# UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 27-03-2024

## Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

Recently, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) connected a strategically important all-weather 298-km long road from Manali to Leh through Darcha and Nimmu on the Kargil–Leh Highway.

### About Border Roads Organisation

It is a road construction executive force in India that provides support to Indian Armed Forces.

Establishment: It was formed on 7 May 1960 to secure India's borders and develop infrastructure in remote areas of the north and north-east states of the country.

In order to ensure coordination and expeditious execution of projects, the Government of India set up the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB) with the Prime Minister as Chairman of the Board and Defence Minister as Deputy Chairman.

It develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighboring countries.

This includes infrastructure operations in 19 states and three union territories (including Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Tajikistan and Sri Lanka.

Officers and personnel from the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF) form the parent cadre of the BRO.

It is also staffed by Officers and Troops drawn from the Indian Army's Corps of Engineers on extra regimental employment (on deputation).

BRO is also included in the Order of Battle of the Armed Forces, ensuring their support at any time.

Motto of the organization: Shramena Sarvam Sadhyam (everything is achievable through hardwork)

It was launched in the 1960s by the Border Roads Organisation and it is the oldest initiative of the organisation which is overseeing the development and maintenance of vital road infrastructure in key Kashmir regions.

# SMART METERING

Kerala's recent move to opt out of the Centre's scheme for the rollout of smart electricity meters challenges the prevailing narrative of smart metering as a panacea for the challenges faced by the country's electricity distribution sector.

This decision has significant implications for the ambitious project aimed at replacing conventional meters with smart meters across households by March 2025.

**Smart Meter**

A smart meter is an electronic device that records information—such as consumption of electric energy, voltage levels, current, and power factor—and communicates the information to the consumer and electricity suppliers.

Such an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) differs from automatic meter reading (AMR) in that it enables two-way communication between the meter and the supplier.

**Challenges in Smart Meter Implementation:**

**Assumptions Behind Smart Metering:**

The nationwide push for smart metering hinges on the assumption that this technology will address the longstanding issues plaguing the electricity distribution sector.

However, critics argue that the efficacy of smart metering is contingent upon several assumptions, **including reliable telemetry synchronization, prevention of tampering, and robust enforcement of energy audits and disconnection protocols.**

**Functional Effectiveness Concerns:**

The effectiveness of smart metering depends on the seamless synchronization of meter telemetry with the grid, prevention of tampering, and the capacity of distribution utilities to enforce disconnection protocols.

India's track record in these areas raises doubts about the viability of widespread smart meter deployment.

**Divergence in Intentions:**

**Global vs. Indian Approach:**

Globally, smart metering aims to optimize Time of Day (ToD) pricing, incentivizing consumption during off-peak hours.

In India, the focus is on reducing distribution losses through remote disconnection features, raising questions about the feasibility of widespread implementation.

**Cost Recovery Challenges:**

Smart meter costs, comprising fixed costs and recurring billing expenses, pose challenges for recovery, particularly given the financial constraints of distribution companies.

A phased approach targeting higher-value consumers may offer a more sustainable path forward.

**Alternate Strategies for Smart Metering:**

**Targeted Deployment:**

Prioritizing metering of high-value consumers and distribution transformers can yield more immediate benefits in terms of loss reduction and grid management.

Phased implementation, starting with critical infrastructure and expanding gradually, may offer a more nuanced approach to smart meter adoption.

# India Employment Report 2024


The India Employment Report 2024 has been released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

**Employment Scenario in India - ILO Report**

**Grim Employment Landscape**

**Unemployment Trends**: Between 2000 and 2018, India experienced a worrying trend in its employment landscape, characterized by a deterioration in various key labor metrics.

**Youth Unemployment**: Nearly 83% of the unemployed population in India comprises young individuals, highlighting a significant challenge in harnessing the potential of the country's youthful demographic.

**Educational Disparities**: The proportion of unemployed youth with secondary or higher education nearly doubled from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022, indicating a mismatch between skills and job market demands.

**Long-term Deterioration and Recent Improvements**

**Labour Market Indicators**: The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR), and Unemployment Rate (UR) exhibited a prolonged decline from 2000 to 2018, indicating systemic challenges within the labour market.

**Recent Trends**: However, there has been a slight improvement observed after 2019, coinciding with periods of economic distress. This improvement, though noteworthy, raises questions about its sustainability and the underlying drivers.

**Paradoxical Improvements**

**Sectoral Imbalances**: Despite the higher growth rate of non-farm employment compared to agriculture, the non-farm sectors have struggled to absorb workers adequately, perpetuating the issue of underemployment.

