



TAKSHASHILA
SCHOOL OF CIVIL SERVICES

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General Studies I

1. The '3Cs' Undermining Indian Education Today

Background

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was hailed as a turning point for Indian education. But despite its promises, critics argue it hides significant structural flaws in the government's educational approach. Over the last ten years, the Union Government has been accused of sidelining student and teacher interests, resulting in a triple crisis—**centralisation, commercialisation, and communalisation.**

Centralisation: Eroding Federal Balance

● Concentration of Power

A key concern is the growing central dominance over education. Although education falls under the Concurrent List—requiring cooperation between Centre and States—the Central Advisory Board of Education hasn't met since 2019. Despite the sweeping changes of NEP 2020, States were hardly consulted.

● Pressure Tactics

The Union Government has allegedly used schemes like PM-SHRI to pressure states, even withholding critical funds from the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which supports the Right to Education (RTE). This coercive practice drew criticism from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education.

● Control Over Higher Education

Draft UGC guidelines for 2025 limit state powers by allowing the Centre greater say in the appointment of vice-chancellors, using Governors as intermediaries. This undermines the independence of state-run universities and threatens the federal character of Indian education governance.

Commercialisation: Turning Education Into a Commodity

● School Privatization

Though NEP claims inclusivity, it has accelerated the decline of public schools—nearly 90,000 have shut down since 2014—while private institutions have proliferated. The concept of 'school complexes' dilutes the RTE Act's focus on neighborhood schools, pushing disadvantaged families into costly, unregulated private options.

● Higher Education Financing

Replacing grants with loans through the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA), universities must now self-finance via student fees. This burden is passed



on to learners through fee hikes, making quality higher education unaffordable for many. Moreover, financial irregularities and corruption—such as bribery within NAAC and mismanagement at NTA—highlight a deeper governance crisis.

Communalisation: Ideological Bias in Education

● **Textbook Revisions**

Curriculum changes driven by ideology are raising alarms. Topics like Gandhi's assassination, Mughal history, and even the Constitution's Preamble have been selectively removed from school books—though public pressure forced partial rollbacks.

● **Politicisation of Academia**

Faculty appointments are increasingly influenced by political leanings over academic merit. Even elite institutes like IITs and IIMs have seen key roles filled based on affiliation, not expertise. The UGC's move to dilute academic eligibility standards reflects this ideological slant.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The combined impact of these three trends has hollowed out India's public education system, widened inequality, and injected political agendas into classrooms. To reverse this:

- **State autonomy must be restored**, both financially and administratively.
- **Public funding should be prioritised** for schools and universities.
- **Academic decisions must be based on expertise**, not political motivations.
- **Transparency and accountability** mechanisms are essential to curb corruption.

Education is more than an economic instrument—it's the foundation of democratic and social development. Safeguarding its integrity is crucial for India's future.

2. Why India's Urban Future Needs Localised, Context-Based Planning

Context

With rapid urbanisation, India is set to become home to the world's largest urban population. But the dominant model of city planning—driven by centrally designed schemes—often overlooks the unique needs of individual cities.

Current Planning: Centralised and Uniform

Although urban development is constitutionally a State subject, the Centre heavily influences it through missions like PMAY, AMRUT, and Swachh Bharat. While beneficial in parts, these programmes impose a one-size-fits-all framework, often misaligned with on-ground realities.



● **Infrastructure Over Local Needs**

Since the 1990s, programmes like JNNURM and the Smart Cities Mission have prioritised large infrastructure—metro projects alone received nearly 30% of the budget. This leaves little room for local bodies to address pressing local concerns like climate adaptation or inclusive housing.

Problems with the Top-Down Approach

● **Inflexible Implementation**

Cities must conform to central formats, regardless of their actual requirements or capacities.

● **Mismatched Funding**

Some cities receive resources for sanitation or housing they may not urgently need, while more urgent needs like flood resilience or transportation remain underfunded.

● **Misuse and Waste**

Cities often spend money on symbolic projects to show fund utilisation, instead of investing in real needs—an issue seen in many Smart City projects.

Urbanisation Varies Across India

Urban growth is not uniform:

- In Kerala, urban and rural landscapes merge seamlessly, making traditional urban policies ineffective.
- In Gujarat's Ahmedabad, wealthier groups shift to suburbs, displacing poorer residents.
- Migration patterns from northern to southern states reshape local demographics and infrastructure needs.

Such diversity demands flexible, city-specific planning.

Way Forward: Empower Local Governance

Experts recommend a decentralised model:

● **Greater Fiscal Autonomy**

At least 70% of urban development funds should go directly to States and urban local bodies, through State Finance Commissions or unconditional transfers.

● **Tailored City Plans**

Local authorities should determine priorities—whether water supply, mobility, or housing—based on scientific evidence and citizen input.

● **Outcome-Oriented Funding**

Move away from rigid formats; allow cities the space to innovate.

● **End Conditional Transfers**

Burdensome requirements (like raising property taxes) reduce local flexibility and

responsiveness.

Conclusion

India's cities are too diverse for a single urban model. Continuing with centralised planning risks wasting resources and worsening urban issues. A shift towards empowering local governments with decision-making and financial independence is vital for building inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities in the decades to come.

