



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Fifth India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Syllabus: GS2/International Relations

In News

- The **Indian Defence Minister and External Affairs Minister** met their counterparts from the US government, for the **fifth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**.

About

- The 2+2 meetings have been held **annually** with the US leaders **since 2018**.
- The discussions in the '2+2' dialogue encompassed various topics, including counter-terrorism, and explored avenues for advancing cooperation in cutting-edge technologies like semiconductors and critical minerals.

What are 2+2 meetings?

- The 2+2 meetings signify the **participation of two high-level representatives**, Ministers holding Foreign and Defence portfolios, from each of the two countries who aim to enhance the scope of dialogue between them.
- Having such a mechanism **enables the partners to better understand and appreciate each other's strategic concerns** and sensitivities taking into account political factors on both sides, in order to build a stronger, more integrated strategic relationship.
- India has held 2+2 meetings with ministers from **Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom and Russia**.

Overview of India and US Bilateral Relations

- Since India's independence, ties with the United States have weathered the **Cold War-era** distrust and **estrangement over India's nuclear program**.
 - Relations have **warmed in recent years** and cooperation has strengthened across a range of economic and political areas.
- **Bilateral Trade:** The bilateral trade between the two countries has **risen by 72 percent** between 2017-18 and 2022-23.
 - The US accounted for **18 percent of the gross FDI inflows into India** during 2021-22, ranking second behind Singapore.
- **Defense and Security:** India and the US have signed a **troika of "foundational pacts"** for deep military cooperation, beginning **with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** in 2016, followed by the **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** after the first 2+2 dialogue in 2018, and then the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020**.
 - In 2016, the United States elevated India to a **major defense partner**, a status no other country holds.
- **Space: Artemis Accords** signed by India established a common vision for the future of space exploration for the benefit of all humankind.
 - The United States and India cooperate through the bilateral Civil Space Joint Working Group.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:** India and the United States cooperate closely in multilateral organizations and fora, including the United Nations, G20,

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-related fora, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization.

- Together with Australia and Japan, the United States and India convene as the Quad, a diplomatic network, to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- **Nuclear Cooperation: Civil Nuclear Deal was signed in 2005**, under the agreement, India agrees to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and place all its civil resources under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. In exchange, the United States agrees to work toward full civil nuclear cooperation with India.

Challenges

- **India's preference to its strategic autonomy:** While its embrace with the U.S. is getting stronger, deeper and more comprehensive, India is also cognisant of the need to maintain its strategic autonomy.
- **Conflicting positions:** India's muted criticism of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 expectedly led to some frustration in the West, raising questions over India's credibility as a security partner.
- **Defence Relations with Russia:** The United States has expressed particular concern regarding new streams of arms like the S-400 air defense system, because they fuel Russian power, diminish prospects for interoperability of and secure communications between U.S. and Indian forces, and preclude sharing of existing sensitive weapons technologies.

Conclusion

- The **evolving relationship** between India and the United States holds significant importance in shaping the global order of the 21st century.
- To fully unlock the potential of this partnership, both governments must focus on **reducing bilateral and multilateral bottlenecks** and charting a course for a comprehensive and strategic global alliance.
- The strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries is of significance in the context of an increasingly aggressive China.

Source: [TH](#)

The U.S.'s signal of a huge digital shift

Syllabus: GS2/ Government Policies & Interventions

In Context

- The US has decided to withdraw its proposal on digital trade at the WTO to retain the policy space for regulating big-tech firms.

More about the news

- The US proposal to withdraw at the **WTO's Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on e-commerce** meeting, was made in 2019.
- **Reasons:** The stated motive is the realisation that the **U.S. needs domestic policy space to regulate Big Tech and AI**, for which data and source code could be important leverage points.
 - The US is said to be reviewing its **approach to trade rules** in sensitive areas such as **data and source code** to balance the right to regulate in the public interest and the need to address **anti competitive behaviour** in the digital economy.

