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Current Affairs - 26 September 2025

AGNI-PRIME MISSILE INDIA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS AGNI-PRIME MISSILE FROM RAIL-BASED LAUNCHER



- Agni-P is a new generation **nuclear-capable Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM)**.
- Agni Prime Ballistic Missile was **tested for the first time in June 2021**. It is lighter than any of the previous Agni missiles.
- **Features of Agni-Prime Missile**
 - It is a **two-stage** canisterised **solid propellant** ballistic missile.
 - This is a **surface-to-surface** ballistic missile
 - **Range:** 1000 to 2000 km.
 - **Payload:** Around 1,000 Kg (It can carry high explosive, thermobaric or nuclear warheads).
 - It incorporates upgrades such as **propulsion systems**, composite rocket motor casings, and advanced navigation and guidance systems.
 - Agni-Prime may be **launched by train or road and stored** for an extended period of time.
- Thus far, only **Russia, the US, China**, and possibly North Korea had the capability of launching long range ballistic missiles from rail-based platforms.
- Rail-based mobile launcher is a **first-of-its-kind capability for India**.
 - This launcher can seamlessly move across the rail network without any preconditions and offers cross-country mobility.
 - It is designed to deliver a **quick reaction time, operate with reduced visibility**, and is self-sustained with independent launch features
 - It also comes fitted with **advanced communication systems** and robust protection mechanisms, ensuring reliability even in high-threat environments.



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UNEP YOUNG CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH PRIZE

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OF THE EARTH PRIZE



CHAMPIONS
OF THE EARTH

- It is UN Environment Programme's flagship initiative on youth engagement.
- It was established in 2017, relaunched in 2025 in partnership with Planet A.
- **Eligibility:** The annual prize recognises individuals under 30 for pioneering solutions to the planet's most pressing environmental challenges.
- **Prize money:** Each winner receives \$20,000 in seed funding, mentoring and access to a global platform to scale their ideas.

The 2025 Young Champions of the Earth are:

- **Jinali Mody (India):** Founded **Banofi Leather**, which produces leather alternatives made from banana crop waste. This reduces water use, toxic waste, and CO₂ emissions.
- **Joseph Nguthiru (Kenya):** Started **HyaPak company** converts the invasive species **hyacinth** in **Lake Naivasha** into packaging bags and **biodegradable seedling wrappers**.
- **Noemi Florea (US):** She has **founded Cycleau**, a compact water reuse system, in consultation with dozens of marginalized communities. The company transforms greywater into drinking water.

What is the UN Environment Programme?

- UNEP is the leading global **voice on the environment**.
- Since **its founding in 1972**, UNEP has served as a **neutral convener** of Member States, civil society, the private sector and UN agencies to address humanity's most pressing environmental challenges.



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NATIONAL GEOSCIENCE AWARDS 2024



- It was **instituted in 1966** by the **Ministry of Mines, Government of India.**
- The **National Geoscience Awards** (formerly known as the **National Mineral Awards** until 2009) are among the country's **oldest and most prestigious honors** in the field of geosciences.
- **Objective:** To honour **individuals and teams** for extraordinary achievements and outstanding contributions in various **fields of geosciences**. mineral discovery & exploration, Mining Technology & Mineral Beneficiation, fundamental/ applied geosciences.
- **Eligibility:** **Any citizen of India** with significant contribution in any field of geosciences is eligible for the award.
- It is **awarded annually** under the **following three categories:**
 - National Geoscience Award for Lifetime Achievement
 - National Geoscience Award
 - National Young Geoscientist Award
- For the year 2024, 12 awards have been finalized under these three award categories, which include **09 individual and 03 team awards.**

FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION REGULATION ACT (FCRA)



- The **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA)** was originally enacted in **1976** during the **Emergency** to **prevent foreign influence** on India's internal affairs through financial contributions.
- The **FCRA, 2010**, currently in force, regulates the **acceptance and utilisation of foreign funds** by individuals, associations, and companies in India.



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- Its **primary objective** is to ensure that **foreign donations do not compromise national sovereignty, integrity, or internal security**, and are used only for **legitimate developmental purposes**.

