

THIS WEEK IN POLICY

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SPECIAL FEATURE · SANITATION

01 Twelve Years of Swachh Bharat

In 2014, two in five rural households had a toilet. India now has 12.22 crore of them. 5.69 lakh villages have gone further and manage their own waste, and cities process 81 per cent of what they collect, against 16 per cent twelve years ago.

12.22 cr

household toilets built since 2014

5.69 lakh

villages now ODF Plus

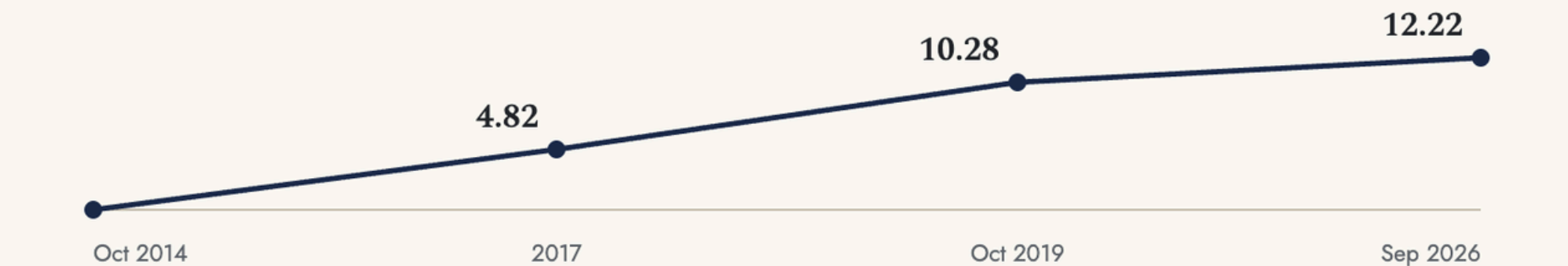
81%

of urban waste processed, up from 16%

3 lakh

diarrhoeal deaths avoided, 2019 vs 2014

HOUSEHOLD TOILETS BUILT, CUMULATIVE, CRORE



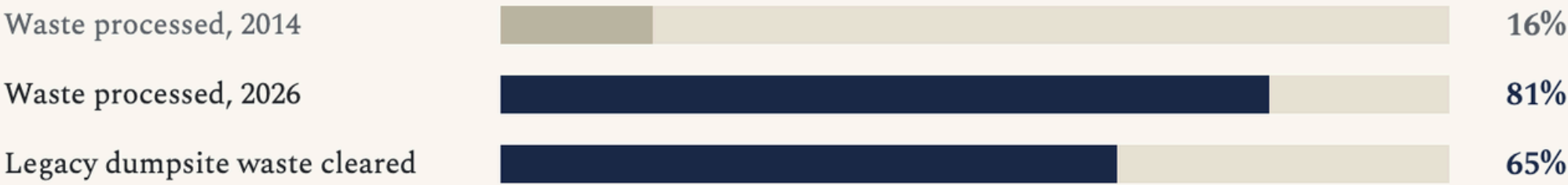
WHAT THE FIRST FIVE YEARS DID

Coverage went from 39 per cent in 2014 to 100 per cent in October 2019. 10.28 crore of today's toilets were built in those five years. A WHO study put the health gain at nearly 3 lakh diarrhoeal deaths avoided in 2019 alone.

WHAT PHASE TWO ADDED

Phase II moved from building toilets to keeping villages clean. 5.38 lakh villages now handle their solid waste and 5.65 lakh their liquid waste. Another 98,273 households have biogas plants that turn dung and kitchen waste into cooking gas.

THE URBAN TURN · SHARE COMPLETED, PERCENT



97 per cent of urban wards have door-to-door collection. Clearing old dumpsites has freed nearly 9,000 acres of city land.

WHAT CHANGED THIS YEAR

Two things are new in 2026. The Solid Waste Management Rules ask households to sort waste four ways instead of two, and make hotels and housing societies register as bulk generators. Swachh Seva Aankalan scores every gram panchayat once a year, as Swachh Survekshan has done for cities since 2016.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The next decade is about upkeep, and that is a more manageable job than the one India took on in 2014. The toilets and the collection systems already exist, and keeping them working is a question of water, repairs and somewhere for the waste to go. Where those are in place the gains have held, and the task from here is to make that the norm rather than the exception.