3. India's Migration Landscape Five Years After Covid-19: Key Shifts and Emerging Trends

Context and Background:

The Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted migration flows across India, intensifying migrant vulnerabilities. Now, half a decade later, while movement patterns have mostly stabilized to pre-pandemic levels, evolving challenges—such as climate change and economic shifts—continue to reshape India's migration dynamics.

Pandemic-Induced Reverse Migration:

The initial lockdowns prompted a large-scale reversal in migration, with millions moving from urban centres back to rural areas. Government data suggests around 44 million people migrated during the first wave, and another 26 million during the second. Returning migrants encountered acute hardships—wage loss, hunger, limited access to healthcare and schooling, social bias, and often, police excesses. Remittance-dependent families were pushed into deeper financial instability.

Rural Challenges and Return to Urban Centres:

India's rural economy was ill-equipped to accommodate the returning population. Although MGNREGA offered temporary relief, it couldn't ensure sustained employment. The drivers behind renewed migration to urban zones include:

- Poor rural wages and agrarian distress
- Aspirational urban lifestyles and job prospects
- The growing impact of climate change on farming, especially in states like Odisha, pushing out youth and farmers

Urbanization and Government Push:

India's urban population is forecast to reach 40% by 2026. Policies like the Smart Cities Mission aim to attract investments and talent to modernized urban zones, indirectly encouraging migration to these areas.



International Migration Dynamics:

Indian workers abroad also suffered during Covid—job losses, wage cuts, and unsafe conditions were common. Still, remittances remained a vital economic lifeline.

Post-pandemic trends reveal:

- GCC nations continue as leading destinations.
- Europe is drawing more Indian professionals, with many receiving EU Blue Cards in 2023.
- African countries are becoming emerging markets for Indian workers, especially in healthcare, IT, and manufacturing—though safety issues persist.
- Student emigration from states like Kerala has surged (2.5 lakh in 2023 vs. 1.29 lakh in 2018), reflecting a growing interest in global education.

Policy Gaps and Governance Issues:

- The 2021 Census delay has impaired a clear understanding of migration shifts.
- PLFS data (2020–21) indicates a minor increase in migration, but doesn't capture long-term impacts.
- Absence of a comprehensive Indian emigrant registry hampers policymaking.
- Initiatives like the e-Shram portal and ONORC have had limited success due to digital barriers and lack of awareness.

State Models and Recommendations:

Kerala's long-standing migration surveys have set a benchmark for informed migration policies. States like Odisha and Jharkhand are following suit. Expanding such data-driven approaches nationwide would improve migrant welfare and economic planning.

Conclusion:

India's migration patterns are evolving, influenced by environmental, economic, and political forces. Strengthening governance with robust data systems and inclusive social policies is essential to safeguarding migrant well-being.

4. India and the Global Free Speech Index: Growing Gaps Between Perception and Reality

Why in the News?

A U.S.-based think tank, The Future of Free Speech, recently ranked India 24th out of 33 countries in its global Free Speech Index, spotlighting contradictions between public attitudes and actual free speech conditions.



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Key Rankings and Global Landscape:

- India scored 62.6, between South Africa (66.9) and Lebanon (61.8).
- Scandinavian countries led the index: Norway (87.9) and Denmark (87.0).
- Nations like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan made notable improvements.
- Surprisingly, Hungary and Venezuela ranked higher than expected, reflecting strong public sentiment despite authoritarian tendencies.

Public Sentiment vs. Reality in India:

While many Indians support the idea of free speech, a significant portion also backs government intervention in curbing dissent.

- A record 37% of Indians supported state restrictions on criticism—highest among all surveyed nations.
- In contrast, only 5% in the UK and 3% in Denmark held similar views.
- Indians largely believe they enjoy more speech freedom now, despite growing legal and political constraints.

Legal and Political Constraints:

- Although sedition laws under Section 124A of the IPC were formally repealed, their essence persists in the new BNS Section 152.
- Laws like the UAPA and IT Rules 2021 continue to restrict speech, especially targeting activists, journalists, and critics.
- Political pressure has led to widespread media self-censorship, fear of legal consequences, and erosion of journalistic independence.

Selective Free Speech Support:

Free speech is often supported in abstract terms but opposed when it contradicts dominant political or religious ideologies. Instances of detaining comedians, writers, and activists underscore the inconsistency in application.

Way Forward:

- Reform laws that hinder open expression and bolster judicial checks.
 - Foster environments in schools, universities, and media where diverse views are welcome.
 - Promote fact-based civic dialogue and increase public awareness of constitutional rights.
 - Ensure digital platforms operate without undue censorship and protect journalists from institutional pressure.
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5. The Dark Reality of Insta-Commerce and Gig Work: A New Form of Exploitation

Context:

Urban labour exploitation has evolved from physical labour hubs to algorithm-driven gig platforms. Though tech-enabled work offers flexibility on paper, it often reproduces and intensifies traditional exploitation.

Traditional Labour Markets and Middlemen:

At daily labour spots in cities, workers rely on *thekedars* (middlemen) for jobs. These intermediaries, however, typically push for the lowest possible wages, leaving workers in precarious conditions without negotiation power.

Digitisation and the Gig Economy:

Gig platforms like delivery and domestic services have virtualised the labour market. These companies act as new-age middlemen, using algorithms to reduce wages, manage workload, and control availability—just as *thekedars* do, but more efficiently and invisibly.