Amendments to FCRA

FCRA (Amendment), 2010

- Consolidated the 1976 law.
- Expanded coverage to associations, NGOs, and companies.
- Strengthened the regulatory framework.

FCRA (Amendment), 2020 Key Changes

- **Ban on Transfers:** Prohibits NGOs from transferring foreign contributions to other NGOs or individuals.
- **Mandatory Aadhaar:** All office bearers must provide Aadhaar/passport/OCI details for registration.
- **FCRA Account:** All contributions must be received only in the **designated SBI branch, New Delhi**.
- **Reduced Administrative Expenses:** Limit cut from **50% to 20%** of foreign funds.
- **Renewal of Licence:** Renewal contingent on government scrutiny for fictitious entities or misuse.
- **Suspension Extension:** Suspension of registration can last up to **360 days**.
- **Surrender Provision:** Organisations can voluntarily surrender their FCRA licence, subject to approval.
- **Bar on Public Servants:** Public servants are prohibited from receiving foreign contributions.

FCRA Rules (Amendment), 2022

- Increased the annual limit for **foreign remittances from relatives abroad** from **₹1 lakh to ₹10 lakh** without prior intimation.
 - Simplified compliance for smaller transactions but reinforced safeguards against foreign funds that may threaten **national interests**.
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REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA - KARNATAKA HIGH COURT ON SAHYOG PORTAL

Sahyog Portal - A Public Good:

- **Launched:** October 2024 by the **Union Home Ministry**, and maintained by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (**I4C**).
- **Purpose:** A centralised channel (which connects central agencies, state police, and online intermediaries to combat cybercrime) for issuing takedown notices to intermediaries.
- **Legal basis:** Section 79(3)(b), **IT Act, 2000** – intermediaries lose “safe harbour protection” if they fail to act upon government notices of unlawful content.
- **Operational data:**
 - 65 intermediaries and nodal officers onboarded by April 2025.
 - 130 takedown notices issued (Oct 2024 – Apr 2025) to platforms including Google, YouTube, Amazon, Microsoft.

X Corporation’s Challenge:

- **Claim:** Sahyog is a “**copyright portal**” creating a parallel, extra-legal content blocking regime.
- **Arguments:**
 - Section 79(3)(b) notices **bypass** stricter procedural **safeguards** under **Section 69A** IT Act. Unlike Section 69A, notices under Section 79(3)(b) lack transparency, hearing, and written reasoning.
 - **State governments and police** issuing notices via Sahyog **expands censorship**
- **Support:** Supporting X’s challenge, Digipub (collective of 92 digital publishers) argued that blocking orders through Sahyog threatens media freedom.

Government’s Defence:

- **Necessity:** Social media requires stricter regulation due to **algorithmic amplification** and **rapid spread of harmful content**.
- **‘Safe harbour’ is not absolute:** It is a statutory privilege conditional upon due diligence.



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- **Separation of powers:** Section 79(3)(b) and Section 69A operate independently.
 - **Section 79(3)(b):** Failure to comply results in loss of safe harbour.
 - **Section 69A:** Blocking power on grounds of sovereignty, security, public order.
- **Efficiency:** Sahyog is an efficient, transparent mechanism to expedite unlawful content removal.
- **X Corp - a foreign entity:** Hence, it cannot invoke **Article 19** rights (available only to Indian citizens).

High Court's Ruling:

- The judgment outlined **three red lines** for social media companies -
 - Social media cannot remain unregulated.
 - Companies must comply with the laws of the land.
 - Past precedents like Shreya Singhal (2015) cannot be used to interpret new regulatory frameworks under IT Rules 2021.

Implications of the HC Ruling:

- **For intermediaries:** Non-compliance with Sahyog notices may result in the loss of safe harbour protection - establishing **legal liability**.
- **Digital governance:** Shows India's move towards **platform accountability**.
- **Cybersecurity:** Strengthens mechanisms against cybercrime, misinformation, and online harms.
- **Law and constitution:** Reasserts sovereign right to regulate speech, **balancing Article 19(1)(a)** – freedom of Speech with reasonable restrictions.
- **Policy relevance:** Demonstrates how courts interpret technological evolution in line with national context.