**Informal Sector Dominance**: Informal employment remains pervasive, engaging approximately 90% of the workforce. However, the share of regular employment, which exhibited growth until 2018, has been on the decline thereafter.

**Contractualization**: There has been a concerning rise in contractualization, with only a small percentage of regular workers benefitting from long-term contracts, contributing to increased job insecurity.

**Skill Gap and Gender Disparities**

**Skills Deficiency**: A significant proportion of the youth lacks essential skills demanded by the job market. For instance, a considerable percentage struggles with basic computer tasks such as sending emails, copying files, and using spreadsheets.

**Gender Disparities**: The labor market in India continues to grapple with substantial gender disparities, particularly evident in low rates of female labor force participation and high unemployment rates among highly educated women.

**Social Inequalities**: Despite affirmative action measures, marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes face persistent challenges in accessing quality employment opportunities, leading to a perpetuation of social hierarchies.

## BIMA SUGAM

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has recently approved the establishment of Bima Sugam, an innovative online insurance marketplace aimed at revolutionizing the insurance sector in India.

This initiative aligns with the broader vision of achieving "Insurance for all by 2047" and underscores IRDAI's commitment to modernize and democratize the insurance landscape.

**What is Bima Sugam?**

**E-commerce Platform for Insurance:**

Bima Sugam serves as a comprehensive e-commerce platform where insurance companies can showcase and sell their products.

It consolidates offerings from both life and non-life insurance providers under a unified digital roof.

**End-to-End Digital Journey:**

From purchasing insurance policies to renewals, claim settlements, and grievance redressal, Bima Sugam promises an 'end-to-end' digital experience for policyholders.

It acts as a centralized hub for all insurance stakeholders, fostering transparency, efficiency, and collaboration throughout the insurance value chain.

**Unified Integration:**

Bima Sugam integrates seamlessly with various government databases, insurers, intermediaries, and insurance repositories.

This integration facilitates streamlined processes for fetching customer details, providing product information, and facilitating insurance transactions.

**How Does Bima Sugam Benefit Customers?**

**Paperless Insurance Experience:**

With Bima Sugam, customers bid farewell to cumbersome paperwork associated with traditional insurance channels.

**Policies are digitized and stored in electronic insurance accounts,** offering convenience and ease of access for policyholders.

**Centralized Policy Management:**

Bima Sugam consolidates all insurance policies—life, health, and non-life—within a single application or window.

Customers can conveniently view policy details, renewal dates, and raise service requests from one unified portal.

**Affordability and Transparency:**

Bima Sugam **endeavors to make insurance policies more affordable by reducing intermediaries' commissions.**

Direct selling through the platform is anticipated to lead to lower premiums for policyholders, promoting accessibility and affordability.

**Industry Perspectives:**

**Streamlining the Insurance Value Chain:**

Industry leaders view Bima Sugam as **a transformative force in streamlining the insurance value chain, from policy issuance to claim settlement.**

The platform aims to enhance transparency, collaboration, and accessibility across all stages of insurance transactions.

**Regulator's Credibility and Accessibility:**

Bima Sugam is hailed as a game-changer in the insurance sector, analogous to UPI's impact on the banking sector.

