



P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

7. Short News

Blue Valley Cluster

Context - The Assam Government and the European Union have launched the Blue Valley Cluster aligning with priorities outlined in the EU-India Comprehensive Strategic Agenda adopted at the Jan 2026 EU-India Summit.

About Blue Valley Cluster

1. The Blue Valley Cluster is a collaborative India-EU initiative focused on developing bioeconomy sectors such as natural flavours, fragrances, agarwood products, and AYUSH-based wellness industries.
2. Objective - To promote sustainable bioeconomy-driven industrial growth in Northeast India through India-EU investment, innovation, technology transfer, value-chain integration, and enhanced market access.
3. Implementing Bodies
 1. Government of Assam
 2. European Union (EU)
 3. Federation of European Businesses in India (FEBI)
 4. Assam Industrial Development Corporation Limited (AIDC)

SAPLING Dialogue 2026

Context - Recently, the Union Minister of Food Processing Industries inaugurated SAPLING Dialogue 2026 in Ahmedabad to advance food processing-led employment and sustainable growth across South Asia.

1. The "Assessment of the Level of Food Processing in India" Report was also Launched at the Event.

About SAPLING

1. SAPLING (South Asian Policy Leadership for Improved Nutrition and Growth) is a regional policy dialogue platform that promotes nutrition-sensitive, resilient, and sustainable food systems across South Asia.
2. Nodal Ministry - The dialogue is jointly organised by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) and the World Bank Group-led SAPLING initiative.
3. Key Features
 1. Regional Policy Cooperation - SAPLING brings together policymakers, industry leaders, researchers, development partners, startups, and investors to strengthen regional collaboration in food processing.
 2. Focus on Food System Transformation - The initiative promotes value addition, technology adoption, food safety, supply-chain strengthening, and formalisation of informal food processors.
 3. Investment and Innovation Platform - It encourages private investment, innovation, MSME growth, and technology-driven solutions to build competitive and sustainable food value chains.

4. Alignment with AgriConnect – SAPLING is aligned with the World Bank Group's AgriConnect Initiative, which supports resilient and nutrition-focused agricultural systems.
4. Significance
 1. Employment Generation and Farmer Prosperity – Food processing creates non-farm employment, increases value addition, reduces wastage, and enhances farmers' incomes through better market linkages.
 2. Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition – Efficient processing, storage, and supply chains improve food availability, quality, and nutritional outcomes across the region.
 3. Promoting Regional Economic Integration – Cross-country cooperation, technology sharing, and investment partnerships can accelerate sustainable growth and strengthen South Asia's food economy.

Key Highlights of the "Assessment of the Level of Food Processing in India" Report

1. Rising Processing Levels – India's food processing level increased from nearly 10% in 2016 to about 17% in 2023, indicating significant progress in value addition and agro-industrial development.
2. Scope for Further Growth – The report identifies substantial opportunities in fruits, vegetables, and dairy sectors while recommending improved infrastructure, reduced post-harvest losses, enhanced farmer incomes, and stronger global competitiveness.

Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index (BGABI)

Context – India is currently pushing for its government bonds to be included within the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index.

About the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index (BGABI)

1. It is one of the world's most widely followed fixed-income indices, tracking investment-grade government, corporate, and securitised bonds across multiple countries and currencies.
2. Bond Market Equivalent of Sensex/Nifty – Just as stock indices track equity performance, BGABI measures the performance of global bond markets.

Reasons for the Distinctiveness of the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index

1. Comprehensive Asset Coverage – Covers investment-grade government, corporate, and securitised bonds across global markets.
2. Global Market Representation – Includes both developed and selected emerging market debt, offering broad geographic exposure.
3. Multi-Currency Exposure – Tracks bonds denominated in multiple currencies, reflecting worldwide fixed-income opportunities.
4. Benchmark for Global Investors – Widely used by international asset managers and index-tracking funds for portfolio allocation.
5. High Market Access Standards – Requires robust settlement systems, operational efficiency, transparency, and ease of access for foreign investors.

Significance of the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index (BGABI)

1. Global Benchmark for Bond Investments – Serves as a key reference index for international asset managers to evaluate and allocate fixed-income investments.
2. Portfolio Benchmark for Fund Managers – Active fund managers measure performance against the index and adjust portfolio allocations accordingly.
3. Catalyst for Passive Investment Flows – Index funds and Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) automatically invest in constituent bonds, creating sustained demand.

