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Headlines:

- SC Restricts Retrospective Environmental Clearances
- U.S. Senate Fast-Tracks Bill Targeting Russian Oil Buyers
- Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026
- ILO Convention No. 193 on Gig Workers: India Abstains
- Private Sector Emerges as India's Largest R&D Investor

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1. SC Restricts Retrospective Environmental Clearances

GS Paper: GS-II (Governance & Judiciary) | GS-III (Environment & Ecology)

Why in News?

- The Supreme Court quashed the 2021 Office Memorandum (OM) permitting ex post facto (retrospective) Environmental Clearance (EC) for projects started without prior environmental approval.
- The ruling will apply prospectively, protecting ongoing projects from disruption.

What is Ex Post Facto Environmental Clearance?

- It is the grant of Environmental Clearance (EC) after a project has already commenced or operations have begun, instead of obtaining prior approval as mandated under the EIA Notification, 2006.

Supreme Court's Observations

- Prior Environmental Clearance is mandatory for notified projects.
- Administrative instructions cannot amend delegated legislation such as the EIA Notification, 2006.
- Retrospective EC cannot become a parallel route to regularise violations.
- The Court criticised the "Pollute First, Pay Later" approach as inconsistent with sustainable development.
- Amnesty schemes should be rare, exceptional and time-bound, issued only through proper statutory notifications.
- Existing approvals under the 2017 Notification and 2021 OM will continue unless individually challenged.
- The Supreme Court may still exercise its powers under Article 142 in exceptional cases.

Why is the Judgment Significant?

- Reinforces the precautionary principle in environmental governance.
- Strengthens the credibility of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework.
- Prevents misuse of retrospective approvals.
- Upholds the rule of law in environmental regulation.

- Seeks to balance developmental needs with ecological sustainability.

Way Forward

- Ensure strict compliance with prior Environmental Clearance.
- Strengthen EIA appraisal, monitoring and enforcement.
- Improve transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making.
- Limit amnesty provisions to exceptional public-interest cases.
- Adopt technology-driven environmental compliance and periodic audits.

2. U.S. Senate Fast-Tracks Bill Targeting Russian Oil Buyers

GS Paper: GS-II (International Relations) | GS-III (Economy – Energy Security & External Sector)

Why in News?

- The U.S. Senate voted to fast-track the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, 2026, proposing tariffs of up to 100% on countries importing significant quantities of Russian oil and natural gas.
- The legislation seeks to reduce Russia's energy revenues used to finance the ongoing Ukraine conflict.

Key Highlights

- Proposes tariffs of up to 100% on major purchasers of Russian energy.
- The original 2025 Bill proposed 500% tariffs, which were revised in July 2026.
- Targets countries continuing large-scale imports of Russian crude oil and natural gas.
- The U.S. Senate invoked cloture, a procedure that limits debate and expedites voting on legislation.
- Reflects the growing use of trade and economic measures to achieve strategic and foreign policy objectives.

Why is India Affected?

- Russia is India's largest crude oil supplier.

- Russian crude accounted for over 40% of India's oil imports in May 2026, increasing to more than 50% in June 2026.
- Discounted Russian oil has:
    - Reduced India's import bill.
    - Strengthened energy security.
    - Helped contain inflation.
    - Supported India's refining and petroleum export sector.

Significance

- Demonstrates the growing role of geoeconomics in international relations.
- Highlights the increasing use of secondary sanctions and tariffs as foreign policy tools.
- Reflects the weaponisation of trade and finance in geopolitical conflicts.
- Underscores the strategic importance of energy security in global politics.

Challenges for India

- Potential strain on India–U.S. strategic and economic relations.
- Risks to affordable and reliable crude oil supplies.
- Possible increase in the import bill, inflation, and Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Greater uncertainty in global energy markets and supply chains.

India's Response

- Continue pursuing a policy of strategic autonomy.
- Diversify crude oil import sources to reduce supply risks.
- Maintain balanced diplomatic engagement with both the U.S. and Russia.
- Strengthen long-term energy partnerships and enhance Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs).

Way Forward

- Accelerate the transition towards renewable and domestic energy sources.

- Diversify energy imports through multiple suppliers.
- Strengthen energy resilience through strategic reserves and long-term procurement.
- Promote stable, rules-based international trade and energy cooperation through sustained diplomatic engagement.

3. Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026

GS Paper: GS-II (Polity & Governance) | GS-III (Internal Security & Role of NGOs)

Why in News?

- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 has been included in the Government's legislative agenda for the Monsoon Session of Parliament.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010 governing the receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions.

Background

- **FCRA, 1976:** First law enacted to regulate foreign contributions.
- **FCRA, 2010:** Replaced the 1976 Act to strengthen regulation of foreign funding and foreign hospitality.
- **Objective:** Ensure that foreign contributions do not adversely affect national security, sovereignty, democratic institutions, or public interest.

Key Provisions of the Bill

- Foreign contributions and assets created from them may vest in a designated authority if an organisation's FCRA registration is cancelled.
- The provision applies even where assets are partly created using foreign contributions.
- If registration is not restored within the prescribed period, such vesting becomes permanent.
- The designated authority may transfer, auction, or otherwise dispose of the assets, with proceeds credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.

