

**“To accomplish  
great things we  
must not only act,  
but also dream;  
not only plan,  
but also believe.”**

**ANATOLE FRANCE**

# **Important Issues of the Day**

- **Troubled waters – Page No. 8, GS 3**
- **Kashmir revival – Page No. 8, GS 2**
- **Technology for social good – Page No.8 , GS 3**
- **Diversity in the judiciary – Text and Context**
- **Vibrant Village Programme – Page No. 12, GS 2**
- **Beat the Heat Programme – Prelims**
- **G7 Summit – Prelims**

# Centre to bring 1,954 border villages under development scheme

**Vijaita Singh**

NEW DELHI

The second phase of the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) will cover 1,954 strategic villages along the land borders with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar in 15 States and two Union Territories, according to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The VVP was launched in 2023, originally to assist development in villages along the China border. The VVP-II was cleared by the Union Cabinet in April 2025.

On February 20, Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to launch the VVP-II programme at Nathanpur vil-

lage in Assam's Cachar district along the Bangladesh border.

## **Ensuring livelihood**

The Ministry said the main objective of the VVP-II is to meet the developmental needs and well-being of the border population, as well as promote diverse livelihood opportunities to ensure economic and cultural assimilation with the nation.

“In these villages, opportunities for professional growth, social cohesion and national integration would be enhanced to ensure that border regions are not left behind in the country's development journey,” the MHA said.

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- **Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir (UT), Ladakh (UT), Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal.**

### **Objective of the Scheme:**

- **To create better living conditions in strategic border villages.**
- **To provide adequate livelihood opportunities for residents.**
- **To ensure prosperous and safe international borders.**
- **To control trans-border crime in vulnerable regions.**
- **To integrate border populations with the national mainstream.**
- **To enable villagers to serve as ‘eyes and ears’ of border guarding forces, enhancing internal security.**

## G7 Summit



- **French President Emmanuel Macron has invited Prime Minister of India to attend the 52nd G7 Summit (2026) in France.**
- **The G7 Summit 2026 is the annual meeting of leaders of the world's seven advanced democracies to deliberate on global economic stability, security, climate change, and geopolitical issues.**
- **Host Country: France**
- **Venue: Évian, France**
- **Members of G7: United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Canada.**

## **Origin and History:**

- **Established: 1975 (Rambouillet Summit, France).**
- **The first summit was convened by France to bring together major industrial economies.**
- **1973 Oil Crisis and Financial Instability:** It emerged as a response to global recession, inflation, and energy shocks following the oil embargo, requiring collective economic stabilisation.
- **G6 to G7 (1976):** Canada's inclusion transformed the original G6 into the G7, strengthening North American representation and economic coordination.
- **G8 Phase (1997–2014):** Russia joined post-Cold War to encourage integration with Western economies, but was suspended after the Crimea annexation in 2014.
- **Expansion of Agenda:** Over time, the G7 evolved from a financial coordination forum into a platform addressing climate change, security, development, and global governance.

**In which one of the following groups are all the four countries members of G20?**

- (a) Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey**
- (b) Australia, Canada, Malaysia and New Zealand**
- (c) Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam**
- (d) Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea**

# G20

## G8

## G7

Germany



U.K.



France



Canada



U.S.



Italy



Japan



Russia



Turkey



European Union



Argentina



Brazil



South Korea



Mexico



China



Indonesia



Saudi Arabia



Australia



India



South Africa



# Beat the Heat Programme



- **Maharashtra has announced that 30 cities have joined the global “Beat the Heat” programme during Mumbai Climate Week 2026.**
- **Beat the Heat is a global climate initiative aimed at accelerating action against extreme heat through sustainable cooling and urban resilience strategies.**
- **It translates the Global Cooling Pledge into practical, city-level implementation.**
- **Announced under the COP30 Presidency (Brazil).**
- **Supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through the Cool Coalition.**
- **Cut greenhouse gas emissions from cooling systems while promoting energy-efficient and low-carbon technologies.**
- **Protect vulnerable populations by integrating affordable cooling and climate-adaptive measures into city planning.**

## **Significance:**

- **Climate Adaptation Imperative: Addresses extreme heat, which causes more annual deaths globally than floods and storms combined.**
- **Urban Focus: Targets urban heat island effects, where temperatures can be up to 10°C higher than rural areas.**
- **NOTE: There are actually two distinct global initiatives with the exact same name, each run by a different organization.**
- **The UNEP “Beat the Heat” – Focus on urban infrastructure and cooling.**
- **The WHO “Beat the Heat” – Focus on human health and safety in sports event.**

# The need for diversity in the judiciary

What does the private Bill by DMK party member P. Wilson constitute? Why was the collegium system introduced? Why did the Supreme Court strike down the National Judicial Appointments Commission? How will regional benches of the Supreme Court help with respect to access?

