



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

India, Qatar elevate ties to strategic partnership

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Qatar and India have signed an agreement to elevate their relationship to a strategic partnership, focusing on trade, investment, energy, and security. The two countries are also exploring a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). During the visit of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, discussions included the Israel-Palestine conflict, regional security, and bilateral trade, with a goal to double trade to \$28 billion. A double taxation avoidance treaty was signed. The visit also highlighted challenges, including the continued detention of ex-Indian Navy commander Purnendu Tiwary in Qatar, despite the repatriation of seven others. India acknowledged the significant Indian workforce in Qatar and mentioned that 85 Indians had received pardons in 2024.

India, which already has strategic partnerships with other Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) members, reiterated its support for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The visit coincided with an upcoming Arab summit in Riyadh, where U.S. proposals on Palestinian displacement are expected to be discussed.

U.S., Russia agree to work to end the war in Ukraine

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Russia and the U.S. have agreed to work towards ending the war in Ukraine and improving diplomatic and economic ties, marking a shift in U.S. foreign policy under President Donald Trump. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov outlined three key goals: restoring embassy staffing, creating a high-level team for Ukraine peace talks, and exploring closer relations.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the talks, prompting concerns from Kyiv and European allies. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy rejected any outcome excluding Ukraine's participation. The discussions are seen as a precursor to a future summit between Trump and Russian

Rubio acknowledged that ending the war would require concessions from all sides, including European involvement, given existing sanctions. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov emphasized that a lasting peace deal must address broader European security issues.

The
More
You Learn,
The
More
You Earn



www.vedhikiasacademy.org

VEDHIK
IAS ACADEMY
The New Learning Mantra



How is registering 'brazen' live-in relationships a privacy invasion, asks HC

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Uttarakhand High Court, while hearing a plea against the mandatory registration of live-in relationships under the state's new Uniform Civil Code (UCC), questioned how this requirement could be seen as an invasion of privacy when couples are openly living together. The Division Bench, led by Chief Justice G. Narender and Justice Alok Mehra, made these remarks on February 17 in response to arguments by the petitioner's advocate, Abhijay Negi.

The petitioners, an interfaith couple, argued that the requirement made it difficult for them to live in society. Negi contended that the mandatory registration would institutionalize gossip, but the court countered that couples already live openly in society. The case also highlighted issues faced by interfaith and intercaste couples, referencing incidents of violence, such as the killing of a man in Almora for marrying an upper-caste woman. The court scheduled the next hearing for April 1, maintaining its stance that State regulation of live-in relationships is not inherently problematic.

Government obliged to consider remission of eligible convicts: SC

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court ruled that governments must consider the premature release of eligible convicts without requiring them or their relatives to apply for remission. A Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan stated that if a government has a policy under Section 432 of the Criminal Procedure Code or Section 473 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, it is obligated to review all eligible cases for early release as per the policy guidelines.

I&B Ministry issued order to block Vikatan site after cartoon on Modi

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Vikatan magazine's website was blocked in India by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry through the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) after publishing a controversial cartoon featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi in chains next to U.S. President Donald Trump. The cartoon, referencing deported immigrants, sparked outrage within the BJP, leading Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai to file a complaint.

The blocking order was issued without prior notice, and Vikatan staff were caught off guard when their website was suddenly taken down on February 15. The magazine later received a formal notice on February 16, stating that the IT Rules, 2021 committee was reviewing the specific cartoon, though the order did not mention blocking the entire website.

Vikatan has defended its right to publish the cartoon and intends to legally challenge any order for its removal. The Ministry has agreed to consider the magazine's stance in an upcoming hearing, and Vikatan has indicated it will pursue further legal action if the decision does not uphold freedom of expression.