About WTO's Joint Initiative on E-commerce

- A group of 71 WTO members agreed at the **11th Ministerial Conference** in December 2017 to initiate **exploratory work towards future WTO negotiations** on trade-related aspects of e-commerce.
- In January 2019, 76 WTO members confirmed in a joint statement their intention to commence these negotiations.
- They agreed to “seek to achieve a high standard outcome that builds on existing WTO agreements and frameworks with the participation of as many WTO members as possible”.

Outcomes of US's withdrawal

- **Suggesting the future trend:**
 - The declaration of withdrawal from WTO's Joint Initiative on E-commerce represents a watershed moment about how the global digital economy and society will evolve going forward.
- **Reshaping the future of digital trade agreements:**
 - Given the US dominant role in the global digital landscape, the decision to withdraw the digital trade proposal is poised to spark a **worldwide reassessment of national e-commerce policies**, potentially reshaping the future of digital trade agreements.
 - The key issues will be ensuring ample policy space and revisiting national digital trade strategies.
- **May hamper existing members:**
 - The US' change in position on the matter is likely to be a dampener for on-going efforts of the JSI members that includes many developed nations such as the EU, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, and Canada, to highlight the need for global rules on e-commerce at the WTO 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024.
- **Possibility of US led initiative:**
 - U.S. may still push for data flow, source code, and facilities location, related provisions in regional digital trade deals, in some form or the other.
 - Such deals will be led by the U.S., and, significantly, be limited to its allies.
 - The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) are two such initiatives by the U.S. It is pursuing similar interests through bilateral trade and technology councils

India's position

- India had refused to be part of the JSI on e-commerce, which is a plurilateral grouping of a limited number of WTO members, over concerns that such rules may strengthen the dominance of large e-commerce companies and go against smaller local companies.
- With China and India being major data generators and China already safeguarding its data, India believes in maintaining flexibility in data-sharing with domestic companies rather than international tech giants
- According to experts, the US's withdrawal is an opportune moment for India to rethink its strategy of negotiating provisions on digital trade in its FTAs.

Suggestions & Way ahead

- **Opportunity for developing countries:**
 - Developing countries such as India, should make the most of the new global consensus on the need for strong digital regulations to rein in Big Tech and manage AI, including through policies related to data, source code, and location of computing facilities.
 - The U.S.'s withdrawal along with the EU already employing data and source code related laws in its domestic regulation which are beginning to look quite contrary to its positions at global digital trade forums.
 - Developing countries should grasp this opportunity with both hands to urgently shape new paradigms for national digital regulation.
- **Not to fall into digital Cold War:**
 - Developing countries must stoutly resist a new trap of a digital Cold War, whereby they get bound into digital dependencies either with the U.S. or China.
- **Need for strong digital policies:**
 - A new digital regulation paradigm should combine with strong digital industrial policies to bolster domestic digital industry.
 - Countries should aim at creating globally open standards, open protocols, and open digital public infrastructures.

Way ahead

- All these suggestions together could mean complete and genuine global-scale interoperability.
- This would enable open global digital value chains, allowing easy switching across global digital trade partners — suppliers or consumers — whether from the U.S., China, or elsewhere.

Source: TH

El Nino impact on Food Security: FAO

Syllabus: GS1/ Geography, GS3/ Economy

Context

- The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** recently forecast that El Nino may fuel more extreme weather events such as heatwaves, wildfires and droughts.

More About the News

- The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** of the United Nations has launched a plan to reduce the projected impacts of climate phenomenon El Nino on agricultural livelihoods and food security of the most at-risk and vulnerable populations.

Formation of El Niño

- El Niño results from a complex interplay between oceanic and atmospheric forces. The primary catalyst is the weakening of the **east-to-west trade winds** that typically prevail across the tropical Pacific Ocean.
- This weakened wind pattern enables warm water from the western Pacific to flow back to the eastern Pacific, causing a rise in sea surface temperatures.