## EXPLAINER

**Rangarajan. R**

### The story so far:

**P**. Wilson, senior advocate and Rajya Sabha MP of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party, has introduced a private member Bill to amend the Constitution in order to bring diversity in judicial appointments and set up regional benches of the Supreme Court.

### What does the Constitution provide?

Article 124 of the Constitution provides that judges of the Supreme Court shall be appointed by the President after consulting the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Similarly, Article 217 provides that judges of a High Court shall be appointed by the President after consulting the CJI, the Chief Justice of the High Court and Governor of the State. Article 130 of the Constitution provides that the seat of the Supreme Court shall be in Delhi or such other place(s) as appointed by the CJI with the approval of central government.

### What is the collegium system?

As per the process laid down in the Constitution, judges were appointed by the government after consultation with the judiciary till the 1980s. In the *First Judges* case (1981), the Supreme Court upheld the primacy of the executive in judicial appointments since it is accountable to the people. However, considering the need to maintain the independence of the judiciary and insulate it from political favouritism, the Supreme Court in the *Second Judges* case (1993) created the collegium system for the appointment of judges. This was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court's opinion in the *Third Judges* case (1998). The collegium consists of the CJI with four senior judges of the SC for appointments to the Supreme Court, and the CJI with two senior judges for appointment to the High Courts. The collegium initiates the



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proposal for appointment of judges to the higher judiciary and sends the recommendation to the Central government. The Centre may return a recommendation in case of any objection. However, if the collegium reiterates the recommendation, the appointment should be made.

The collegium system has ensured the independence of the judiciary from the executive, in the matter of appointments. Nevertheless, it has its own drawbacks like lack of transparency and accountability. There is also resentment on account of alleged nepotism in this process whereby kith and kin of sitting judges are favoured for appointments to higher judiciary. Parliament through the 99th constitutional amendment in 2014 had set up the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) to provide recommendations to the

executive for appointment of judges. The NJAC was to consist of the CJI, two senior judges, the Union law minister and two eminent persons. This was however struck down by the Supreme Court in 2015 as it violated the basic structure of the independence of the judiciary. Hence, the collegium process continues till date for appointments.

### What is this Bill?

The collegium process lays emphasis on merit in the selection of judges. However, it does not reflect the social diversity of our country. For instance, out of the judges appointed to higher judiciary between 2018 and 2024, only around 20% belonged to the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). The proportion of women and religious minorities is less than 15% and 5% respectively. The Bill

introduced by the private member mandates that due representation should be given to SC, ST, OBC, religious minorities and women in proportion to their population while appointing judges to the Supreme Court and High courts. It also sets a maximum timeline of 90 days for the Central government to notify the recommendations of the collegium.

Considering that the Supreme Court only sits in Delhi, access to the highest court for common citizens remains a challenge. There are also more than 90,000 cases pending in the Supreme Court as of January 2026. In order to address these issues, the Bill requires setting up of regional benches of the Supreme Court in New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. These regional benches shall exercise full jurisdiction of the Supreme Court except over cases of constitutional importance to be heard by the main Constitution bench in Delhi.

### What can be the way forward?

The onus for ensuring social diversity in the appointment of judges primarily falls on the judiciary through the collegium process. The private member Bill is relevant as it would create a constitutional directive to achieve the desired objective. The long-term reform could be to revive the NJAC by broad basing its composition. It can include representatives from the legislature, bar council and academia like in South Africa and the U.K. This would make the consultation broad based and inclusive. Suitable representation for SC, ST, OBC, minorities and women should be ensured through this process.

As recommended by Parliamentary committees and Law Commission in the past, regional benches of the Supreme Court can be set up under existing provisions of the Constitution itself. The Court may even consider setting up a bench in one region initially and extend to other regions in a time bound manner.

*Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified.' He currently trains at Officers IAS academy. Views expressed are personal.*

## THE GIST

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- **Parliament through the 99th constitutional amendment in 2014 had set up the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) to provide recommendations to the executive for appointment of judges.**
- **The NJAC was to consist of the CJI, two senior judges, the Union law minister and two eminent persons.**
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**Which one of the following statements is correct?**

- (a) In India, the same person cannot be appointed as Governor for two or more States at the same time.**
- (b) The Judges of the High Court of the States in India are appointed by the Governor of the State just as the Judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President.**
- (c) No procedure has been laid down in the Constitution of India for the removal of a Governor from his/her post.**
- (d) In the case of a Union Territory having a legislative setup, the Chief Minister is appointed by the Lt. Governor on the basis of majority support.**

## Mains Question

**The Collegium system of judicial appointments has evolved through judicial interpretation rather than constitutional amendment. Examine its constitutional basis and key features.**

न्यायाधीशों की नियुक्ति के लिए कोलेजियम प्रणाली संवैधानिक संशोधन के बजाय न्यायिक व्याख्या के माध्यम से विकसित हुई है। इसके संवैधानिक आधार एवं प्रमुख विशेषताओं का परीक्षण कीजिए।

# AI for people, applying technology for social good

Page No. 8, GS 3

**A**rtificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming our lives, including how we work. The question is not whether AI will change jobs – it already does – but whether this transformation will be shaped in ways that advance social justice, decent work and shared prosperity. As India hosts the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi – the first of its kind in the Global South, coinciding with the World Day of Social Justice observed on February 20 – we take the opportunity to call for a human-centred AI that serves people and drives inclusive social development.