START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE
BEST

INDIA'S TOP MOST CIVIL SERVANTS FOR COACHING

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

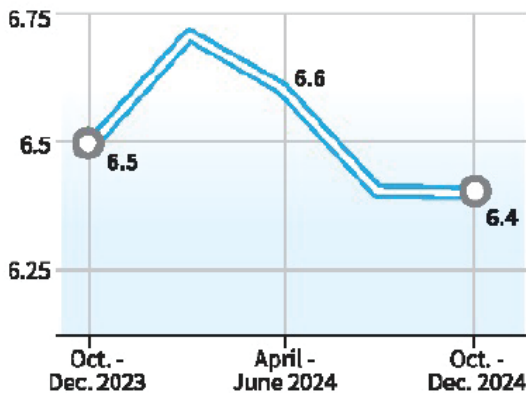
Slight dip in unemployment rate in urban areas: survey

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for October to December 2024 reported an urban unemployment rate of 6.4% for individuals aged 15 and above, with 5.8% for men and 8.1% for women. The unemployment rate was 6.5% in the same period of 2023 and remained at 6.4% in the previous quarter (July–September 2024).

Faint glimmer

The chart shows the unemployment rate (in %) in urban areas for persons of age 15 years and above



Seeking prospects: Job seekers participating in a job mela in Hyderabad. NAGARA GOPAL

Source: MOSPI

The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for those 15 and above increased to 47.2% from 46.6% in Q4 2023, with male WPR rising to 70.9%.

Employment distribution showed 39.9% self-employed, 49.4% regular employees, and 10.7% casual labourers. Sector-wise, 5.5% worked in agriculture, 31.8% in the secondary sector (including mining), and 62.7% in the tertiary (service) sector. The survey covered 1,70,487 people in 45,074 households.

Among states, Himachal Pradesh had the highest unemployment rate (10.4%), while Gujarat had the lowest (3%). The female unemployment rate was also highest in Himachal Pradesh (24%) and lowest in Delhi (1.3%).

The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), indicating the percentage of people in the labour force, was 39.6% (compared to 39.2% in Q4 2023). The female LFPR increased slightly to 20% but declined from the previous quarter's 20.3%. Bihar recorded the lowest LFPR at 30.7% overall and 9.9% for women.

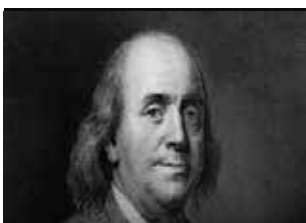
India prepares to submit updated greenhouse gas inventory to UN

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

India is finalizing its first Biannual Transparency Report (BTR) as part of its commitment under the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, according to the Environment Ministry. The BTR will present India's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory, sector-wise sources, progress in energy efficiency and renewable energy transition, and resource availability.

Unlike previous Biannual Update Reports (BURs), the BTR will undergo technical review by independent UNFCCC-accredited experts. While only developed countries previously submitted BTRs, the 2024 COP in Baku marked the first time all signatories had to comply. Although the deadline was December 2024, India and several other countries missed it.

The upcoming BTR will include data up to 2022, whereas the last BUR reflected 2020 emissions. India's 2020 BUR reported a 7.93% decline in GHG emissions from 2019, largely due to COVID-19 lockdowns. However, the new BTR is expected to show an increase in emissions, following global trends. Despite this, India's emissions remain 4-5% of global totals, and its per capita emissions are less than a third of the global average.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

Centre revamps websites, creates multilingual AI hub for better scheme outreach

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Union government is revamping its official websites and developing an AI hub to improve the dissemination of government information. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has released a Digital Brand Identity Manual to create a standardized design for government websites, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directive to enhance digital platforms.

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry is working on a multilingual AI hub to efficiently share government initiatives, though it has not been formally launched. Other AI-driven initiatives include Digital India Bhashini (language translation), BharatGen (a multimodal large language model), Sarvam-1 AI LLM, Chitrlekha (video transcreation), and Everest 1.0, a multilingual AI system for Indian languages.