Illusion of Flexibility:

Though gig workers seem to choose their hours, platform algorithms essentially control task distribution and wage rates.

- Rejecting tasks may lead to fewer future assignments.
- Wages fluctuate based on supply-demand algorithms, often to the worker's disadvantage.
- Workers remain on standby, competing for underpaid tasks.

Wage Depressions and Algorithmic Exploitation:

Platforms automate the race to the bottom. Algorithms prioritize low-cost labor, forcing workers to accept exploitative rates to stay active on the platform.

Lack of Social Protection:

Gig workers are classified as “independent contractors,” meaning no entitlement to:

- Minimum wage or job security
- Paid leave or medical cover
- Compensation for injuries or termination

They bear all risks while the platform profits.

Legislative Pushback and Corporate Resistance:

- States like Rajasthan and Karnataka have proposed laws for gig worker protections—social security, data access, and redressal mechanisms.
- However, industry groups like NASSCOM have strongly opposed formal employee classification, fearing increased costs.

Corporate Double Standards:

Despite branding themselves as worker-centric, gig platforms oppose any regulation that enforces fair pay or protections.

Apps offering services at rock-bottom prices, such as “Insta Maids” at ₹49/hour, reflect this contradiction.

Slogans from protests like “Haq chahiye, rating nahi” and “Insaan hai hum, ghulaam nahi” encapsulate workers' struggles for dignity.

Conclusion:

The gig economy hasn't solved the issue of labour exploitation—it has simply updated it for the digital age.

True reform requires:

- Enforceable labour laws
- Recognition of gig workers as employees
- Corporate accountability

Until then, these platforms will continue to operate as tech-enabled systems of labour extraction with minimal worker protections.

6. A Land Where Ambition Grows Without Needing to Leave

Overview

Migration has been central to human history, influencing economies, societies, and cultures globally. Recent deportation cases of Indian migrants from the U.S. underscore the complex nature of migration today. While India celebrates its global achievers, many Indians still pursue opportunities abroad—legally or otherwise—raising important questions about the pressures driving migration and the kind of development India must strive for.

The Mixed Realities of the Indian Diaspora

India leads globally in terms of emigrants. Many have found success overseas, including prominent figures like Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella, symbolizing India's intellectual contributions to the world. Yet, many others face hardship, often traveling illegally through risky routes into the U.S. These are not refugees, but economic migrants



seeking a better future than they perceive is possible in India. Their struggles expose the gap between India's image as a rising power and the lived realities of many citizens.

Economic Growth vs. Migration Paradox

India's robust economic growth contrasts starkly with persistent youth unemployment and inequality. Even prosperous states like Gujarat and Punjab see high migration rates, including tragic incidents like families perishing at foreign borders. This suggests that migration is not just about poverty—it reflects a deeper yearning for upward mobility and better life prospects.

Key Reasons for Migration

- **Growing Economy, Limited Jobs:** Although India is growing fast, employment generation has lagged, leaving millions of educated young people without adequate work.
- **Affluent Migration:** Increasingly, even the middle and upper classes are migrating. States considered prosperous see high outbound rates due to dissatisfaction with healthcare, education, and bureaucratic red tape at home.
- **Lack of Inclusive Development:** Economic progress has been concentrated in select areas and sectors. Rural India remains underdeveloped, agriculture is no longer seen as viable by many, and aspirations for a better life push youth to seek alternatives abroad.

The Myth of the American Dream

The U.S. is still seen as a land of opportunity, but the reality is often harsh for undocumented migrants who live in constant fear and face mistreatment. Deportation processes, particularly involving shackling, are degrading. India must protect the dignity of its citizens overseas and advocate for fair treatment.

The Way Ahead: Making Migration a Choice, Not a Compulsion

- **Boosting Job Creation:** Investment in industries like tech and manufacturing is essential to absorb the growing workforce.
- **Education and Skills Alignment:** There is a need to match education with market requirements through better vocational training.
- **Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** Reducing regulatory hurdles and supporting startups can help talented individuals thrive within India.

Conclusion

India's progress should be measured by its ability to provide opportunities domestically. Migration should be a voluntary pursuit—not a survival strategy. A truly rising India must empower its people to succeed at home, not just abroad.



7. Public Health Education in India: Gaps and Opportunities

Overview

Public health is vital for a strong healthcare system. While demand for public health professionals in India has increased, the sector faces key issues: a mismatch between education and job availability, lack of regulation, and uneven access to quality training.

Historical Evolution of Public Health Training

- **Colonial Era:** Public health in India began during British rule, focused on sanitation and disease control, often taught as a side component in medical education.
- **Early Institutions:** The All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, founded in 1932, marked an early effort in public health education. Still, training remained limited to medical students.
- **Post-Independence:** As India tackled public health crises post-1947, institutions like NIHF were created, but community medicine remained the primary focus.
- **Modern Developments:** The 2000s brought expansion through MPH (Master of Public Health) programs, open to graduates from diverse fields. This led to an interdisciplinary approach, and by 2024, over 100 institutions offered MPH programs.