SOURCES PIB backgrounders on Swachhata Hi Seva, 18 September 2026, and Lakshya Zero Dumpsite, January 2026; Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2026; Ministry of Jal Shakti, 3 October 2026. Rural figures as of 17 September 2026.

DATA RELEASE · NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD TRAVEL SURVEY

02 How India Gets to Work and School

India's first national survey of how households travel, run by the NSO from July 2025 to June 2026. It counts only journeys of a kilometre or more.

SURVEYED 4,92,023 households · 20,34,371 persons · 14,274 villages · 10,377 urban blocks

25 min

average trip to a fixed workplace

23 min

average trip to an educational institution

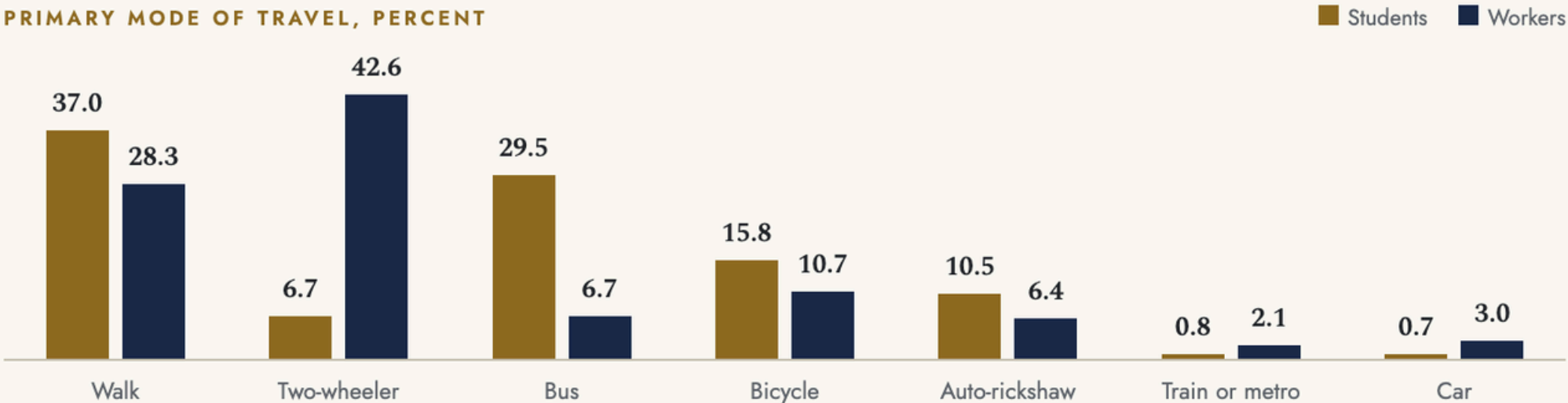
₹785

average monthly spend per worker

₹443

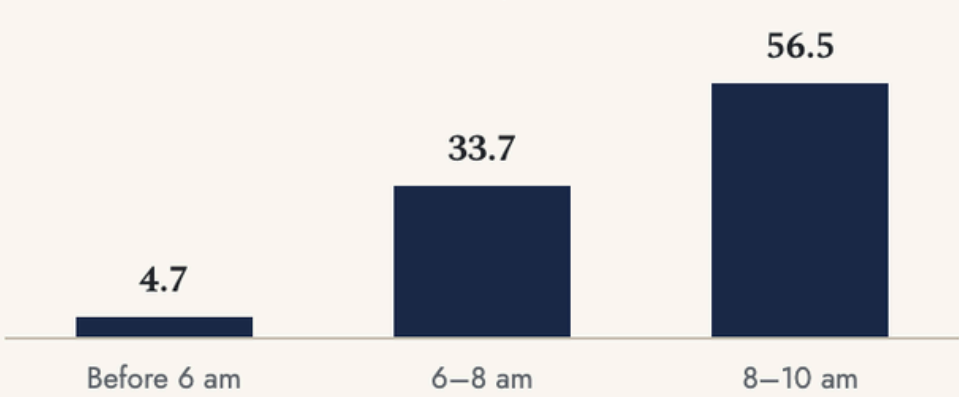
average monthly spend per student

PRIMARY MODE OF TRAVEL, PERCENT



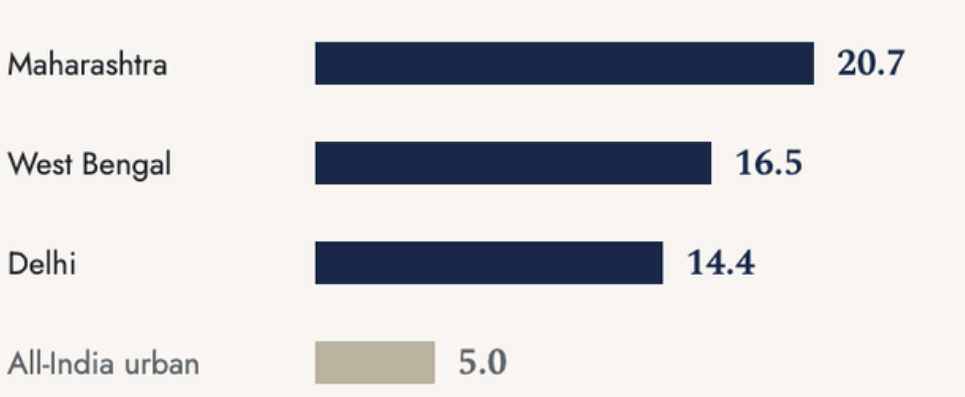
The two-wheeler is the single largest mode for workers, and takes over half of urban commutes. Students mostly walk or take the bus.

WHEN WORKERS LEAVE HOME, PERCENT



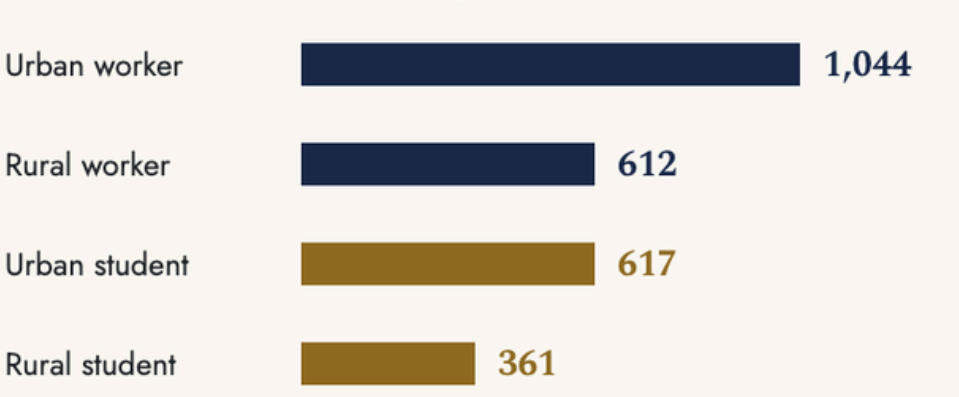
Workers leave in a tight morning window, and more than half of them inside a single two-hour band.

RAIL-BASED TRANSIT IN URBAN WORK TRIPS, PERCENT



Rail commuting is concentrated in three states. Maharashtra alone runs at four times the all-India urban rate.

MONTHLY COMMUTE SPEND, RUPEES



Men spend ₹835 a month, women ₹533. Far fewer women travel for work at all: 41.9 per cent against 61.9.

WHY HOUSEHOLDS TRAVEL OVERNIGHT, PERCENT



Seven in ten overnight journeys are made to see family or for religious occasions. Buses carry 55.8 per cent of them, trains 17.7.

SOURCE NSO, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Household Travel Survey, July 2025 to June 2026, released 5 October 2026. Trips under one kilometre are not counted.

At the Centre

03

Cabinet approves ₹10,000-crore SME Growth Fund for direct equity investment

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹10,000-crore government commitment to establish the SME Growth Fund, an Alternative Investment Fund providing long-term equity capital to small and medium enterprises. The fund will primarily support growth-stage manufacturing businesses, alongside firms in services, technology and strategic value chains. It will finance capacity expansion, technology adoption, exports and business acquisitions, with investments also extending to industrial clusters in Tier-II and Tier-III cities.