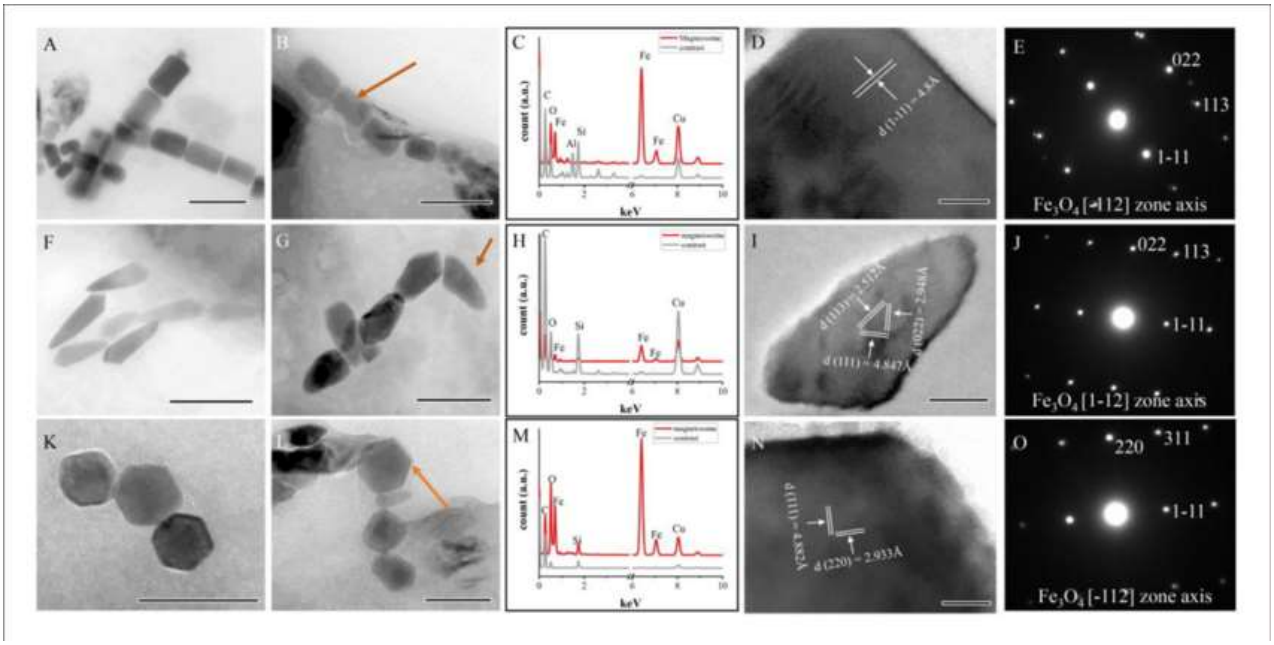
It offers insurers and customers alike a trusted platform for selling, servicing, and settling claims, backed by regulatory credibility.

Through Bima Sugam, the Indian insurance sector embarks on a journey towards digitalization, accessibility, and affordability, ushering in a new era of convenience and empowerment for policyholders.

# Magentofossils

In the depths of the Bay of Bengal, scientists have discovered a 50,000-year-old sediment — a giant magnetofossil and one of the youngest to be found yet.

About Magentofossils




These are the fossilised remains of magnetic particles created by magnetotactic bacteria, also known as magnetobacteria, and found preserved within the geological records.

These are mostly prokaryotic organisms that arrange themselves along the earth's magnetic field.

These organisms were believed to follow the magnetic field to reach places that had optimal oxygen concentration.

These bacteria contained "novel structured particles, rich in iron" in small sacs that essentially worked as a compass.

These magnetotactic bacteria create tiny crystals made of the iron-rich minerals magnetite or greigite. The crystals help them navigate the changing oxygen levels in the water body they reside in.

What did the study find?

The three-metre-long sediment core from the southwestern Bay of Bengal consisted mainly of "pale green silty clays,".

Researchers reported finding abundant benthic and planktic foraminifera — single-celled organisms with shells found near the sea bed and free-floating in water.

The microscopy also confirmed the presence of ‘conventional’ magnetofossils along with giant ones.

At a depth of around 1,000-1,500 m, the Bay of Bengal has a distinctively low oxygen concentration.

Analysis of the sediment sample confirmed fluctuations in the monsoon took place as the scientists found particles of magnetic minerals from the two distinct geological periods.

The rivers Godavari, Mahanadi, Ganga-Brahmaputra, Cauvery, and Penner, which empty into the Bay of Bengal, played a crucial role in the formation of the magnetofossils.

The nutrient-rich sediment carried in by these rivers provided a sufficient supply of reactive iron, which combined with the available organic carbon in the suboxic conditions of the Bay of Bengal to create a favourable environment for the growth of magnetotatic bacteria.

The freshwater discharge from these rivers along with the other oceanographic processes, like eddy formation, rendered the oxygen content in these waters that isn’t usually found in other low-oxygen zones.

The scientists also said the presence of the magnetofossils showed that the suboxic conditions of the Bay of Bengal persisted for a long time, allowing the bacteria to thrive.

## Ex-parte Injunction

Courts should not grant ex-parte injunctions against the publication of a news article, barring in exceptional cases, as it may have severe ramifications for the right to freedom of speech, the Supreme Court said recently.

About Ex-parte Injunction

It is a court order that is issued without hearing from the other party involved in the case. It is also known as a temporary restraining order.

This type of injunction is only granted in emergency situations where there is a risk of irreparable harm if immediate action is not taken.

The court will consider the evidence presented by the person requesting the injunction and decide whether to grant it or not.

What is an Injunction?

In India, an injunction is a legal remedy available to parties who wish to prevent the other party from carrying out a certain action or behavior.

Injunctions can be granted in a variety of situations, such as in cases of intellectual property infringement, breach of contract, or defamation.