'GDP growth may slow to 6.4%-6.6% in Q3 of FY25'

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

India's GDP growth is expected to slow to 6.4%-6.6% in Q3FY25, down from 8.6% in Q3FY24, due to global economic uncertainties. Bank of Baroda (BoB) projects 6.6% growth, while ICRA estimates 6.4%, though both indicate a recovery from Q2FY25's seven-quarter low of 5.4%.

Economist Jahnvi Prabhakar noted that while India remains among the fastest-growing economies, global headwinds are affecting the currency and external sector. Sector-wise, agriculture (4.5% vs. 0.4% last year) and public administration (8.1% vs. 7.5%) are expected to grow faster. However, industrial growth (5.9% vs. 10.2%) and services (6.9% vs. 7.1%) may slow down, partly due to a higher base effect from Q3FY24.

European leaders differ on sending peacekeepers to post-war

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



European leaders failed to agree on sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine at an emergency summit in Paris, convened by French President Emmanuel Macron. The meeting was held in response to U.S.-Russia talks in Riyadh, which excluded Ukraine and Europe.

Macron emphasized the need for security guarantees for Ukraine and called for European investment in defense. However, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz rejected the idea of peacekeeping troops, calling it inappropriate amid an ongoing war. Polish PM Donald Tusk ruled out sending troops but agreed Europe should increase defense spending, noting Poland leads in this effort.

UK PM Keir Starmer said Britain would consider deploying troops under a lasting peace

agreement, but only with a U.S. security guarantee to deter Russia. Swedish PM Ulf Kristersson said post-war peacekeeping was a possibility, while Dutch PM Dick Schoof stressed that Europe must contribute actively to have influence in peace talks.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

Iran FM, Houthi envoy discuss Nimisha case

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has appealed on behalf of Nimisha Priya, an Indian nurse sentenced to death in Yemen, after discussing her case with a senior Houthi envoy in Muscat. Araghchi, who met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, later raised the issue with Ansar Allah's special envoy, Mohammed Abdul Salam, expressing hope for a resolution.

Priya, a 37-year-old nurse from Kerala, was convicted in 2020 for killing her Yemeni business partner, Talal Abdo Mahdi, in 2017. Her family claims she was abused for years and has been raising funds for "blood money" to seek a pardon under Islamic law.

The Indian government has stated that the case is between Priya's and Mahdi's families, prompting criticism in Kerala that New Delhi is not

doing enough. However, Araghchi's comments indicate that diplomatic efforts are ongoing, given Iran's influence over the Houthis. He emphasized that the case is a legal matter, and finding an alternative legal solution is necessary to prevent her execution. Priya is currently held at the Central Prison in Sana'a.

Eroding federalism

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The Union Government has withheld ₹2,152 crore in Samagra Shiksha funds from Tamil Nadu for rejecting the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), pressuring the State to comply. This move contradicts the scheme's goal of ensuring quality education and has affected 40 lakh students and 32,000 staff members. Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan insists Tamil Nadu must implement the NEP and adopt a three-language policy, including Hindi, despite the State's historic opposition and commitment to Tamil-English bilingual education since 1968.

Tamil Nadu leaders, including Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, have strongly opposed this coercion, questioning the constitutional basis for enforcing the trilingual system. They argue that education policies should be flexible, respecting regional diversity and cooperative federalism. A better approach would be to decouple central education funds from the NEP and base funding on generic performance indicators. Tamil Nadu, in turn, should finalize its State Education Policy to ensure academic stability without federal interference.

Time and timing

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) has sparked controversy again, as the government follows its December 2023 law, which is under Supreme Court review. The new law replaces the Chief Justice of India (CJI) in the selection panel with a Union Minister, giving the executive a 2:1 majority. Petitioners argue that this undermines the Election Commission's independence, violating a 2022 Supreme Court ruling that sought to insulate appointments from government influence.