CPRG INSIGHT

Most government MSME financing schemes work through loans, guarantees or interest subsidies. Equity is different because businesses receive capital without taking on fixed repayment obligations, while investors share the risk and future returns. Existing government-backed equity funds largely target micro and early-stage enterprises. The new fund addresses the financing gap faced by viable SMEs that have moved beyond that stage but still struggle to raise long-term capital for expansion. Its focus is on scaling existing businesses rather than financing their creation.

04

Cabinet approves Integrated Transport and Logistics Authority for national infrastructure planning

The Union Cabinet approved the establishment of the Integrated Transport and Logistics Authority (ITLA) as an apex institution for multimodal transport planning and project assessment. It will prepare a National Transport Master Plan covering at least ten years, undertake technical appraisal of central projects costing ₹500 crore or more, and monitor their implementation and outcomes. It will also establish a National Transport Data Repository integrating information from FASTag, e-way bills, Vahan, GPS systems and urban traffic networks.

CPRG INSIGHT

PM GatiShakti already provides a common digital planning platform, but highways, railways, ports and other transport projects continue to be assessed largely within their respective ministries. ITLA adds an institution capable of examining whether these investments fit a wider transport network. Its mandate also extends to evaluating projects after completion, rather than stopping at their approval. However, ITLA will neither finance nor implement projects, and financial appraisal remains with existing authorities. Its influence will therefore depend on how its technical assessments are incorporated into government investment decisions.

05

MoSPI releases Environmental-Economic Accounting Strategy for 2026–30

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released its Strategy for Environmental-Economic Accounts in India, 2026–30, extending the earlier 2022–26 roadmap. The framework expands environmental accounting to minerals, soil resources, land, water, carbon stocks, biodiversity and environment-related economic activities. Based on the UN System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, it identifies data gaps, potential sources, priority areas and implementation milestones. It also provides a reference framework for states and union territories developing their own environmental accounts.

CPRG INSIGHT

Conventional national accounts measure the value generated by activities such as mining or timber production but do not provide a corresponding picture of the natural resources used or depleted. Environmental-economic accounts fill this gap by measuring environmental assets alongside economic activity. India has already developed accounts for forests, wetlands, energy and other resources. The new strategy broadens that work and addresses missing datasets. It does not replace GDP with a single green GDP figure but builds the statistical base needed to examine economic growth alongside changes in natural resources.

06

India demonstrates first 5.56-km free-space quantum-secure communication link

QNu Labs, in collaboration with BISAG-N and IIT Gandhinagar, successfully demonstrated a 5.56-km free-space Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) link. The field trial achieved a quantum bit error rate below 5% and generated secure encryption keys at 230–260 bits per second. These were integrated with BISAG-N's Vedic Kavach post-quantum cryptography platform to encrypt and decrypt test messages. The hybrid system combines quantum-based key distribution with software-based cryptographic protection, allowing secure communication to continue during temporary disruptions to the quantum channel.

CPRG INSIGHT

In June 2025, DRDO and IIT Delhi demonstrated free-space quantum-secure communication over one kilometre, generating keys at approximately 240 bits per second. The new trial extends the distance to 5.56 kilometres while maintaining a comparable key generation rate. Its more important addition is the integration of quantum key distribution with post-quantum cryptography, allowing the system to remain operational when the quantum link is interrupted. This addresses a practical challenge in developing satellite-based quantum communications, which India aims to extend across 2,000 kilometres under the National Quantum Mission.

07

Centre proposes prior approval for advertising prescription medicines

The Union Health Ministry published draft amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945, requiring prior Central Government approval for advertisements of medicines under Schedules H, H1 and X. The proposal extends existing restrictions on manufacturers to licensed retailers, wholesalers and distributors, covering prescription medicines including certain antibiotics, diabetes treatments and drugs with abuse potential. It proposes inserting a new provision under Rule 65 and invites public objections and suggestions within 30 days of Gazette publication. The restrictions will take effect only after final notification.

CPRG INSIGHT

Under the existing rules, manufacturers need government approval to advertise prescription medicines, but the same requirement does not explicitly apply to pharmacies, wholesalers and distributors. This means a medicine that its manufacturer cannot advertise without permission may still be promoted by the business selling it. The amendment extends the approval requirement to these sellers as well. It is particularly relevant to medicines for conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, where advertising directly to consumers can encourage purchases without medical consultation.