An injunction is a powerful legal tool that acts as a court order requiring a party to do or cease doing specific actions.

It plays a crucial role in many legal battles, serving as a preventive measure to stop legal wrongs or as a remedy to enforce rights.

Injunctions are a discretionary remedy, and the court will consider various factors before deciding whether to grant an injunction. These factors may include the urgency of the matter, the balance of convenience, and the likelihood of success in the underlying lawsuit.

**Types of Injunctions in India:**

**Temporary Injunctions:** They are granted to preserve the status quo until a final decision can be reached. These are usually granted at the start of a case and can last for the duration of the legal proceedings.

**Permanent Injunctions:** They are granted after the court has made a final determination in the case. They prohibit the defendant from continuing a particular action or behavior.

**Mandatory Injunctions**: They require the defendant to carry out a particular action. They are often granted in cases of breach of contract, where the plaintiff requires the defendant to fulfill their contractual obligations.

**Prohibitory Injunctions:** They prohibit the defendant from carrying out a particular action or behavior. They are often granted in cases of intellectual property infringement or defamation.

In India, the law regarding injunction is provided under the Specific Relief Act, 1963 and the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

What happens if the party violates the injunction? If a party violates the injunction, they may be held in contempt of court and could face penalties such as fines or imprisonment.

It is a legal statute dealing with reliefs or recovery of the damages of the injured person. This Act was enacted in 1963 following the approach that when a person has withdrawn himself from the performance of a particular promise or a contract with respect to another person, the other person so aggrieved is entitled to a relief under Specific Relief Act, 1963. This Act is considered to be in one of the branches of the Indian Contracts Act, 1872.

## ICGS Samudra Paheredar

External Affairs recently visited Indian Coast Guard ship Samudra Paheredar, which is in Manila Bay in the Philippines, as part of an overseas deployment to ASEAN countries.

**About ICGS Samudra Paheredar**

It is a specialised Pollution Control Vessel (PCV) of the Indian Coast Guard.

It is the second PCV of India (the first being ICGS Samudra Prahari).

It was indigenously built by ABG Shipyard, Surat.

It was commissioned in 2012.

It is stationed on the East Coast of India in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

Features:

The ship is 94.10 metres long, draws 4,300 tons at maximum displacement, and is propelled by 3,000-kilowatt twin diesel engines, producing power that is further enhanced by twin shaft generators for a maximum speed of 21 knots.

At economical speed, the ship has an endurance of 6,500 nautical miles and can stay at sea for 20 days.

The ship's primary role is pollution response at sea and is equipped with the most advanced and sophisticated pollution response and control equipment for mitigating oil spills, which includes containment equipment like hi-sprint booms and river booms, recovery devices like skimmers, and side sweeping arms.

The ship is capable of unhindered oil-recovery operations, with a storage capacity of 502 kilolitres.

The special features include an integrated platform management system, a power management system, and a high-powered external firefighting system.

It is capable of operating one twin-engine ALH/ Chetak helicopter.

## Krishi Integrated Command and Control Centre

Recently, the union Agriculture Minister inaugurated a Krishi Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) set up at Krishi Bhavan in New Delhi.

About Krishi Integrated Command and Control Centre

It is a tech-based solution involving multiple IT applications and platforms, which is designed to help in making informed decisions.

It is housed in the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare.

Objectives: It will enable comprehensive monitoring of the farm sector by making available at one place geospatial information received from multiple sources, including remote sensing; plot-level data received through soil survey and weather data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) etc.

Working: It uses state of the art technologies such as artificial intelligence, remote sensing, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to collect and process large amounts of granular data — on temperatures, rainfall, wind speed, crop yields and production estimations — and presents it in graphical format.

Features of this centre

It provides information on crop yields, production, drought situation, cropping patterns (geographic region-wise and year-wise) in map, timeline, and drill-down views.

Here one can also see the relevant trends (periodic and non-periodic), outliers, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and receive insights, alerts, and feedback on agriculture schemes, programmes, projects, and initiatives.

It uses platforms including the Krishi Decision Support System (DSS) to collect micro-level data, process it, and present the macro picture.

It can create an ecosystem based on which individual farmer-level advisories can be generated through apps like Kisan e-mitra, a chatbot developed for PM-Kisan beneficiaries.

The AI-/ machine learning-based system will identify a farmer through his/ her mobile number or Aadhaar, and match it with the farmer's field information obtain through land records, historical crop sowing information from the crop registry, weather data from IMD, etc.

It will then generate a customised advisory in the local language of the farmer. For this, the system will use the Bhashini platform that allows translation into several Indian languages.