Challenges for Public Health Graduates

- **Job Shortages:** Despite growing interest, job opportunities—especially in government—are limited. Many planned state-level public health cadres are stuck in bureaucratic delays.
- **Private Sector Preferences:** Private healthcare often values business skills over public health expertise, limiting options for MPH graduates.
- **Quality of Education:** The rapid proliferation of MPH courses has sometimes diluted quality. Many students enroll without full understanding, and faculty lack practical experience.
- **No Standard Curriculum:** Unlike medical degrees, MPH programs lack a regulatory authority to enforce consistency and quality.
- **Regional Disparities:** Several large states have little or no access to public health training, creating educational inequality and weakening local health systems.

Steps Toward Reform

- **Create More Government Jobs:** Establishing public health cadres within states can provide employment while strengthening grassroots healthcare.
- **Introduce Regulatory Oversight:** A dedicated regulatory body under NMC or UGC should oversee curriculum design and ensure practical training.

- **Promote Practical Training:** Stronger links between academic institutions and NGOs, research centers, and government bodies can help graduates gain field experience.
- **Expand Access:** New institutions and incentives like scholarships and assured placements can encourage more students from underserved regions to pursue public health.

Conclusion

India's healthcare future depends heavily on the strength of its public health workforce. Without proper regulation, job creation, and education reform, the sector risks becoming oversaturated and underutilized. Strategic policy changes can help ensure that public health education not only thrives but translates into meaningful impact on national health outcomes.

8. The Gender Budget: Larger Allocations, Limited Impact

Context

The Union Budget 2025–26 saw a major increase in the gender budget, rising to ₹4.49 lakh crore—a 37.25% hike from the previous year. While this signals greater government focus on women's welfare, the actual impact on marginalized women, especially those from SC and ST communities, remains minimal. A critical evaluation of the gender budget reveals persistent structural issues and missed opportunities.

The Core Issue: Growth in Budget, Not in Benefits

Despite consistent increases in the gender budget over the years, its benefits have not proportionately reached all women. Targeted schemes like PM JANMAN and the Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan have been introduced, yet their outcomes remain weak due to deep-seated structural inequalities.

The major flaw lies in the lack of an intersectional framework that considers how caste, class, and tribal identity affect access to resources. Despite two decades of gender budgeting, the system has not evolved to address these interconnected social factors.

Structural and Implementation Challenges

- **Digital Exclusion**

Many rural and tribal women remain digitally illiterate. Although digitization aims to streamline welfare delivery, it can alienate these women further without complementary digital literacy initiatives.

- **Outdated Census Data**

With the last census conducted in 2011, policy planning is based on outdated information. This hampers the government's ability to assess need and target

interventions effectively. For example, gender-specific data under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is lacking despite a nearly 46% rise in budget allocation.

● **Administrative Hurdles**

Bureaucratic inefficiencies contribute to poor fund utilization. According to a 2023–24 report, over one-third of SC/ST welfare funds go unused due to complex procedures, inadequate community engagement, and poor accessibility, particularly for women unfamiliar with formal systems.

Key Reform Measures

● **Adopt an Intersectional Perspective**

Gender budgeting must address the overlapping influences of caste, class, and location. Central and state-level audits can help tailor funds more equitably.

● **Empower Local Governance**

Strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions by ensuring funding, autonomy, and gender-sensitive leadership (curbing male dominance via proxy 'sarpanch husbands') is essential for grassroots effectiveness.

● **Community Participation in Planning**

Schemes designed and monitored by local women, especially SC/ST women, can improve both reach and relevance. Kerala's Kudumbashree model offers a successful blueprint.

● **Improve Data Collection and Accountability**

Regular gender-disaggregated data and a centralized budget tracking portal can enhance transparency and ensure that funds are used effectively.

● **Invest in Digital Literacy**

Training programs must accompany digitization drives to empower women to independently access government schemes and services.

Conclusion

While the increased gender budget is a welcome move, actual progress depends on removing structural barriers and ensuring that benefits reach the most vulnerable. By adopting inclusive frameworks, strengthening local systems, and improving data transparency, gender budgeting can move from symbolic to transformational.

9. Empowering India's Women Through Bold Policy Initiatives

Context

International Women's Day on March 8 serves as a reminder of India's progress in gender equality. Over the past few years, targeted government schemes have significantly improved women's access to sanitation, clean water, financial services, entrepreneurship

opportunities, and governance roles. These policy-driven shifts are helping redefine women's roles across the country.

Key Initiatives in Women's Empowerment

● Sanitation and Water Access

- *Swachh Bharat Mission*: Built over 116 million toilets, dramatically improving safety, hygiene, and dignity for rural women. Community-led programs like the Maa Tarini SHG in Rourkela show the social and economic benefits of such initiatives.
- *Jal Jeevan Mission*: Boosted household tap water access from 17% to over 150 million households, freeing up women's time and improving their participation in education and the workforce. This contributed to a rise in rural female workforce participation—from 24.6% in 2017 to 41.5% in 2023, especially in states like Bihar and Jharkhand.

● Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment

- *PM Jan Dhan Yojana*: Enabled over 300 million women to open bank accounts, giving them greater financial independence through direct benefit transfers.
- *PM Mudra Yojana*: Provided 68% of its loans to women, allowing many to transition from informal work to entrepreneurship.
- *Stand-Up India*: Offered loans to women and marginalized groups, helping over 2.36 lakh women entrepreneurs with ₹53,609 crore in funding, along with financial training.

