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Current Affairs - 24 September 2025

INDIAN TEA SECTOR - SCOPE FOR GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES

- India is the **second-largest producer and consumer of tea** and the **third-largest exporter**
- Tea cultivation spans across Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, providing employment to over **1.2 million workers directly** and sustaining millions more indirectly.
- **Production:** In 2024, India produced **1.303 billion kg** of tea, contributing significantly to the global production of **7.074 billion kg**.
- **Consumption:** Domestic consumption stood at **1.22 billion kg**, highlighting India's centrality in balancing global supply and demand.
- **Exports:** India exported **255 million kg**, valued at nearly **\$800 million**, positioning itself after Kenya, China, and Sri Lanka.

Challenges in the Sector

- **Low realisation per export unit** compared to Sri Lanka and Kenya due to quality inconsistencies.
- **Stagnant domestic per capita consumption** of 840 grams per year, compared with **Turkey's 3 kg per year**, the highest globally.
- Pressure from **climate change, ageing tea bushes, and rising labour costs** is affecting productivity.

Recent Steps by the Government and Industry

- Initiatives under the **Tea Development Board** to modernise tea estates.
- Promotional efforts through the **India Tea brand** to improve recognition in global markets.
- Incentives for organic and speciality tea production to capture premium markets.

News Summary

- At the **India International Tea Convention in Kochi**, experts underscored India's untapped potential in the global tea trade.



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- **Focus on Quality:** India must improve quality standards to secure better prices in international markets.
- **Exploring New Markets:** India needs to expand exports beyond traditional buyers to newer markets such as **South America and Africa**, where demand is rising.
- **Domestic Market Potential:** Indian consumers are increasingly willing to pay for quality. The participants noted that if per capita consumption rises even to **1 kg annually**, India could absorb its entire production domestically.
- **Comparative Position:** While Kenya exports almost its entire tea output and Sri Lanka earns \$1.4 billion from 245 million kg exports, India earns significantly less despite exporting a higher volume.
- The experts concluded that with its scale, heritage, and growing consumer sophistication, India has all the “ingredients to become a tea superpower.”

HEALTHCARE AS AN INVESTMENT - INDIA'S JOURNEY TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT 2047

- **India's healthcare policy** under the current government has **undergone a paradigm shift** — from being viewed as welfare expenditure to becoming an investment in human capital.
- This reorientation **aligns healthcare with the vision of building a Viksit Bharat** (Developed India) by 2047, ensuring **equity, economic productivity, and social transformation**.

Evolution of Healthcare Policy in India - Gujarat Model:

- **The 108 Emergency Ambulance Service** brought rapid medical attention to rural and urban communities.
- Simultaneously, **POSHAN**, a nutrition programme for tribal and rural children, addressed micronutrient deficiencies and laid a foundation for better learning outcomes.
- **Lesson learned:** Investing in prevention pays dividends in productivity and prosperity.



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Major National Initiatives Since 2014:

- **Ayushman Bharat (2018):**
 - **Overview:** It has become the **world's largest** publicly funded health insurance scheme, covering over **55 crore** economically vulnerable citizens.
 - **Outcomes:** Prevents households from slipping into poverty due to catastrophic health expenditure. Encourages private hospital upgrades in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan (2018):**
 - **Targets** pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children.
 - **Focus** on supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring, and behavioural change.
 - **Long-term impact:** Enhances cognitive development and higher future earnings.
- **Jan Aushadhi Kendras:** Over 16,900 Jan Aushadhi Kendras supplying quality generics at steep discounts, and reducing out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure on healthcare.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission:**
 - Though often framed as a sanitation drive, it is equally a **public-health revolution**.
 - **Constructed millions of toilets** across villages and towns, and have drastically reduced open defecation, cutting water-borne disease and saving an estimated 60,000-70,000 infant lives annually.
 - According to **UNICEF**, each rural family has **estimated savings of Rs 50,000 per year** thanks to the mission.