08

NABKISAN raises ₹180 crore through India's first WASH-focused social bond

NABKISAN Finance Limited, a subsidiary of NABARD, listed India's first social bond dedicated exclusively to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) on the National Stock Exchange. The five-year bond raised ₹180 crore, was oversubscribed 1.8 times and carries an 8.10% annual coupon, with maturity in September 2031. Rated AAA (Stable) by CRISIL and CARE, the proceeds will finance access to safe water and sanitation in rural and underserved communities. Water.org served as technical advisor and knowledge partner.

CPRG INSIGHT

Water and sanitation projects have traditionally relied heavily on government grants and development finance. This bond raises repayable capital directly from investors, with the money earmarked for WASH activities. It also follows SEBI's 2025 framework for social bonds, which requires issuers to disclose how proceeds are spent, report social outcomes and obtain independent verification.

DIPLOMACY & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

India & the World

09

India and Switzerland announce key outcomes during Swiss President's state visit

India and Switzerland concluded five agreements and arrangements during Swiss President Guy Parmelin's state visit. A Migration and Mobility Partnership provides for multiple-entry visas valid for up to five years and renewable one-year student permits. A separate agreement enables the annual exchange of 300 young professionals from each country, expandable to 500. Other arrangements cover transport technologies, including electric vehicles, tunnels and ropeways, and cooperation in research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

CPRG INSIGHT

The professional exchange arrangement creates a defined route for temporary employment rather than permanent migration, allowing young professionals to acquire workplace experience in the partner country. Its initial ceiling of 300 participants per country also makes it a controlled mobility channel, distinct from broader immigration liberalisation. The transport agreement extends cooperation into areas where Switzerland has established technical expertise, particularly tunnelling and ropeway systems. For India, these technologies are relevant to infrastructure development in mountainous and difficult terrain.

10

India and Switzerland launch research framework for scientific collaboration

India and Switzerland introduced the Indo-Swiss Research Framework to deepen cooperation between universities, research agencies and industry. A Letter of Intent between India's Department of Science and Technology and the Swiss National Science Foundation will support exploratory research partnerships. The New Explore programme, scheduled to open in November, will fund collaborative networking, travel and small equipment over 9–12 months. A separate arrangement with Zurich University of Applied Sciences will support science-based startups through the Academia-Industry Training programme.

CPRG INSIGHT

India and Switzerland have collaborated in scientific research for two decades, including work on Himalayan glaciers, brain research and public health. The new framework changes how partnerships can begin. Instead of requiring researchers to establish full-scale projects from the outset, Explore funds the earlier stage of finding collaborators, testing research ideas and building consortia. The Academia-Industry Training programme adds a separate route for taking research towards commercial applications. The two mechanisms address different gaps of forming international research partnerships and connecting scientific work with entrepreneurship.

11

India and EFTA mark first year of trade pact with renewed focus on utilisation

India and the European Free Trade Association marked the first anniversary of their Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), which entered into force on 1 October 2025. At an exporter outreach event, the Commerce Ministry highlighted preferential access covering 99.6% of Indian exports to Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. India's tariff commitments cover 95.3% of EFTA exports. The engagement focused on improving exporters' use of the agreement's market-access provisions and advancing trade and investment cooperation.

CPRG INSIGHT

While TEPA provides preferential access for almost all Indian exports, the benefits have yet to translate into significant export growth. Indian exports to EFTA remained almost unchanged in April–June 2026, despite non-gold imports from EFTA rising 22%. Exporters still need to meet product standards and rules of origin to claim lower tariffs. The government's renewed focus on utilisation is therefore about helping businesses, particularly smaller exporters, make use of concessions already available under the agreement.

12

India calls for delivery of existing climate commitments at pre-COP31

At the pre-COP31 meeting in Fiji, India called for the forthcoming climate conference to prioritise implementation of the Paris Agreement over the negotiation of additional targets. Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav emphasised fulfilling existing commitments, strengthening adaptation and capacity building, and directing resources towards areas with the greatest need. India also called for closer integration of scientific knowledge with traditional and community practices and for countries to identify proven mitigation and adaptation measures that can be scaled.