● Digital Connectivity Boosting Entrepreneurship

- *BharatNet & PM-WANI*: Brought internet access to over 2 lakh villages, allowing women to use digital payments and online platforms.
- *UPI & GeM Portals*: UPI has made financial transactions seamless for rural entrepreneurs. Over 1 lakh women-led businesses on the GeM portal have secured contracts worth ₹46,615 crore.
- *Case Example*: Reena Kirar, a self-help group leader from Madhya Pradesh, expanded her business nationwide using GeM, highlighting the potential of digital tools in rural empowerment.

● Women in Governance

- A landmark 33% reservation for women in legislatures is a turning point in political inclusion.
- Women now make up 46% of Panchayati Raj representatives, with over 1.4 million women in leadership roles. Their influence has improved public services like education and health at the village level.

Remaining Challenges and the Way Forward

- **Limited Access to Large-Scale Credit**

Women still struggle to access higher-value loans due to lack of collateral or formal credit histories. Encouraging MFIs and venture capital investment in women-led enterprises could bridge this gap.

- **Socio-Cultural Norms**

Gender stereotypes still discourage women's full participation in the economy. Awareness campaigns and mentorship by successful women can help shift mindsets.

- **Digital Literacy Gap**

Despite increased digital access, many women lack the skills to fully benefit. Government and private initiatives should scale up training in online banking, digital marketing, and e-commerce.

Conclusion

India has made notable gains in women's empowerment across sanitation, finance, entrepreneurship, and governance. These policies have improved quality of life and enabled greater economic participation. However, to sustain momentum, continued policy focus, investment in education, and efforts to break social barriers are critical.

10. Inclusion in Public Spaces: Transitioning from Fear to Freedom

Context

India continues to struggle with entrenched gender inequalities, and one of the most urgent issues is ensuring women's access to and safety in public spaces. According to the Women, Peace, and Security Index 2023, India ranks 128 out of 177 countries, emphasizing the critical need for comprehensive reform. While conversations around gender-based violence often focus on domestic abuse and workplace harassment, an equally important but often neglected area is how public spaces are designed and experienced by women.

Gendered Control Over Space and Women's Mobility

Public spaces are more than physical locations—they are arenas for economic, social, and political engagement. However, these areas remain largely dominated by men, reinforcing a spatial hierarchy that restricts women's mobility. Research reveals that women often use public spaces out of necessity, not by choice. As per NFHS-4 (2015–16), just 54% of women reported being able to go to markets alone, and only half could access healthcare without company.

In 2023–24, only 35.6% of women were part of the labour force, highlighting limited participation in public life. For many working women, public spaces are simply transit zones, unlike men who often use these areas for leisure. This lack of freedom reinforces



patriarchal norms, implying women must always have a reason to be outside, discouraging them from fully participating in community life.

Safety Concerns and Limited Access

Fear of Violence and Its Effects

Public areas are frequently seen as unsafe for women due to prevalent gender-based violence—ranging from catcalling and stalking to physical assault. This constant threat forces women to adopt self-protective behaviors, such as:

- Avoiding poorly lit or isolated areas and late-night public transport,
- Taking longer but safer routes,
- Walking quickly, avoiding eye contact, or dressing modestly to avoid attention.

These defensive strategies are a daily reality for women, shaping how they interact with their environment. In contrast, men can typically move through public areas without such constraints.

Public Spaces as Sites of Violence

While violence in private settings gets more attention, public areas also serve as dangerous zones for women. Places like parks, streets, and bus stops expose them to threats from multiple strangers. Public transport, a necessity for many women, often becomes a hotspot for harassment. Incidents like inappropriate touching and verbal abuse are common, deterring women from using shared transportation. Poor lighting and inadequate infrastructure worsen the situation.

Victim-Blaming and Social Attitudes

A major obstacle to change is the widespread culture of victim-blaming. Survivors of harassment are often questioned about their clothes, behavior, or the time of day they were outside. Comments like "Why was she out late?" or "She should have been more cautious" shift responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim. This discourages women from reporting crimes and further restricts their presence in public life. It normalizes gendered violence while placing the burden of safety entirely on women.

Consequences of Restricted Access

- **Economic Limitation:** Safety concerns discourage women from jobs requiring travel or late shifts, affecting their income and career growth.
- **Social Isolation:** Fewer opportunities to participate in cultural or community events reduce their social interactions.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Constant fear leads to stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of personal freedom.

The Way Forward: Societal and Policy Solutions



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- **Inclusive Urban Planning:** Cities must invest in better street lighting, secure public toilets, and safe recreational spaces.
- **Stronger Legal Measures:** Fast-track courts, higher conviction rates, and stricter punishments can serve as deterrents.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Educating the public—especially men—on issues like consent and respectful behavior is vital.
- **Encouraging Women's Participation:** Women should be actively encouraged to occupy public spaces for recreation and leisure, not just necessity.

Conclusion

Changing centuries of gendered spatial norms is a gradual process, but consistent efforts can create meaningful impact. Women deserve to use public spaces freely and confidently, without fear. Ensuring safe, inclusive environments will empower women to move from simply navigating these areas to fully claiming and enjoying them.

General Studies II

1. An Indian Judicial Service: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Context:

The discovery of half-burnt currency notes during a fire at a Delhi High Court judge's home has reignited debates around judicial accountability in India. This incident, among others, highlights systemic issues in judicial transparency and the flaws in the Collegium system of judicial appointments. In this context, the demand for a structured Indian Judicial Service (IJS) becomes increasingly relevant.