Type of Bonds Under Consideration for Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index

1. Eligible Bonds – The bonds being considered for India's inclusion are Government Securities (G-Secs) designated under the Fully Accessible Route (FAR).
2. RBI Initiative – FAR was introduced by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 2020 to increase foreign participation in India's government bond market.

India's Current Status in the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index

1. Inclusion Still Pending – India is not yet a part of the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Bond Index.
2. Inclusion Deferred (January 2026) – Bloomberg postponed India's entry due to concerns over settlement delays, cumbersome post-trade tax procedures, limited trading automation, and lengthy fund registration processes.

Dark Patterns in India's Online Marketplaces

Context – A 2026 report by Datum Intelligence estimates that Indian online consumers lose ₹25,000–28,000 crore annually due to deceptive digital practices known as dark patterns.

What are Dark Patterns?

1. Dark patterns are manipulative digital design practices that distort consumer choice, undermine informed consent, and can lead to financial or privacy-related harm.
2. Common Dark Patterns –
 1. Drip Pricing – Extra fees revealed only at the final checkout stage.
 2. Hidden Charges – Taxes, convenience fees, or service charges concealed until payment.
 3. False Urgency – Messages such as “Only 1 room left” or “Offer ends in 5 minutes” creating artificial pressure.
 4. Forced Add-ons – Pre-selected insurance, memberships, or premium services.
 5. Subscription Traps – Making subscriptions easy to start but difficult to cancel.
3. In 2023, the Central Consumer Protection Authority issued guidelines identifying and regulating 13 types of dark patterns to protect digital consumers in India.

Key Findings of the Report

1. Massive Consumer Losses – Around 88% of India's 304 million online buyers lose ₹78–87 per month due to deceptive online practices.
2. Hidden Charges Increasing – 63% of users experienced hidden charges or drip pricing in 2026, up from 52% in 2024.
3. Forced User Actions – 73% of platforms used “forced action” mechanisms, nudging users into purchases, subscriptions, or additional services.
4. Awareness Doesn't Prevent Manipulation – Although 81% of consumers knew about dark patterns, 85% still reported being misled.
5. Demand for Fair Platforms – 74% of shoppers said they would pay more for platforms offering transparent and ethical user experiences.

IMI-Resistant Mustard Hybrids

Context – India will begin large-scale cultivation of IMI-resistant mustard hybrids from the 2026–27 rabi season to combat Orobanche weed infestation.

About Imidazolinone-Resistant (IMI-Resistant) Mustard Hybrids

1. IMI-resistant mustard hybrids are herbicide-tolerant mustard varieties developed to enable effective control of parasitic weeds, particularly Orobanche (Phelipanche), which significantly reduce mustard yields.
2. Development – The hybrids have been developed through mutation breeding, a conventional plant-breeding technique that preserves naturally occurring beneficial mutations without genetic engineering.
 1. The development was spearheaded by researchers at Delhi University's Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP), prominently involving the well-known geneticist Dr. Deepak Pental
3. Key Features
 1. ALS Enzyme-Based Resistance – The technology is based on a mutation in the Acetolactate Synthase (ALS) enzyme, which is essential for plant growth and normally targeted by IMI herbicides.
 2. Selective Herbicide Tolerance – A natural mutation alters the ALS enzyme, preventing herbicide binding and allowing mustard plants to survive while weeds are eliminated.
 3. Effective Control of Orobanche – The herbicide moves through the plant and soil, targeting the parasitic weed "Orobanche" attached to mustard roots, which cannot be effectively removed through manual weeding.
 4. Reduced Labour Requirement – The technology lowers dependence on labour-intensive weeding operations, particularly during critical crop-growth stages when labour shortages are common.
 5. Potential for Higher Productivity – Better weed management can improve mustard yields, strengthen domestic oilseed production, and reduce losses caused by parasitic infestations.
4. How is it Different from GM Mustard?
 1. Method of Development – IMI-resistant hybrids are developed through mutation breeding and selection of natural genetic variations, whereas GM mustard is produced through genetic engineering techniques involving direct gene insertion or modification.
 2. Regulatory Framework – IMI-resistant hybrids are treated as conventionally bred crops, while GM mustard is subject to stringent biosafety, environmental, and regulatory assessments before commercial cultivation.
 1. The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) granted conditional environmental clearance for the commercial cultivation and seed production of Mustard GM Crop Dhara Mustard Hybrid (DMH) -11, developed by the University of Delhi.
 2. A two-judge Supreme Court bench delivered a split verdict to quash the GEAC approval, citing a lack of indigenous health and environmental studies putting a ban on its cultivation till further Judgement.