CPRG INSIGHT

India's position reflects a longstanding distinction in climate negotiations between agreeing to emission targets and providing the finance, technology and capacity needed to meet them. The Paris Agreement already establishes collective temperature goals, while developing countries have repeatedly argued that implementation depends on adequate international support. By prioritising delivery over fresh pledges, India is placing attention on commitments already made but not fully implemented. This is a negotiating position ahead of COP31, not a new climate agreement or a revision of India's own emissions targets.

13

India and Japan operationalise bilateral carbon crediting mechanism

India and Japan launched the Operational Manual for their Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement. The manual establishes procedures covering project registration, monitoring, verification, and the issuance and authorisation of carbon credits. The mechanism will support Japanese investment and technology transfer for projects reducing greenhouse gas emissions in India. It follows the bilateral agreement signed in August 2025 and implementation rules adopted in June 2026, moving the arrangement towards project-level implementation.

CPRG INSIGHT

India has prioritised technologies such as green hydrogen, compressed biogas and carbon capture for international carbon trading, rather than conventional renewable energy projects. These technologies are expensive to deploy, making Japanese finance and technical expertise valuable. However, the carbon credits are shared according to each country's contribution, and reductions transferred to Japan cannot also count towards India's climate targets. Japan gains access to emissions reductions achieved abroad, while India receives investment and technology. The important question is whether the financing and technology obtained justify the share of emissions reductions India gives up.

STATE POLICY & GOVERNANCE

Across the States

14

Jammu & Kashmir notifies Compressed Bio-Gas Policy 2026

The government notified the Compressed Bio-Gas Policy 2026 to convert cattle dung, apple pomace, pine needles, municipal waste and crop residues into clean fuel and organic manure. It provides capital assistance of ₹50 lakh per tonne-per-day capacity, capped at ₹10 crore per project, government land at ₹1 per square metre, five-year SGST reimbursement and interest subvention. Non-statutory approvals will be deemed granted after 60 days, while the policy targets 2,000 direct rural jobs by 2030.

CPRG INSIGHT

The Centre's GOBARDhan initiative already supports compressed biogas production, but J&K's policy addresses additional barriers involving land, local approvals and feedstock collection. Its inclusion of apple pomace and pine needles is particularly relevant to the region's waste economy. Unlike concentrated industrial waste, these materials are seasonal or geographically dispersed, making collection and year-round supply more difficult. The proposed feedstock aggregation support therefore addresses an operational problem that financial incentives for plant construction alone cannot resolve.

15

Andhra Pradesh approves foreign university policy and relaxes private school approvals

The Cabinet approved the Andhra Pradesh Policy for Promotion of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions and Private Universities, 2026, establishing eligibility criteria, incentives and support for new campuses, including development through selected academic infrastructure providers. It also cleared amendments to the Andhra Pradesh Education Act, 1982, removing requirements for prior area surveys, notifications and proof of local need before private schools can be established. Existing safety, sanitation, infrastructure and educational standards will continue to apply.

CPRG INSIGHT

Foreign university campuses are already permitted under UGC's 2023 regulations, with institutions establishing a presence in GIFT City, Bengaluru and other cities. Andhra Pradesh joins this effort by offering state-level support to attract such institutions, in line with NEP 2020's internationalisation goals. Bringing foreign universities closer to home could reduce outward student mobility and create opportunities for joint research and academic exchange. However, the actual benefit to students will depend on the universities attracted, the courses offered and whether their fees are more accessible than studying abroad.

16

Bihar launches MSME Policy 2026 to expand entrepreneurship and industrial development

The government launched Bihar MSME Policy 2026 alongside new MSME support centres in every district and initiatives for industrial cluster development. The policy seeks to strengthen small-enterprise growth through improved access to finance, technology, infrastructure and markets. The government has set a broader target of connecting one crore families with entrepreneurship. It also introduced measures to encourage local manufacturing through government procurement and transferred financial assistance to more than 7,000 beneficiaries under the existing Mukhyamantri Udyami Yojana.

CPRG INSIGHT

Bihar has offered purchase preference to local businesses since 2024, so using government procurement to support MSMEs is not entirely new. The bigger question is the scale of the state's ambition. Existing government programmes cover around 45,000 entrepreneurs, while the new target is to bring one crore families into entrepreneurship. Bihar will need to move beyond financing new enterprises and focus on how many remain operational, generate regular sales and create employment. These outcomes will matter more than the number of beneficiaries enrolled.