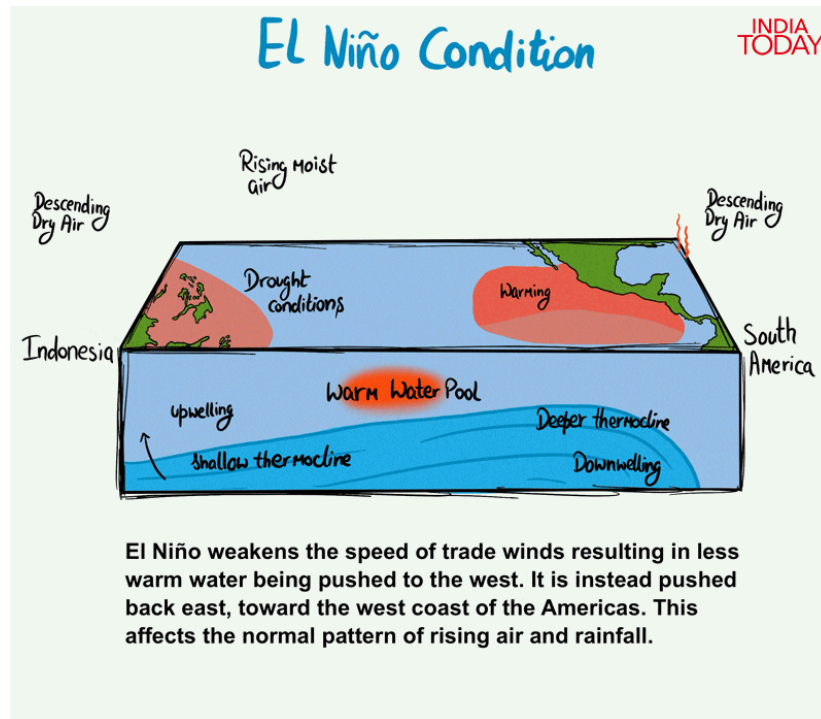


Image Courtesy: India Today

Impact of El Niño on Global Regions

- **Oceanic and Atmospheric Effects:** El Niño influences ocean temperatures, currents, coastal fisheries, and local weather patterns spanning from Australia to South America and beyond. Warmer ocean surface waters lead to increased rainfall due to the ascent of warm air.
- **Regional Weather Patterns:** South America experiences heightened rainfall, contributing to coastal floods and erosion. Conversely, Indonesia and Australia face dry conditions, resulting in reservoir depletion and reduced river flow, posing risks to water-dependent agriculture.
- **Asia-Pacific Dynamics:** The weakened trade winds drive warm surface water towards Asia and Australia, elevating sea levels and temperatures in Indonesia compared to Ecuador.
- **Environmental and Health Consequences:** Regions impacted by El Niño-induced natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, become more susceptible to disease outbreaks, including cholera, dengue fever, and malaria. Dry conditions can lead to wildfires, causing respiratory difficulties.
- **Positive Impact on Hurricane Frequency:** El Niño can have a positive consequence by reducing the frequency of hurricanes in the Atlantic.

Impact of El Niño on India

- **Weather and Climate Impact:** El Niño significantly influences India's weather and climate, particularly during the monsoon season. Weaker monsoon rains during El Niño events contribute to droughts, with notable instances in 2002 and 2009, affecting the country's water resources.
- **Agricultural Sector and Economic Consequences:** El Niño directly impacts India's agricultural sector, diminishing yields of crucial summer crops like rice, sugarcane, cotton, and oilseeds. Reduced agricultural output has ripple

effects on the economy, contributing to high inflation and diminished GDP growth.

- **Water Resource Impact:** El Niño's effects can have a devastating impact on water resources in India, exacerbating challenges related to drought and water scarcity.
- **Climate Variability and Hazards:** El Niño induces changes in temperature, precipitation, and storm patterns in India, leading to increased risks of flooding, landslides, and other hazards.