Despite pending court hearings, the government has proceeded with appointments, elevating Gyanesh Kumar as CEC and Vivek Joshi as an EC, following Rajiv Kumar's retirement. Critics argue that such executive dominance weakens public trust in the Election Commission's impartiality. The Supreme Court must now decide if the law meets the independence standards set in its 2022 judgment, ensuring elections remain free and fair.

Quakes may well sharpen India's seismic readiness

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquake and the recent January 7, 2025 earthquake in Tibet highlight the growing seismic threats worldwide. India, particularly the Himalayan region, sits on an active fault line between the Indian and Eurasian plates, making it highly vulnerable to a major earthquake.

Despite warnings from seismologists, national preparedness remains inadequate. While media discussions, including an editorial in *The Hindu*, emphasize adhering to building codes, the earthquakes felt in Delhi and Bihar on February 17 prove that existing measures are insufficient. Stronger government action is needed beyond public awareness and individual precautions.

Immediate Steps for Preparedness:

- Regulating infrastructure in seismic zones, halting projects that weaken the earth's crust.
- Updating seismic maps and assessing high-risk structures like hydel projects and nuclear reactors.
- Implementing seismic building insurance to encourage earthquake-resistant construction.
- Developing a disaster response framework for rescue, rehabilitation, and relief operations.
- Collaborating with global experts to enhance earthquake prediction and infrastructure resilience.

India has the advantage of pre-emptive action, unlike post-disaster recoveries. With the Ministry of Earth Sciences and Disaster Management Authority, proactive planning can mitigate devastation.

The danger of a digital censor board

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The controversy over the YouTube show *India's Got Latent*, hosted by Samay Raina and featuring Ranveer Allahabadi, has triggered widespread outrage. The Supreme Court, Chief Ministers, and a Parliamentary Standing Committee have condemned Allahabadi's crude remarks, fueling demands for greater digital regulation. However, this backlash is not just about vulgarity—it reflects the government's growing control over digital media.

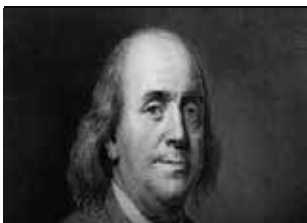
Legal and Censorship Issues

- **Obscenity Laws:** The Supreme Court's 2024 ruling in *Apoorva Arora v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi* clarified that vulgar language alone is not obscene unless it arouses sexual or lustful thoughts. This suggests that Allahabadi's remarks, though offensive, may not be criminal.
- **Website Blocking:** Section 69A of the IT Act (2000), used to censor content, does not explicitly cover "decency and morality". However, the government has expanded its blocking powers, as seen in past cases like *Savita Bhabhi* and the 2021 IT Rules, which enhanced censorship over digital media.
- **Push for Regulation:** The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is reviving the Broadcasting Bill, aiming to regulate online creators like traditional broadcasters. Public uproars, like this one, often lead to stricter censorship laws, reducing creative freedom.

Political and Economic Context

The government's increasing control over digital platforms is linked to a broader shift in India's political economy. Analysts Yamini Aiyar and Neelanjan Sircar argue that direct benefit transfers, once a constitutional right, have become tools of political allegiance. This techno-patrimonialism, combined with cultural nationalism and welfarism, explains why political parties now push for stricter digital censorship.

The outrage over *India's Got Latent* is not just about vulgarity—it's part of a larger trend toward digital media control. With new censorship laws on the horizon, online creators may soon plead for self-regulation to avoid legal crackdowns. This moment marks a significant shift in India's digital freedom, where offensive jokes spark state intervention, raising concerns about the future of free speech online.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

Agricultural protectionism pushes up India's import tariff

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Tariff troubles

The data for the charts were sourced from the World Trade Organization and the Centre For Monitoring Indian Economy



Chart 2: The chart shows the number of applied tariff lines India U.S.