- Empowers the Government to exempt specified organisations or persons from the Act in public interest.

Significance

- Strengthens oversight of foreign funding.
- Enhances transparency and accountability of NGOs.
- Seeks to prevent misuse of foreign contributions.
- Reinforces national security and financial integrity.

Concerns

- Broad discretionary powers regarding registration cancellation.
- Ambiguity surrounding the term "public interest".
- Asset vesting provisions may affect the functioning of genuine NGOs.
- Exemption provisions may invite scrutiny on equal treatment.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent and objective implementation.
- Establish clear safeguards against arbitrary action.
- Balance national security with the legitimate functioning of civil society.
- Promote accountability while enabling genuine developmental and humanitarian activities.

4. ILO Convention No. 193 on Gig Workers: India Abstains

GS Paper: GS-II (International Organisations & Social Justice) | GS-III (Employment, Labour Reforms & Inclusive Growth)

Why in News?

- The International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted ILO Convention No. 193 – Decent Work in the Platform Economy, the first legally binding international treaty dedicated to gig and platform workers.
- India abstained from voting, while its employer and worker delegates voted in favour.

About ILO Convention No. 193

- Extends minimum labour rights to platform workers irrespective of their employment classification.
- Provides for:
    - Fair remuneration and timely payment.
    - Occupational safety and health.
    - Social security protection.
    - Transparency in algorithmic management.
    - Human review of significant automated decisions.
    - Requires workers to be classified based on the actual nature of work, rather than contractual labels.

Why did India Abstain?

- India generally ratifies ILO Conventions only after ensuring compatibility with domestic laws.
- Labour is a Concurrent List subject, requiring consultation between the Union and States.
- The Government may prefer to strengthen existing domestic frameworks before accepting binding international obligations.

India's Existing Framework

- Code on Social Security, 2020 recognises gig workers and platform workers.
- Provides for social security schemes supported by contributions from aggregators.
- e-Shram Portal facilitates registration of unorganised and gig workers for welfare benefits.
- States such as Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Telangana have introduced or proposed dedicated welfare measures for platform workers.

Significance

- Establishes the first global labour standards for the platform economy.
- Promotes decent work, fair wages, and social protection for gig workers.

- Enhances transparency and accountability in algorithm-driven employment.
- Supports inclusive and sustainable growth in the digital economy.

Concerns

- Limited social security coverage for gig workers.
- Disputes over employment classification.
- Lack of transparency in algorithmic decision-making.
- Weak grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Balancing worker protection with innovation and platform growth.

Way Forward

- Operationalise comprehensive social security schemes for gig workers.
- Establish transparent standards for algorithmic management.
- Strengthen legal protection and grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Enhance Centre–State coordination on labour reforms.
- Periodically align domestic labour laws with evolving international best practices.

5. Private Sector Emerges as India's Largest R&D Investor

GS Paper: GS-III (Science & Technology | Economy – Innovation, Research & Development)

Why in News?

- According to the latest Research & Development Statistics 2025–26, India's Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) reached 0.83% of GDP in 2021–22, the highest level since 2009–10.
- Private industry accounted for 51.8% of total R&D expenditure in 2023–24, surpassing government spending for the first time.

Key Highlights

- GERD increased from ₹1.27 lakh crore (2020–21) to ₹2.45 lakh crore (2023–24).
- Private sector contribution rose from 36.4% (2020–21) to 51.8% (2023–24).

- Marks a shift from government-led to industry-driven research and innovation.
- Data is compiled by the Department of Science & Technology (DST) through the National Science and Technology Management Information System (NSTMIS).

Significance

- Strengthens India's innovation and knowledge-based economy.
- Promotes industry-led research, technology commercialisation, and startup growth.
- Supports initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India.
- Enhances India's global competitiveness in emerging technologies.

Government Initiatives

- **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):** Promotes industry-academia collaboration and funds high-quality research and innovation across disciplines.
- **National Quantum Mission (NQM):** Develops indigenous capabilities in quantum technologies, including computing, communication, sensing, and materials.
- **PM Research Fellowship (PMRF):** Attracts talented students to pursue doctoral research in premier institutions to strengthen India's research ecosystem.
- **Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):** Fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and a startup culture through incubation centres and Atal Tinkering Labs.
- **Startup India:** Supports startups through funding, tax incentives, ease of doing business, and innovation-driven entrepreneurship.
- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:** Encourages domestic manufacturing and investment while promoting technology adoption, innovation, and global competitiveness.

Challenges

- India's R&D expenditure remains below major economies such as China, the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Israel.
- Limited industry–academia collaboration.

- Uneven private R&D participation across sectors.
- Gaps in research infrastructure and technology commercialisation.

Way Forward

- Increase R&D expenditure towards global benchmarks.
- Strengthen industry–academia collaboration and technology transfer.
- Encourage greater private investment in frontier technologies.
- Expand research infrastructure and innovation ecosystems.
- Promote commercialisation of indigenous research for sustainable economic growth.