Concerns Around Judicial Accountability:

Several recent events have cast doubts on the judiciary's integrity—from controversial judgments to the judiciary resisting oversight. The Supreme Court itself has had to intervene in questionable rulings and has resisted scrutiny from bodies like the Lokpal. These issues point to a system where accountability is lacking, and public trust is being eroded.

Problems with the Collegium System:

- **Opaque Selection Process:** Judges are appointed through closed-door decisions, lacking documented criteria or transparency, unlike civil services like the IAS or IPS.



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- **Nepotism:** The Collegium often favours candidates from influential legal families, creating 'judicial dynasties' and sidelining equally capable candidates from non-elite or underprivileged backgrounds.
- **Lack of Merit-Based Evaluation:** No exams or structured assessments exist for selecting judges, leading to subjective and potentially biased appointments.
- **Unexplained Transfers and Promotions:** Judges are frequently transferred or promoted without clear justification, raising concerns about internal politics or misuse of power.
- **Resistance to External Oversight:** The judiciary has blocked reforms like the NJAC, citing judicial independence, but this has led to unchecked autonomy and inadequate accountability.
- **Poor Representation:** Women, Dalits, Adivasis, and economically weaker sections remain grossly underrepresented in the higher judiciary.

Why India Needs an Indian Judicial Service (IJS):

- **Diverse and Inclusive:** A national exam would open doors to talented candidates from all sections of society.
- **Merit-Driven:** A transparent, exam-based system would prioritize competence and ethics over connections.
- **Structured Training:** New judges could be uniformly trained, ensuring quality and consistency across courts.
- **Maintains Judicial Independence:** Recruitment can be handled by a neutral body like UPSC, while the judiciary retains control over criteria.

Conclusion:

The Collegium system, though intended to protect judicial independence, has become a symbol of opacity and inefficiency. Reforms like revisiting the NJAC with safeguards and establishing the IJS are crucial to build a fair, transparent, and accountable judiciary that serves democratic values.

2. India's Geopolitical Vision Needs Expansion

Context:

India has historically played an active role in global diplomacy—from its leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement to regional interventions in Bangladesh (1971), Maldives (1988), and Sri Lanka (2009). However, in today's volatile geopolitical climate, India's reluctance to engage deeply in international crises is limiting its global influence.

India's Current Diplomatic Posture:

Though India has shown global goodwill through initiatives like 'Vaccine Maitri' and climate diplomacy, its muted stance on key global conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war or



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the Israel-Palestine issue reveals a cautious approach. While India's balanced relations with various powers are commendable, this neutrality is starting to appear passive rather than strategic.

Risks of Strategic Inaction:

- **Emerging Middle Powers Filling the Gap:** Countries like Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are taking on active mediation roles, enhancing their global profiles. India risks being sidelined as others gain diplomatic clout.
- **Diminishing Credibility as a Global Leader:** As an advocate for the Global South and a candidate for a UNSC permanent seat, India is expected to act, not just speak. A failure to step up could weaken its leadership claims.
- **Strategic Marginalisation:** With global power realignments and potential U.S.-China accommodations, India may be excluded from critical regional or global decisions. Its hesitancy could also erode the relevance of groupings like the Quad, weakening its Indo-Pacific strategy.

What India Should Do:

- **Strengthen Regional Engagement:** India must reassert itself in West, Central, and East Asia, even after opting out of frameworks like RCEP.
- **Deepen Ties with Europe and the U.S.:** Stronger economic and political alliances with Western powers can provide a counterbalance to Chinese influence.
- **Proactively Facilitate Peace Efforts:** India doesn't need to mediate conflicts directly but can leverage its credibility to facilitate dialogue, as it has done historically during the Korean War and recent UNSC engagements.

Conclusion:

India's aspiration to be a major global power must extend beyond economic success to include bold geopolitical engagement. As the global order shifts, India must proactively shape outcomes, not just react to them. Its future as a key pole in a multipolar world hinges on its readiness to lead in times of crisis, not merely comment from the sidelines.

3. Judicial Appointments in India – Evolution, Challenges & NJAC Verdict

Context:

The recent discovery of large sums of cash at Justice Yashwant Varma's residence has reignited concerns about how judges are appointed in India. Vice President Dhankhar commented that the situation might have been different had the Supreme Court not invalidated the NJAC Act passed in 2014.

Constitutional Basis:

- Article 124 governs the establishment and functioning of the Supreme Court.



- As per Article 124(2), the President appoints Supreme Court judges after consulting the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- B.R. Ambedkar had opposed granting veto powers to the CJI, stressing consultation rather than concurrence.

Evolution of Judicial Appointments:

- **1950s–70s:** The executive had the upper hand in judicial appointments, though independence wasn't seriously questioned.
 - This changed in the 1970s with incidents like the supersession of Justice H.R. Khanna, sparking debate over judicial autonomy.
- **First Judges Case (1981):** Asserted executive primacy, interpreting “consultation” as not binding.
- **Second (1993) & Third Judges Cases (1998):** Reversed the earlier decision, making consultation with the judiciary binding, thus giving rise to the **Collegium System**.

