore **Ken-Betwa Link Project**. This has already led to agitations by tribal populations in Chhatarpur.

The Case for Demand-Side Management

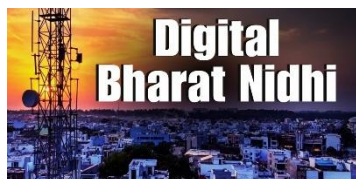
- Many experts argue that governments at the Centre and in the States, along with civil society, should **shift focus** from supply-side interventions to demand-side management.
- The reasons are practical:
 - Land is increasingly scarce.
 - Public resistance to land acquisition is growing.
 - The era of mega irrigation projects is almost over.
- The priority must be conserving available water and using it judiciously. Specific measures suggested include:
 - A massive programme to sensitise and incentivise farmers on optimal water use.
 - Immediate curbs on indiscriminate groundwater extraction, which is encouraged by free electricity schemes for agriculture in many States and is leading to ecological disaster.
- Unless water conservation becomes a shared commitment of all stakeholders, disputes will remain the norm.

Conclusion

- River-linking promises a supply-side fix but ignores ecological risks, federal tensions and the Centre's own poor record in resolving existing disputes.
- With land scarce and mega projects facing resistance, India must prioritise conservation, efficient irrigation and groundwater regulation.
- Demand-side management, not grand engineering, offers the sustainable path to water security.

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DIGITAL BHARAT NIDHI

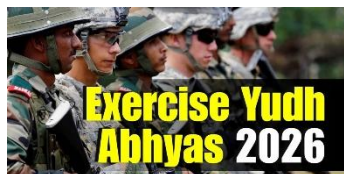


- It was formerly known as the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**.
- It now operates under the **Telecommunication Act, 2023**.
- **Mandate:** It has mandate to **support universal service** through promoting access and **delivery of telecommunication service** in **underserved rural, remote and urban areas**.
- It is an **attached office of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT)**, Ministry of Communications.
- **Objectives of Digital Bharat Nidhi:**
 - **Support universal service** through promoting access to and delivery of telecommunication services in underserved rural, remote and urban areas
 - **Support research and development** of telecommunication services, technologies, and products
 - **Support pilot projects**, consultancy assistance and advisory support towards provision of service under clause (a) above
 - **Support introduction of telecommunication services**, technologies, and products
- **Funding:** The contributions made by telecom companies towards the Digital Bharat Nidhi will first be credited to the **Consolidated Fund of India (CFI)**.
- The balance to the credit of the DBN **is not lapsed at the end of the financial year**.

Utilization of Funds: Funds collected under the DBN will be used to support promoting access to and **delivery of telecommunication services** in underserved rural, remote and urban areas; fund research and development of telecommunication services, technologies, and product.

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EXERCISE YUDH ABHYAS 2026



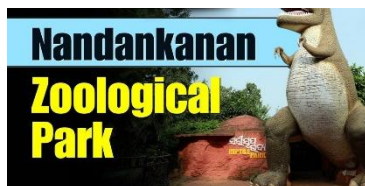
- It is the **annual bilateral military exercise** between the **Indian Army** and the **United States Army**.
- It focuses on enhancing interoperability, joint operational capabilities, and military cooperation between the two countries.
- **2026 Edition:**
 - It is the **22nd edition** of the exercise.
 - The **first phase** is scheduled at the **Mahajan Field Firing Range in Rajasthan**, near the **Pakistan border**.
 - The forces will **then move** to the **high-altitude terrain of Auli in Uttarakhand**, close to the **Line of Actual Control with China**.
 - It focuses on **high-altitude warfare, long-range precision fires, counter-drone capabilities**, and greater operational interoperability.
 - The drills consist of a command post exercise and a field training exercise, culminating in a **combined live-fire demonstration** involving U.S. and Indian **long-range precision fires and rocket systems**.
 - This year's exercise marks a historic milestone with the **first-of-its-kind deployment of advanced counterdrone systems to India**.
 - The **integration of the mobile low, slow, small unmanned aircraft integrated defeat system (MLIDS)** allows both nations to adapt together to emerging battlefield threats and reinforce regional readiness.

Other Exercises between India and USA:

- **Vajra Prahar:** Indian Army Special Forces + U.S. Army Special Forces
- **Cope India:** Indian Air Force + U.S. Air Force
- **Malabar:** Indian Navy + U.S. Navy, Japan, and Australia
- **Tiger Triumph:** India–U.S. tri-service exercise with a focus including amphibious and HADR operations.

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NANDANKANAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK



- Nandankanan, literally meaning “The Garden of Heaven”, is located on the **banks of Kanjia Lake** in Odisha.
- Unlike other zoos in the country, it has been **built inside a natural forest (Chandaka Forest)**, which is moist deciduous in nature and remains semi-evergreen.
- It also **contains a botanical garden**, and **part of it has been declared a sanctuary**.
- It is the **first zoo in India** to **gain membership in the World Association of Zoos & Aquariums (WAZA)**.
- It is the **sole zoo in India** to **inspire an express train named after it**—the **Nandankanan Express**, as recognised by the Indian Railways.
- Since its inception, the zoo has been successful in breeding several endangered species, including Leopard, Tiger, Lion-tailed macaque, Asiatic lion, Nilgiri langur, Mouse deer, Indian pangolin, Indian crocodiles, Ratel, Brow-antlered deer, and many other water and land birds.
- Nandankanan has the distinction of being the **first zoo in the world to breed Melanistic and White tigers** and the **sole conservation breeding center for Indian Pangolins** across the globe.
- It is the **first zoo in the country** to feature an **open-top enclosure for leopards** and also the **first where endangered Ratels were born in captivity**.
- It is also known for being the **first one** to begin **captive breeding of Gharials**.