By its scale and impact, India's AI journey stands at a critical moment, offering a compelling laboratory for what lies ahead. The country now has the world's largest share of monthly active users of the ChatGPT mobile application and one of the largest user bases for advanced AI platforms. By 2030, AI could generate more than three million new technology jobs in India while reshaping over 10 million existing ones. India illustrates both the scale of transformation and the promise of responsible AI deployment for social justice, job creation, economic inclusion and growth.

## Divided discourse

Globally, debates on AI are increasingly polarised. Some narratives emphasise the potential for surging productivity growth, while others focus on job losses, rising inequality and governance gaps. Yet, both perspectives overlook a fundamental truth: technology alone does not determine outcomes, human beings do. This is why the way AI is governed – through inclusive institutions, social dialogue and democratic participation – matters as much as the technology itself.

When deployed inclusively and responsibly, AI can help reduce inequalities, expand access to training, employment and social protection, and improve workplace safety and conditions – benefiting workers and enterprises alike. To support this agenda, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is working together with India and other partners of the Global Coalition for Social Justice, which includes a global network of AI observatories to strengthen evidence and



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is Union Minister of Labour and Employment, Government of India



**Gilbert F. Houngbo**

is Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

Artificial intelligence must help advance social justice, inclusive work, and equitable growth

support decision-making. Evidence from the ILO – the leading normative agency on labour standards – suggests that AI will profoundly reshape the world of work, not by replacing jobs wholesale, but by transforming roles in ways that can enhance productivity, drive innovation and improve organisational performance. Around one in four workers globally is employed in occupations with some level of exposure to generative AI, yet more roles are likely to be transformed rather than replaced. To maximise these opportunities, effective policy and governance frameworks are essential, along with meaningful worker participation and strong social dialogue to ensure that innovation promotes equitable and inclusive outcomes across the world of work.

## Tech for good, AI impact

There are compelling examples of how technologies, including AI, can strengthen social justice and decent work. For instance, India's e-Shram platform, which enables over 315 million informal workers to register for social protection schemes. With the ILO's technical collaboration on the inclusion of major central and states schemes, India has increased its social protection coverage from 19% in 2015 to 64.3% in 2025. Building on this success, major investments, such as Microsoft's \$17.5 billion commitment to AI diffusion, are supporting the integration of AI into e-Shram and the National Career Service portal. This approach has the potential to benefit India's informal workers by improving access to jobs, skills development and social protection.

Aligned with the vision of leveraging AI for inclusive and human-centred development, the Government of India has been proactive in preparing the country for the future of work by advancing transformative technologies through initiatives such as the AI Mission, National Quantum Mission, Anusandhan National Research Fund and the Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

Recognising that technological progress must translate into inclusive growth and quality

employment, the Union Budget 2026-27 has announced the formation of a High-Powered 'Education to Employment and Enterprise' Standing Committee to assess the impact of emerging technologies, including AI, on employment and skill requirements. It will also recommend targeted measures to embed AI education, from the school-level onwards, and enable AI-driven matching of workers with jobs and training opportunities. Through these forward-looking measures, India is positioning itself not only to harness AI for social good domestically but also to serve as a model for the Global South in building an inclusive, future-ready digital economy.

## AI access remains unequal

AI exposure around the world is, however, uneven with persistent gaps in access to technology and skills across regions and within countries, genders, age groups and social categories. In low-income countries, only about 11.5% of employment is exposed to generative AI, compared with roughly one-third in high-income economies. These differences reflect variations in economic structures and underscore

the need for tailored policy approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions. Targeted public investment in skills development, digital infrastructure and social protection, alongside international collaboration and solidarity, are essential to ensure that AI fosters greater inclusion and expands opportunity across all countries.

The convergence of the AI Impact Summit and the World Day of Social Justice is a reminder that technology should primarily serve workers and societies. AI is moving faster than our institutions, but it does not absolve us from our collective responsibility. The task ahead is to align technological ambition with social purpose so that innovation strengthens trust, inclusion and dignity at work. Through such an approach, AI will not only reaffirm why work matters but also its intrinsic value as a source of dignity and social cohesion, and its fundamental role in building peaceful and socially just societies.