The Collegium System:

- Not mentioned in the Constitution; evolved via Supreme Court judgments.
- Involves the CJI and four senior-most judges of the SC for SC appointments and transfers.
- For High Courts, a smaller collegium (CJI + 2 senior-most judges) is involved.
- Criticized for **lack of transparency, internal lobbying, and no accountability**.

NJAC – A Reform Attempt:

- Parliament passed the 99th Constitutional Amendment and NJAC Act in 2014.
- The NJAC would include:
 - CJI (Chair), 2 senior SC judges, Law Minister, and 2 eminent civil society members (one from SC/ST/OBC/minority/women).
- Enjoyed broad political and state-level support.

Supreme Court Strikes Down NJAC (2015):

- Declared unconstitutional (4:1 judgment).
- Main concerns:
 - **Veto power of non-judicial members**
 - **Executive dominance** violating the **Basic Structure Doctrine**—specifically, **judicial independence**.
- Justice Chelameswar dissented, pointing out flaws in the collegium system.
- Even Justice Kurian Joseph, who concurred, later regretted the decision due to continued opaqueness in the collegium.



Future of Judicial Appointments:

- Reforms are still needed.
- Suggestions include:
 - Giving CJI a casting vote.
 - Removing veto for non-judicial members.
 - Ensuring limited executive interference.
- A middle path balancing **independence and accountability** is essential.

4. The 'Great Abandonment' of Afghanistan

Context:

After the U.S. withdrawal in 2021 and the Taliban's return, Afghanistan plunged into turmoil. The situation has revived debates over foreign responsibility, and India's own shifting stance toward the Taliban raises important strategic questions.

U.S. Role and Its Aftermath:

- Under Trump and Biden, the U.S. exited Afghanistan, with the 2020 **Doha Accord** excluding the Afghan government.
- Result: Taliban swiftly regained control, undoing years of democratic and social progress.
- Women's rights and freedoms have been significantly curtailed.
- Though lacking global recognition, the Taliban regime continues, supported in varying degrees by countries like China, Russia, and Pakistan.

India's Evolving Strategy:

- Initially distanced itself post-2021 and shut its Kabul embassy.
- Later opened a "technical mission" and began official-level talks with the Taliban.
- Now reportedly considering accepting a Taliban-appointed envoy in New Delhi.
- Justified as **pragmatic diplomacy**—dealing with de facto powers to protect Indian interests and ensure aid delivery.

Challenges in Engaging the Taliban:

- **Internal Taliban tensions:** Power struggles between factions (e.g., Haqqani group vs Kandahari clerics), especially over issues like girls' education.
- **Uncertain Taliban future:** Their hold on power is not guaranteed, given economic crisis and friction with Pakistan.
- **Strategic limitations:** Unlike with the previous Afghan government, India lacks security cooperation or intelligence links with the Taliban.



- **Loss of Afghan goodwill:** India's denial of visas to fleeing Afghans, even those who worked with India, has hurt its image among Afghan citizens.

A Balanced Approach – The Way Forward:

- **Support civil society:** Champion women's rights and support cultural initiatives like the Afghan women's cricket team.
- **Engage the diaspora:** Back opposition groups in exile and provide platforms for democratic voices.
- **Cautious engagement:** If engagement with the Taliban is unavoidable, ensure that aid is not used for Taliban propaganda.

Conclusion:

India must walk a fine line between pragmatism and principle. While engagement with the Taliban may be necessary, abandoning Afghan civil society would hurt long-term interests. A flexible and values-based foreign policy is key to maintaining India's influence in the region.

5. Charting a Route for IORA under India's Chairmanship

Context & Importance

- The **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** connects nations in the Indian Ocean region to promote regional cooperation.
- India will assume **IORA chairmanship in November 2025**, presenting an opportunity to strengthen the organization's relevance.

Strategic Importance of IOR

- Covers **two-thirds of the global population**.
- Handles **75% of global trade** and **50% of daily oil consumption**.
- Annual intra-IORA trade reached **\$800 billion in 2023**.
- However, faces **underdevelopment, political instability, climate change, and security threats**.

Key Challenges

1. Funding Constraints:

- Heavy reliance on member contributions; many members are **developing countries** with limited capacity.

2. Precarious Financial Model:

- Lack of consistent funding affects long-term planning and project execution.

3. Limited Technological & Analytical Capacity:



- The **Mauritius-based Secretariat** has limited human and technical resources for policy formulation.

4. **Poor Private Sector Integration:**

- Major industries in the blue economy are **underrepresented** in policy-making.

India's Strategic Recommendations

- Align IORA with **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)**.
- **Enhance cooperation** using India's diplomatic strengths and integrate traditional knowledge from island nations.
- Build capacity by launching **marine-related academic programs** (e.g., marine accounting).
- Leverage **public-private-academic partnerships** to address blue economy challenges.

Conclusion

- India's leadership can help transform IORA into a **robust regional actor** through:
 - Financial strengthening
 - Technological advancement
 - Educational initiatives

6. The Assault on Multilateralism and International Law

Context

- The **DEFUND Act**, proposed by U.S. Senator Mike Lee, seeks full **U.S. withdrawal from the UN**, undermining global governance.

Implications of the DEFUND Act

1. Legal Consequences:

- Repeal of foundational legislation (e.g., **UN Participation Act 1945**) would nullify U.S. obligations and contributions (~22% of UN's budget).