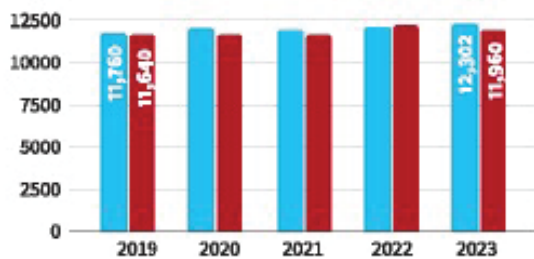


Chart 3: The chart shows the average duty (simple average) levied category-wise on imports into India (in %)

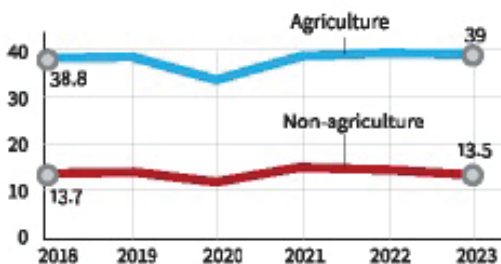
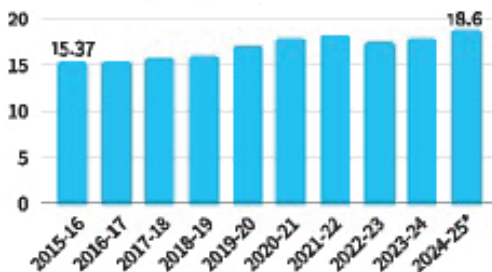


Chart 5: The chart shows the share of exports to the U.S. in India's total exports (in %)



Note: * Data for April-November FY 25

Chart 1: The charts shows the average duty (simple average) levied on imports country-wise (in %)

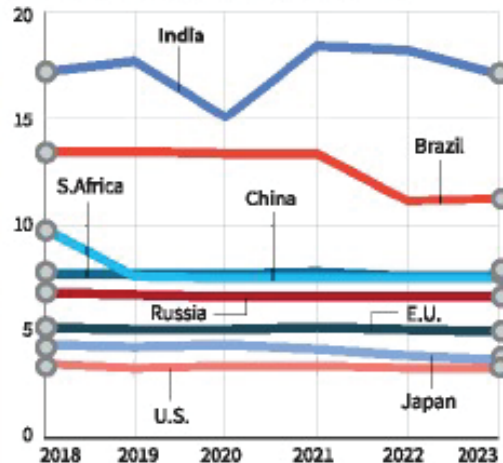


Table 4: The chart shows the average duty levied product category wise on imports into India (in %)

Product Category	2018 (%)	2023 (%)
Beverages and tobacco	74.7	74.5
Oilseeds, fats and oils	54.1	60.1
Sugars and confectionery	51.5	51.5
Coffee, tea	56.3	47.6
Cereals and preparations	37.1	37.8
Dairy products	34.8	35.2
Fruits, vegetables, plants	32.4	34.6
Animal products	32.5	32.5
Fish and fish products	30	30
Transport equipment	31.1	28.2
Other agricultural products	29	28.1
Clothing	20.5	20.7
Textiles	20.7	16
Leather, footwear, etc	12.1	15.1
Manufactures n.e.s.	11.1	12.4
Minerals and metals	11	11.9
Electrical machinery	8.8	11.2
Wood, paper, etc	10	10.6
Chemicals	10.2	10.3
Cotton	26	9.4
Petroleum	9.2	9.2
Non-electrical machinery	7.8	7.9

India imposes significantly higher tariffs on imports compared to the U.S., with an average tariff of 17% in 2023, compared to 3.3% in the U.S.. Among BRICS nations, India's tariffs are the highest, followed by Brazil (11%), China and South Africa (7%+), and Russia (6.6%). However, the number of products subject to tariffs is similar in both India and the U.S.