El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

- **Overview of ENSO:**
 - ENSO describes the interaction between the tropical Pacific Ocean and the atmosphere, marked by periodic warming (El Niño) and cooling (La Niña) of the central and eastern tropical Pacific oceans. The warming phase is termed El Niño, while the cooling phase is referred to as La Niña.
- **Southern Oscillation and Pressure Fluctuations:**
 - The typical pressure conditions in the tropical South Pacific and Indian Ocean can reverse during ENSO events, resulting in low pressure in the Pacific and high pressure in the Indian Ocean.
 - This fluctuation in pressure conditions is known as the Southern Oscillation, intricately linked to the El Niño phenomenon.
 - The synergy of El Niño and the Southern Oscillation is collectively termed El Niño Southern Oscillations, encapsulating the comprehensive climate patterns and anomalies associated with this phenomenon.

Food and Agriculture Organization

- **About:**
 - It is a specialized agency established by the **United Nations in 1945** that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.
 - It is **headquartered in Rome, Italy**.
 - It strives to provide information and support sustainable agriculture through legislation and national strategies, with a goal of alleviating hunger.
 - It works to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives.
- **Major Publications released:**
 - The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA).
 - The State of the World's Forests (SOFO).
 - The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI).

Source: DTE

Digital Advertisement Policy, 2023

Syllabus :GS 2/Polity and Governance

In News

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting approved "**Digital Advertisement Policy, 2023** to enable and empower the **Central Bureau of Communication** to undertake campaigns in the **Digital Media Space**.

About Digital Advertisement Policy 2023

- It has been formulated after wide ranging discussions with multiple stakeholders and outlines the roadmap of enhancing the **Digital Outreach of the Government of India** and **improving information dissemination to the Citizens**.
- It introduces **competitive bidding** for rate discovery, ensuring transparency and efficiency.
 - Rates discovered through this process will **remain valid for three years** and will be **applicable to all eligible agencies**.

Key Features

- It marks a pivotal moment in CBC's mission to **disseminate information** and **create awareness** regarding various schemes, programs, and policies of the Government of India in response to the evolving media landscape and the increased digitalization of media consumption.
- The **Policy also recognizes the dynamic nature** of the digital landscape and empowers CBC to on board New and Innovative Communication Platforms in the Digital Space with the approval of a duly constituted committee.
- The Policy **will enable CBC to empanel agencies and organisations** in the **OTT and Video on Demand Space**.
- CBC will also be able to **leverage the growing number of listeners** to Podcasts and Digital Audio platforms through empanelment of Digital Audio platforms.
- Apart from rationalising its process of empanelling Internet Websites, CBC now for the **first time will be able to channelize** its public service campaign messages through Mobile Applications too.
- The **policy also empowers CBC** to empanel Digital Media Agencies to enhance its outreach through the various platforms.

Objectives And Need

- In recent years, the way audiences consume media has witnessed a significant shift towards the digital space.
- The **Digital India program** has led to a huge growth in the number of people in the country who are now connected to the internet, social and digital media platforms.
 - As per TRAI's Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators January–March 2023, the internet penetration in India as of March 2023, is over 880 million, and the number of telecom subscribers as of March 2023 is over 1172 million.

- The huge subscriber base in the Digital Universe, coupled with technology enabled messaging options through Digital advertisements will facilitate effective **delivery of citizen centric** messages in a targeted manner, resulting in cost efficiencies in public oriented campaigns.

The Central Bureau of Communication (CBC)

- It is a unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that has the mandate of providing 360 degrees communication solutions to Ministries, Departments, Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), and autonomous bodies.
- It was set up on 8th December 2017 by the integration of the erstwhile Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), Directorate of Field Publicity (DFP), and Song & Drama Division (S&DD).
- It is responsible for creating awareness and disseminating information about various government programs, schemes, and policies in India.
- It is engaged in the process of educating people, both rural and urban, about the Government's policies and programmes to evoke their participation in developmental activities

Source:[TH](#)

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- NRLM and SIDBI signed MoUs to help Self Help Group

Syllabus: GS3/Indian Economy

In News

- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission and SIDBI** signed an MOU that marks a significant milestone in the journey of women-led enterprises.