17

West Bengal doubles higher education assistance for unmarried women to ₹50,000

The Cabinet approved the Bhagini Nivedita Scheme, providing ₹50,000 over three years to unmarried women pursuing undergraduate education. Beneficiaries will receive ₹17,000 in each of the first two years and ₹16,000 in the third, with implementation scheduled to begin in January 2027. The scheme replaces the earlier Kanyashree K2 benefit, which provided a one-time grant of ₹25,000 to eligible unmarried girls aged 18–19 who continued their education or other recognised pursuits.

CPRG INSIGHT

Bhagini Nivedita extends Kanyashree's support into undergraduate education. While Kanyashree K2 provides a one-time ₹25,000 grant at age 18 to discourage child marriage and encourage continued education, the new scheme doubles the assistance and distributes it across three years. This helps cover recurring college expenses and supports students throughout their degrees. However, the scheme retains the unmarried eligibility condition into adulthood. The implementation rules will need to clarify whether women who marry during their studies can continue receiving subsequent instalments.

18

Uttarakhand approves ₹200-crore higher education skill development scheme

The Cabinet approved the Mukhyamantri Uchcha Shiksha Kaushal Samvardhan Yojana, 2026, with an estimated outlay of ₹200 crore over five years. The scheme will provide employability and entrepreneurship-oriented skill development to approximately 1.19 lakh students enrolled in government and private universities and affiliated colleges across the state. It seeks to connect higher education with practical employment requirements by extending structured skill-development support to students pursuing conventional degree programmes.

CPRG INSIGHT

Uttarakhand's universities already offer vocational courses under NEP 2020, while its earlier World Bank-supported Workforce Development Project targeted 80,500 trainees, primarily through ITIs and short-term programmes. The new ₹200-crore scheme instead extends support to 1.19 lakh students across government and private higher education institutions. The change is therefore in scale and coverage rather than the introduction of skilling itself. Its value will depend on whether the training offers recognised qualifications and industry-linked opportunities, rather than duplicating the vocational courses already available in universities.

19

Maharashtra approves CM-SRISTHI to strengthen research and innovation in higher education

The Cabinet approved CM-SRISTHI, the Scheme for Research, Innovations and Technological Hubs in Higher Education Institutions, for 2026–27 to 2030–31. The programme will establish Schools of Technology and Centres of Excellence in emerging fields including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors, robotics and green hydrogen. Institutions must submit detailed project proposals, while industry partners will contribute at least 25% of the cost of commercially viable projects. The scheme also promotes international research collaboration, joint degrees and shared academic infrastructure.

CPRG INSIGHT

The Centre's ₹1-lakh-crore RDI Fund finances industry-led research but does not directly fund universities. CM-SRISTHI addresses a different need by building research capacity within public institutions, while requiring industry to contribute at least 25% to commercially viable projects. The scheme also proposes research centres in Amravati, Nanded and other cities beyond Mumbai and Pune. This spreads advanced research infrastructure across the state and connects university research with industry without relying entirely on private investment.

20

Jammu & Kashmir completes its first successful mineral-block auctions

The Ministry of Mines announced the successful auction of Jammu & Kashmir's first two mineral blocks under the Centre's competitive auction framework. Both limestone deposits are located in Anantnag district. The 22.43-hectare Koot–Kapran block contains an estimated 4.75 million tonnes of limestone, while the 5.36-hectare Wantrag block contains approximately 10.85 million tonnes. The blocks have been explored to the G-4 and G-3 stages respectively. The Union Territory had entrusted the auction process to the Union Ministry of Mines.

CPRG INSIGHT

India's experience shows that auctioning mineral blocks does not immediately translate into production. As of September 2026, the Ministry of Mines recorded 738 blocks auctioned nationally since 2015, but only 105 had become operational. J&K's two limestone blocks are also at early exploration stages, with further geological surveys and statutory clearances required before mining can begin. The auctions bring J&K into the competitive mineral allocation system, but actual investment, production and revenue will depend on how quickly these blocks progress towards operation.

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