Reasons for High Tariffs

India's high tariffs are primarily due to agricultural protectionism. While tariffs on non-agricultural goods have remained below 15%, agricultural tariffs have consistently exceeded 38%. This is to protect domestic food security and farmer livelihoods, as low agricultural investment (6% of total investment) has left the sector inefficient and uncompetitive globally. High U.S. agricultural subsidies further complicate the situation, preventing India from reducing tariffs.

Sector-Wise Tariff Trends

- Agricultural products, dairy, beverages, and tobacco attract over 30% import duty.
- Transport equipment, cotton, and textiles saw tariff reductions from 2018 to 2023.
- Electrical machinery, leather/footwear, and some manufactured goods faced tariff hikes.

U.S. Trade Pressure and Reciprocal Tariffs

Former U.S. President Donald Trump criticized global tariffs and proposed reciprocal tariffs against countries he deemed unfair to the U.S., raising concerns in India. In response,

India recently reduced tariffs on bourbon whiskey from 150% to 100%.

India's trade surplus with the U.S. has grown, with exports surpassing \$53 billion in FY25, now making up 18% of total exports (up from 15% a decade ago). The U.S. is likely to push India to lower agricultural tariffs during upcoming bilateral trade negotiations, even though India has resisted discussing agricultural tariffs in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

What is the 'rarest of rare' doctrine?

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Two recent murder convictions on January 22 highlighted contrasting judicial approaches to the death penalty in India. While one case resulted in capital punishment, the other led to life imprisonment, raising concerns about the unclear application of the 'rarest of rare' doctrine.

Case Comparisons

- Kolkata Doctor Murder Case (2024) – A civic volunteer raped and murdered a female doctor on duty. The judge ruled it did not qualify as 'rarest of rare' and sentenced him to life imprisonment.
- Sharon Raj Poisoning Case (2022) – A Kerala student was poisoned by his partner, leading to his death. The court deemed it a 'rarest of rare' case and sentenced the accused to death.
- Origins of the 'Rarest of Rare' Doctrine
- In Jagmohan Singh v. State of U.P. (1972), the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the death penalty, rejecting arguments that it violated fundamental rights.
- In Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980), the court introduced the 'rarest of rare' doctrine, but did not define it clearly.
- In Machhi Singh v. State of Punjab (1983), the court outlined five criteria for the death penalty:
 - Brutality of the murder
 - Depraved motive
 - Socially abhorrent nature
 - Magnitude of the crime
 - Victim's vulnerability (e.g., child, elderly, or helpless individual)
 - Legal Revisions and Ongoing Debate
- Mithu v. State of Punjab (1983) struck down mandatory death sentences for life convicts committing murder, ruling it unconstitutional.

In 2022, the Supreme Court sought to establish a uniform approach to hearing mitigating circumstances before classifying crimes as 'rarest of rare'.

Judicial Discretion and Controversy

Despite legal frameworks, the lack of a clear statutory definition for the 'rarest of rare' doctrine creates inconsistencies in death penalty rulings, leaving room for judicial discretion and debate.



START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE
BEST

INDIA'S TOP MOST CIVIL SERVANTS FOR COACHING

**Comprehensive Coaching For
568 Government Jobs**

www.vedhikiasacademy.org



VEDHIK

IAS ACADEMY

The New Learning Mantra

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE BEST

**INDIA'S
TOP MOST
CIVIL SERVANTS
FOR COACHING**

www.vedhikiasacademy.org

Head Office:

Vedhik IAS Academy
Mercy Estate,
MG Road, Ravipuram,
Ernakulam-682 015,

Corporate office:

Vedhik IAS Academy
Samkalp Bhawan, Plot No.15,
Sector 4, Rama Krishna Puram,
New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office

Vedhik IAS Academy
202, Raheja Chambers, 12,
Museum Road. Bangalore -
560001. Karnataka, India.

GCC Office:

Bobscoedu,
Bobsco Trading & Contracting Co. W. L . L
Office 22, Dream Tower 1,
Road: 2701, Adliya, Kingdom of Bahrain
www.bobscoedu.com