Conclusion:

The ruling **reaffirms India's sovereign regulatory authority** over digital platforms, emphasizes the balance between free speech and accountability, and calls for **continuous legal adaptation** in line with technological advancements.



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RIGHT TO COOLING IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

- The intensifying heatwaves across the **Global South**, including India, have turned cooling into an essential public health safeguard rather than a luxury.
- In June 2025, the Government of India proposed regulations requiring all new air conditioners to function within a temperature range of 20°C to 28°C, with 24°C as the default setting.
- While the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)** projects that such a move could save 20 billion units of electricity annually and cut emissions by 16 million tonnes, the debate extends far beyond efficiency.
- It raises urgent questions of equity, climate justice, and the universal right to cooling.

Access to Cooling in India and the Global South

- Cooling access in India remains severely inadequate. In 2021, only 13% of urban households and 1% of rural households owned air conditioners, with overall national penetration at around 5%.
- The **disparity is stark**: Delhi reports 32% household ownership, while **low-income states such as Bihar and Odisha report just 1%**, despite recording extreme heat conditions.
- Globally, the contrast is sharper. Nearly 90% of households in the U.S. and Japan own an air conditioner, compared to 22% in Latin America and just 6% in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Per capita electricity consumption for cooling in the U.S. is 28 times higher than in India.
- Despite these inequities, the discourse on cooling in the South is often framed as a climate burden, while in the North it is justified as a health necessity.

Health and Productivity Implications

- Extreme heat is no longer just a climate phenomenon but a direct **public health hazard**.
- According to the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**, heat exposure caused 489,000 global deaths between 2000 and 2019, with India recording over 20,000.



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- The lack of reliable electricity, inadequate thermally secure housing, and under-equipped public health infrastructure amplify vulnerabilities.
- The **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** estimates that over 70% of the global workforce was exposed to excessive heat in 2020, causing 23 million occupational injuries and nearly 19,000 deaths.
- In India, where 80% of workers are in agriculture, construction, or street vending, the absence of heat-resilient workspaces threatens both health and livelihoods.

Policy Interventions and Heat Action Plans

- Several Indian states and cities have initiated **heat action plans**, including early warning systems, public shelters, and awareness drives.
- However, weak institutional capacity, limited funding, and poor legal backing have restricted their effectiveness. Millions remain vulnerable to heat-related illnesses, productivity losses, and income insecurity.
- The government's regulatory approach to air conditioner efficiency is commendable for energy savings, but risks being symbolic if not paired with stronger investments in affordable cooling access for the vulnerable.

Climate Justice and the Right to Cooling

- Developed countries historically invested heavily in heating systems, often backed by subsidies and unchecked emissions.
- Today, developing nations like India face a similar need for cooling but with fewer resources and under mounting international pressure to decarbonise.
- Global emissions from cooling stand at one billion tonnes annually, far lower than heating-related emissions, yet the cooling demand is projected to triple by 2050, with India's share growing eightfold.
- For the Global South, the challenge is twofold: **achieving efficient cooling** while **ensuring universal access**.
- Thus, cooling must be recognised not merely as a **mitigation liability** but as a **development right** tied to health, equity, and livelihood security.



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BRICS



The Indian Prime Minister recently met the Russian Deputy Prime Minister to discuss establishing a BRICS Grain Exchange to enhance agricultural trade among member countries.

- The acronym '**BRIC**' was coined by **Jim O'Neill** (Goldman Sachs economist) in **2001** to denote four emerging economies – **Brazil, Russia, India, and China**.
- BRIC held its **first meeting in 2006** during the G8 Outreach Summit and its **first standalone summit in Russia in 2009**.
- With the inclusion of **South Africa in 2010**, BRIC became **BRICS**.
- In **2024**, **Iran, Egypt, the UAE, and Ethiopia**
- In **2025**, **Indonesia** joined as a full member.
- **Saudi Arabia** has not formalised its membership, while **Argentina opted out** despite initial plans to join.

Membership (2025)

- **Core Members (10):** Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, UAE, Ethiopia, Indonesia.
 - **Partner Countries (11):** Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Nigeria, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Uganda, Uzbekistan.
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