About

- The MoU is signed for **two years**.
- The primary focus of this collaboration is to **demonstrate on-the-ground activities** that establish a reliable and sensitive support structure for the **capacity enhancement of women entrepreneurs (WEs)**.
- Furthermore, it **aims to institutionalize** standard protocols, systems, and procedures for streamlined access to formal finance, as well as the development of a comprehensive framework for new financial products and schemes.

Key outcomes expected from this collaboration are:

- Enhanced capacity and ability of State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLM) teams to promote the **graduation of seasoned SHG members into micro-entrepreneurs**.
- The establishment of a **reliable and sensitive support architecture** for women-led enterprises.
- The **design and implementation of new financial schemes**, such as credit guarantees and interest subventions.
- The **creation of clear, scalable models** for promoting women-led enterprises which can be replicated nationwide.

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)

- It was launched by the **Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in 2011**.
- It **aims to reduce poverty** by enabling the poor household to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities resulting in sustainable and diversified livelihood options for the poor.
- The Mission seeks to achieve its objective through investing in **four core components**:
 - social mobilization and promotion and strengthening of self-managed and financially sustainable community institutions of the rural poor women;
 - financial inclusion;
 - sustainable livelihoods; and
 - social inclusion, social development and access to entitlements through convergence.
- The Mission seeks to reach out to around **10 Crore rural poor households** in a phased manner by **2022-23** and impact their livelihoods significantly.

SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India)

- It is the **Principal Financial Institution** set up under an Act of Parliament for promotion, financing, and development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector in India.
- **Mission: To facilitate and strengthen credit flow to MSMEs** and address both financial and developmental gaps in the MSME ecosystem.
- **Vision:** To emerge as a **single window** for meeting the financial and developmental needs of the MSME sector to make it strong, vibrant and globally competitive.
- **Functioning:** In order to achieve the same, SIDBI proactively partners with Banks, SFBs, NBFCs, MFIs, and New Age FinTechs for Indirect lending, focusing on multiplier effect / larger reach in financing the MSME sector.

Source: [PIB](#)

Facts In News

Broadcasting Services Bill

Syllabus: GS2/Polity

In News

- I&B Ministry releases draft Broadcasting Services Bill for public consultation.

Scope of the Bill

- The proposed bill aims to replace the Cable and TV Act.
- Bill expand Cable and TV act scope to cover a wide range of broadcasting services, including Direct-to-Home (DTH), Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms, Digital Media, and Internet Protocol Television (IPTV).

Features of Bill

- **Modernization:** The draft bill is intended to modernize the regulatory framework by replacing outdated Acts, Rules, and Guidelines. This could involve adapting regulations to accommodate emerging technologies and changing consumer preferences.
- **Innovations in Self-Regulation:** It proposes the establishment of 'Content Evaluation Committees' for robust self-regulation. Additionally, there is mention of transforming the Inter-Departmental Committee into a broader 'Broadcast Advisory Council' to encourage inclusive decision-making.
- **Accessibility Guidelines:** The draft bill includes "comprehensive accessibility guidelines" to address the needs of differently-abled users. This reflects a commitment to ensuring that broadcasting services are accessible to a diverse audience.

Significance

- **Ease of Doing Business:** The bill aligns with the government's objective of promoting the ease of doing business. This suggests an intention to create a regulatory environment that encourages growth and innovation in the broadcasting sector.

Source: [TH](#)

Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA)

Syllabus: GS2/International Relations

In News

- The Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral emphasized the pivotal role of establishing networks and partnerships like the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) in safeguarding the security and stability of the Indian Ocean Region.