Strengthening Medical Education:

- In 10 years, the number of **medical colleges has grown to 780** from 387 in the last 60 years.
 - Today, India produces over **1,18,000 doctors every year**, the most in the world.
 - **Significance:** Expands skilled human resources for India's growing healthcare needs.
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LESSONS FROM INDIA'S VACCINATION DRIVE

- Vaccination is widely regarded as one of the most effective, cost-efficient, and sustainable public health measures, **responsible for saving millions of lives worldwide.**
- India, home to one-sixth of the global population, operates the **world's largest immunisation programme**, reaching both infants and pregnant women on an unprecedented scale.
- **Over the past decade, the country has made remarkable progress in improving immunisation coverage**, introducing new vaccines, and integrating digital innovations into public health infrastructure.
- However, **despite these successes, challenges such as vaccine hesitancy, disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, and gaps in last-mile delivery persist.**

Achievements and Global Recognition

- India's vaccination efforts have produced several **historic milestones.**
- The country has maintained **polio-free status since 2011**, eliminated maternal and neonatal tetanus by 2015, and was declared **Yaws-free in 2016.**
- The **nationwide Measles-Rubella campaign** between 2017 and 2019 vaccinated nearly 35 crore children, making it one of the largest catch-up campaigns ever conducted.
- The COVID-19 pandemic tested India's **resilience**, but also highlighted its **capacity.**
- The **COVID-19 vaccination programme**, launched in January 2021, rapidly scaled to deliver more than 220 crore doses by January 2023, covering nearly the entire eligible population.
- This **achievement underscored India's manufacturing strength and innovation**, bolstered by domestic vaccine development and global solidarity initiatives like **Vaccine Maitri**, which supplied doses to low- and middle-income countries.
- In recognition of these efforts, India received the **Measles and Rubella Champion Award in 2024**, reflecting its global leadership in immunisation.



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Persistent Challenges

- Despite progress, several obstacles hinder universal coverage. Hard-to-reach geographies, migratory populations, and low-awareness clusters remain under-served.
- Moreover, vaccine hesitancy, often fuelled by misinformation, creates pockets of vulnerability.
- The COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted routine services, contributing to measles outbreaks between 2022 and 2024, exposing immunity gaps.

The Way Forward

- **Technology and System Strengthening**
 - A defining feature of India's immunisation strategy has been the integration of **digital platforms and logistics systems**.
 - Building on the success of Co-WIN, the government launched U-WIN, a platform for end-to-end digital vaccination management, ensuring seamless record-keeping for children and pregnant women.
 - Supporting systems such as the **electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN)** and the **National Cold Chain Management Information System** help track stocks and monitor cold chains in real-time, while the SAFE-VAC module ensures vaccine safety reporting.
 - **Towards a One-Health Future**
 - Looking ahead, India's immunisation programme must be closely integrated with **disease surveillance and pandemic preparedness**.
 - The experience of COVID-19 and recent measles outbreaks has underscored the importance of adopting a **One-Health approach**, linking human, animal, and environmental surveillance systems.
 - **By aligning immunisation with broader health security frameworks, India can both safeguard its population and contribute to global epidemic preparedness.**
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GETTING GST 2.0 TO RUN LIKE A WELL-OILED MACHINE

The Road to Reform and Simplification of Tax Slabs

- **The Road to Reform**

- The **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)** played a **pivotal role** in advocating for change.
- Since December 2024, it has consistently highlighted the **inefficiencies of the old system**, cumbersome compliance requirements, inverted duty structures, and classification disputes.
- **MSMEs, in particular, bore the brunt of these challenges**, often struggling with high tax burdens on essential goods and procedural bottlenecks.
- The **reforms announced in September 2025 represent the fruition of years of policy advocacy**, industry engagement, and economic analysis, including repeated recommendations from the Economic Survey.

- **Simplification of Tax Slabs**

- At the heart of GST 2.0 lies a **fundamental restructuring of tax rates**.
- The **previous four-tier system (5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%) has been collapsed into three simplified slabs**: 5% for essentials, 18% as the standard rate, and 40% for luxury and sin goods.
- This **move not only reduces confusion** and litigation but also directly benefits consumers.
- The **finance minister emphasized that 99% of goods and services will now fall under zero, 5%, or 18%**, a shift that translates into tangible savings for households, particularly middle- and lower-income families.
- The **decision to move several daily-use goods, household items, toiletries, and small appliances**, into lower tax brackets represents a deliberate attempt to **ease the cost-of-living burden and curb inflationary pressures**.