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- **Tech for good, AI impact**
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## Mains Question

Artificial Intelligence has transformative potential, yet access to AI technologies remains highly unequal across regions and socio-economic groups. Examine the reasons for this inequality.

कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (AI) में परिवर्तनकारी क्षमता है, फिर भी विभिन्न क्षेत्रों और सामाजिक-आर्थिक समूहों के बीच इसकी पहुँच अत्यंत असमान बनी हुई है। इस असमानता के कारणों का परीक्षण कीजिए।

## Kashmir revival

### Tourism that benefits locals can help counter the terrorist ecosystem

**T**he April 2025 Pahalgam attack forced India to confront the fact that tourism recovers only when visitors can predict what will happen to them and local communities see credible benefits from keeping the sites open. Following the attack, the local administration closed 48 government-approved tourist sites, later reopening them in phases, including 14 on February 16. Tourists have rated the Kashmir Valley as relatively safe overall while still differentiating types of risk, which means that tourism policy in the region needs to focus on what visitors can be certain about and whether the state has a fixed and lucid rationale for closing or reopening sites. In the Union Budget 2026-27 announcement, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman described a two-pronged plan to enhance tourism: institutional capacity building and developing trails and heritage sites. She also singled out the development of ecologically sustainable mountain trails in Jammu and Kashmir, which is good because formal trails admit better management, including ticketing, permits, deployment of rangers, and medical facilities, and reduce fragility by diversifying the 'Kashmir experience'. Kashmir could al-

so do with a third prong: it is a biodiverse region that has become heavily militarised and shared environmental governance can help build trust.

The central government should consider paid civic roles rather than relying only on volunteer awareness campaigns, using protocols that forest protection committees already implement around protected areas. These can include trail maintenance, waste management, guiding, fire watch, and (wildlife) conflict mitigation. An influx of tourists can jolt the local economy to provide more and better services, so that over time, more families are incentivised to speak out against terrorism that suppresses tourism. Functional sites also need clear rules, reliable permits, fast help during emergencies, working roads, clean public spaces, and good communication, and the lower disruption is the state's incentive to solve these problems. Tourism can also help reduce fear and isolation by bringing people from across India into local contact and fostering business ties. Tourism and allied services can give young people a real path into the economy by skilling or reskilling them. The people of the region deserve more civilian ownership of social stability and more negotiating power, especially one that outstrips their cause for resentment.

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## Troubled waters

Concerns about the Great Nicobar project should have got a fair appraisal

**P**roponents of the controversial Great Nicobar Project will be enthused by an order from the Kolkata bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ruling that all environmental safeguards are in place, that the potential impact of this gargantuan project on resident native populations of the region is duly accounted for, and the project's "strategic utility" is reason enough for the government to not be fully transparent with what it shares in the public domain. But the dominant narrative around the project mirrors the classic development versus environment conflict of a pristine Pandora being ravaged for the greed of far-away mainlanders. The Great Nicobar Island Project (GNIP) envisages a trans-shipment port, an international airport, township development, and a 450 Mega-volt-Amperes (MVA) gas and solar-based power plant. In the early 20th century, the British Phosphate Commissioners (a joint venture of the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand) began large-scale phosphate mining for fertilizer on Nauru and Banaba in the Pacific Ocean. By 1945, the island had been so physically devastated by strip mining that it was deemed uninhabitable. The native Banabans were forcibly relocated to Rabi Island in Fiji, over 2,000 kilometres away. Today, Banaba is a desolate landscape of jagged limestone "pinacles" and the displaced population is fighting

tories. Though accorded an environment and preliminary forest clearance by the Union Environment Ministry, concerns about the potential loss of biodiversity, tree-felling, and impact on resident tribes prompted the NGT to order a review of the environmental aspects of the project.

Independent scientists and environmentalist groups have said that the felling of tracts of pristine tropical forest – nearly nine lakh trees across 130 sq.km – for this project would significantly harm the biodiversity of the region and constitute an irreparable loss. This is not counting the disturbance to leatherback turtle nesting grounds and the assault on the corals. There was also the contested matter of whether the community rights of the local Shompen and the Nicobarese tribes were fully settled under the requirements of the Forest Rights Act. Recently, members of the Tribal Council said they were being coerced to sign "surrender certificates" that implied their consent to large parts of their land being diverted for the project. The NGT order essentially rubber-stamps the government's appraisal process without independently examining the concerns raised. It only imposes faith that the government will be a conscientious executor of the project. Whether the Great Nicobar Project is a 'net good' can only be judged by future generations, but the lack of a process that offers a fair appraisal of independent concerns bodes ill for the present.

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- **The native Banabans were forcibly relocated to Rabi Island in Fiji, over 2,000 kilometres away.**
- **Today, Banaba is a desolate landscape of jagged limestone “pinnacles” and the displaced population is fighting for the rehabilitation of its homeland.**

Thank You!