About

- IPMDA is a collaborative effort by the Quad nations to monitor and enhance maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, with a focus on real-time awareness, comprehensive coverage, and regional cooperation.
- **Introduced by:** Quad group during the 2022 Tokyo summit.
- **Objective:** The initiative aims to monitor "dark shipping" and provide a comprehensive, real-time maritime overview of partner nations' waters.
 - **Dark shipping** refers to vessels that engage in illegal or suspicious activities like smuggling, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and transporting illicit goods.
- **Geographical Focus:** IPMDA focuses on integrating the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region (IOR) within the broader Indo-Pacific framework.
- **Security and Stability:** The primary objective of IPMDA is to enhance the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region, which holds a central place in global geopolitics.
- **Comprehensive System:** IPMDA seeks to establish a comprehensive system for monitoring and securing maritime activities in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Critical Sea Lines of Communication:** It aims to ensure the safety of critical sea lines of communication in the region.
- **Promoting Cooperation:** IPMDA encourages cooperation among like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific, fostering a collaborative approach to maritime security.
- **Global Geopolitical Significance:** The initiative acknowledges the Indo-Pacific's crucial role in global geopolitics, emphasizing the need for collective efforts in maintaining regional security.

Source: [TH](#)

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

Syllabus: GS3/Economy

In News

- The Supreme Court refused to give reprieve to personal guarantors in case of default by a company under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

About

- **Introduction:** The IBC was introduced by the Central Government in 2016.
- **Objective:** To streamline and expedite the process of resolving insolvency, which was historically a lengthy and economically challenging procedure.
 - The IBC covers a wide range of insolvency-related matters and is designed to protect the interests of small investors.
- **Resolution Timeframe:** IBC establishes a time-bound process for resolving insolvency cases. Companies are required to complete the entire insolvency exercise within 180 days.
 - For smaller companies, including startups with an annual turnover of Rs 1 crore, the deadline is set at 90 days, with a possible extension of 45 days.
- **Debtor-Creditor Relationship:** The IBC has transformed the debtor-creditor relationship by providing a structured and time-sensitive mechanism for resolution.

- When a default in repayment occurs, creditors gain control over the debtor's assets and must make decisions to resolve insolvency.
- **Recovery Proceedings:** Both debtors and creditors have the option to initiate 'recovery' proceedings against each other under the IBC.
- **Liquidation:** If debt resolution is not achieved within the stipulated time frame, the company may go into liquidation.
- **Creditor Objections and Extensions:** The deadline for resolution may be extended if creditors do not raise objections to the extension.

Source: [BS](#)

Baler machine

Syllabus : GS 3/Agriculture

In News

- The Baler machine has been in demand in Punjab with the problem of farm fires being taken up by the Supreme Court.
- Currently, Punjab has around 32 lakh hectares of rice fields. Depending on how many days they operate, only 15-18% of this area can be covered by the available balers in the state.

About Baler machine

- It facilitates ex situ (off site) stubble management.
- It compresses **agricultural residue into manageable and transportable bales.**
- Baler' machines have been around for a decade, and currently around 2,000 of them operate in Punjab.
 - Of these 1,268 are highly subsidised (50-80%) under the Centre's Crop Residue Management (CRM) scheme.

Need

- Upon harvesting, the paddy crop leaves a stubble on the ground. Farmers need to get rid of this stubble before the next crop can be sown.
- Farmers burn the stubble, the smoke from which becomes one of the largest air pollutants each year.
- More environment-friendly methods include incorporation of the stubble into the soil using machines such as super seeders (in situ management).
- However, farmers say this leaves fields vulnerable to insect attacks, necessitating the use of toxic insecticides.
- For many, ex situ management is preferable. This is where baler machines come in.

Do you know ?

- Before using a baler machine, farmers cut the crop residue with a tractor-mounted cutter. After two days of drying, a rake arranges the stubble in straight lines. A tractor-mounted baler machine then compresses the stubble into compact bales using netting.
 - These bales are transported to factories or dumping sites.
- In fields where balers are used, farmers can immediately plough the field and sow the next crop.
 - Most balers in Punjab create cylindrical or rectangle bales weighing 25-30 kg, though bigger machines are also available.

Source:[IE](#)