



## Rapid Fire Current Affairs

### Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management

The [Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Land Management \(CoE-SLM\)](#) was formally inaugurated on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at the **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun**. This initiative was announced by the **Prime Minister of India** during the 14<sup>th</sup> [Conference of the Parties \(COP-14\)](#) of the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#) in 2019. The CoE-SLM aims to **tackle land degradation issues** through **sustainable land management practices**, promote **South-South Cooperation**, and contribute to achieving [Land Degradation Neutrality \(LDN\)](#). By leveraging technical support, capacity building, and knowledge sharing, the CoE-SLM intends to restore degraded land, align with international conventions and goals such as the [SDGs](#), [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), and [UNFCCC](#), and address the impacts of land degradation on [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and biodiversity loss. The establishment of the CoE-SLM reflects the Indian government's commitment to environmental conservation and combating climate change.

**Read more:** [Dialogue on Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought](#)

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### DRI Busts Ambergris Smuggling Gang



The [Directorate of Revenue Intelligence \(DRI\)](#) has made a significant breakthrough by busting an [Ambergris smuggling gang racket](#), which poses a threat to the **nation's flora and fauna**.

The DRI is an Indian intelligence agency that functions under the [Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs \(CBIC\)](#), Ministry of Finance. It was constituted in 1957 as the apex **anti-smuggling agency** to counter the menace of smuggling and commercial frauds related to **international trade and evasion of customs duty**. The DRI also works as the lead agency for **Anti-Smuggling National Coordination Centre (SCord)**, which coordinates the efforts of various agencies involved in anti-smuggling activities. The DRI has a network of regional and zonal units across the country, as well as overseas liaison offices in some countries.

Ambergris, known as "**whale vomit**," is a solid **waxy substance** that originates in the intestines of

**sperm whales**. Produced by only around **1% of these whales**, ambergris contains alkaloids, acids, and a compound called ambreine, similar to cholesterol. It is often found floating on the surface of water bodies and occasionally washes up on coastlines. Due to its **high value**, ambergris is often referred to as "**floating gold**". The main use of ambergris is in the **perfume industry, particularly for creating musk fragrances**. Countries like Dubai, known for their large perfume market, have a high demand for ambergris. Additionally, ancient Egyptians used it as incense, and it is believed to have been used in traditional medicines and as a spice. However, due to its value, ambergris has become a target for smugglers, especially in coastal areas.

**Read more:** [Directorate of Revenue Intelligence \(DRI\)](#) , [Ambergris](#)

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## Arsenic Exposure

A recent study has highlighted the **potential cognitive impacts of even low levels of arsenic consumption on children, adolescents, and young adults in India**. The research revealed that individuals exposed to arsenic displayed reduced grey matter and **weaker connections** in crucial brain regions responsible for **concentration, task-switching, and information storage**. It suggests that **chronic exposure to arsenic could be a "silent pandemic" affecting a significant portion of the global population**. The researchers analysed that the arsenic exposure, primarily through **food intake**, was strongly correlated with the consumption of rice, especially in south India. However, cooking rice in a specific way can significantly reduce the naturally occurring arsenic content by over **50% in brown rice and 74% in white rice** without compromising the rice's micronutrient content.

The research is part of the **C-Veda initiative**, a collaborative effort between **India and the United Kingdom to assess the impact of various risk factors on cognitive development**, including vulnerable populations in industrialising and industrialised societies.

Arsenic is an **odourless and tasteless metalloid** widely distributed in the earth's crust. It is naturally present at high levels in the earth crust and groundwater of a number of countries. **It is highly toxic in its inorganic form. Arsenicosis** is the medical word for **arsenic poisoning**, which occurs due to accumulation of large amounts of arsenic in the body.

**Read more:** [Arsenic Contamination](#)

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## Annual Forex Spends up to ₹7 Lakh Exempted from TCS

India will **not impose a 20% tax on spending of up to 7 lakh rupees through international debit and credit cards** in a financial year to eliminate any procedural uncertainties. This decision comes in response to concerns raised regarding the application of **Tax Collection at Source (TCS)** to small transactions under the **Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) from July 1, 2023**.

It clarified that expenditures up to **₹7 lakh per year would neither fall under the LRS nor be subject to TCS**. To facilitate this exemption, the necessary changes to the **Foreign Exchange Management (Current Account Transactions Rules), 2000** would be separately issued.

Additionally, the ministry emphasised that the existing beneficial TCS treatment for education and health payments would continue, with a **TCS rate of 5% for such payments up to ₹7 lakh per year**.

Also, the **Reserve Bank of India** recently introduced a new provision under the LRS, allowing individuals to make **forex remittances** of up to **USD 2.5 lakh annually**.

**Read more:** [Liberalised Remittance Scheme](#), [Reserve Bank of India](#).