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Broader Economic Implications

- **Reduced costs for households will spur demand**, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where price sensitivity is high.
- Analysts estimate that **the reforms could add over one percentage point to GDP growth**, largely through heightened consumption and improved business confidence.
- **Inflation moderation**, particularly in essential commodities, **will provide additional relief to households**.
- For the government, however, **the reforms entail short-term revenue sacrifices running into tens of thousands of crores**.
- Yet, these costs may be offset in the medium term by **increased consumption**, greater formalisation, improved compliance, and fiscal buoyancy.
- **The reform thus reflects a strategic trade-off** between immediate fiscal pressures and long-term economic gains.

The Challenges Ahead

- Despite its promise, **GST 2.0's success hinges on effective implementation**.
 - **Ensuring that tax cuts are passed on to consumers**, rather than absorbed upstream, will require vigilance.
 - **Administrative readiness across the Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN)**, State revenue departments, and metrology and labelling authorities will be crucial.
 - **For MSMEs**, which often lack sophisticated legal or accounting support, **targeted assistance and simplified guidance are essential**.
 - **Feedback mechanisms must also be strengthened** to address transitional challenges, classification disputes, handling of old stock, and packaging adjustments.
 - **The reform must remain dynamic**, capable of **fine-tuning** based on the lived experiences of businesses and consumers alike.
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FRANCE RECOGNISES PALESTINE: IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAEL AND GAZA WAR

- Palestine enjoys wide international recognition, has diplomatic missions, and competes in global events.
- Yet, it lacks agreed borders, a capital, and full sovereignty due to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.
- Recognition is thus **symbolic, signaling moral and political support rather than immediate change on the ground.**

The Question of Palestinian Statehood

- Under the **1933 Montevideo Convention**, statehood requires defined territory, a permanent population, a government, and capacity for international relations.
- For Palestine, these pillars remain contested under Israeli occupation.
- **Territory**
 - Palestinian lands — West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza — are effectively under Israel's control.
 - Settlement expansion and annexation efforts further erode prospects of territorial sovereignty.
- **Permanent Population**
 - The Gaza war has devastated the population, with over 65,000 deaths estimated and widespread famine.
 - Such conditions threaten the very survival of Palestinians as a people.
- **Government**
 - The Palestinian Authority (PA) governs limited West Bank areas, while Hamas controls Gaza under blockade.
 - Calls for PA reform and Hamas' disarmament highlight governance challenges, leaving sovereignty curtailed.
- **International Recognition**



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- Global recognition strengthens Palestine's ability to engage diplomatically, even as effective control of land, population, and governance remains compromised.
- Recognition thus primarily boosts Palestine's lobbying capacity on the world stage.

Israel's Response to Growing Recognition of Palestine

- Israel has reacted to increasing global recognition of Palestine by intensifying military action and deepening its occupation.
- After the UK's recognition, Prime Minister Netanyahu vowed that a Palestinian state "will never be established" and claimed credit for blocking it despite international pressure.
- Similar defiance followed the UNGA's vote for a two-state solution.
- Each escalation on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank strengthens Israel's control, further diminishing the feasibility of a Palestinian state.

India's Stand on Palestine

- India has long supported the Palestinian cause as part of its foreign policy.
 - In 1974, India became the first non-Arab state to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
 - In 1988, India was among the first to recognize the State of Palestine.
 - In 1996, India opened its Representative Office in Gaza, later moved to Ramallah in 2003.
 - **Policy Approach**
 - India advocates a negotiated **Two-State solution**, seeking a sovereign, independent, and viable Palestinian state coexisting peacefully with Israel.
 - The Two-State solution refers to establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on pre-1967 borders.
 - It emphasizes diplomacy, dialogue, de-escalation, and early resumption of peace talks.
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