2. Geopolitical Impact:

- U.S. exit may **reduce its global influence** and create a **power vacuum**, enabling China and Russia to assert dominance.

3. Impact on UN Peacekeeping & Aid:

- Loss of U.S. support would **cripple missions** in conflict zones and hamper humanitarian efforts.

Trend Towards Unilateralism



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- **Economic Nationalism** under Trump (e.g., tariffs, WTO obstruction).
- Undermining institutions like **WTO, UN, and ICC**.
- Erosion of multilateralism has **destabilizing global effects**, especially on trade and climate action.

India's Emerging Role

- India champions **multilateralism** and **international law**.
- Advocates **UNSC reforms** and inclusive diplomacy.
- India can **fill the leadership vacuum** left by the U.S., especially in forums like the G-20.

Conclusion

- U.S. isolationism threatens the **multilateral order**.
- Countries like India must **step up**, promote **global cooperation**, and **reform global governance institutions**.

7. The Challenge of Policing Digital Giants

Context

- The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** fined Meta ₹213.14 crore for abusing dominance via WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy.
- Case highlights the **urgent need for regulatory modernization** in digital markets.

Role of Data in Market Power

- Data enables **personalized ads, network effects, and barriers to entry** for new players.
- Meta and Google exemplify how tech giants **leverage data to entrench dominance**.

Global Regulatory Trends

1. U.S. Antitrust Actions:

- Meta faces FTC lawsuits for anti-competitive acquisitions.
- Google found guilty of violating **Sherman Act** in 2024.
- Push for **breaking up tech monopolies**.

2. EU Regulations:

- **Digital Markets Act (DMA)** and **GDPR** ensure fairness, transparency, and data privacy.
- Meta and Google fined billions for practices like **self-preferencing** and forced data integration.

Need for Indian Legal Reform



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- India's **Competition Act, 2002** is outdated; lacks provisions on **data monopolies**.
- Suggested reforms:
 - Redefine "**dominant position**" to include data power.
 - Promote **interoperability and data portability**.
 - Align with the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** for holistic regulation.

Conclusion

- The Meta case is a **wake-up call** for India.
- Coordinated reforms are necessary to regulate **data-driven dominance** and protect **consumer and market integrity**.

8. Freebies vs Welfare – India's Economic Democracy Dilemma

Context: The issue of distinguishing between welfare and freebies is gaining attention, especially with political parties offering populist schemes during elections.

Welfare vs. Populism:

- In the recent Delhi elections, many parties promised free services rather than focusing on long-term development.
- The 2024 manifesto of a leading national party showcased schemes like:
 - PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (free ration to 80 crore people),
 - Direct Benefit Transfer (₹34 lakh crore distributed),
 - PM Mudra Yojana (46 crore loans),
 - PM SVANidhi (credit for street vendors).
- This raises the debate: Are these genuinely transformative welfare measures or simply vote-winning strategies?

Economic Implications of Freebies:

- States like Maharashtra and Gujarat face fiscal stress in funding social schemes and essential services.
- Despite government claims of large-scale poverty reduction and job creation, reliance on freebies persists.
- Critics argue this can reduce productivity, increase dependency, and strain public finances.

Constitutional and Ideological Debates:

- In 1948, the Constituent Assembly rejected a proposal to declare India a socialist state.
 - K.T. Shah supported socialism for justice and security.
 - B.R. Ambedkar argued that economic policy should be left to elected governments.



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- Damodar Swarup and Mahboob Ali Baig supported a socially just order but stressed political diversity and voter choice.

India as a Welfare State – Reality Check:

- While a welfare state aims to ensure equal opportunity, wealth equity, and basic dignity, India faces severe challenges:
 - Poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare, and inequality persist.
- In *S. Subramaniam Balaji v. Tamil Nadu*, the Supreme Court justified freebies, sparking debate about fiscal prudence.

Conclusion:

As democracy allows diversity and criticism (Forster), and as Benjamin Disraeli once said, power must serve welfare. India must reconsider whether continued freebies serve genuine development or hinder long-term economic growth.

9. Delimitation – A Warning from J&K and Assam

Context:

The upcoming 2026 delimitation exercise has raised concerns about fairness, federalism, and communal balance.

Population Disparity and Representation:

- Northern states (U.P., Bihar, M.P.) have rapid population growth, unlike southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala) that succeeded in population control.
- If seat allocation is based only on population, southern states may lose representation—punishing states for good governance.
- This risks centralising power in the north, undermining balanced representation.

Rajya Sabha and Federal Balance:

- To offset the north-south imbalance, some propose redistributing Rajya Sabha seats equally across five zones.
- As the upper house reflects states' interests, balanced regional representation is vital.
- However, zonal councils (intended to promote regional cooperation) are largely dormant and need revival for this to be effective.

Federalism and Power Dynamics:

- A purely demographic approach could allow populous northern states to dominate policy making.



- Past experiences show political motivations may influence delimitation—eroding democratic trust.

Case Studies:

- **Jammu & Kashmir (2022):** Six new seats were added in Hindu-majority Jammu but only one in Muslim-majority Kashmir. Mergers of unrelated constituencies raised suspicion of demographic engineering.
- **Assam (2023):** Muslim-majority constituencies were eliminated, and population sizes of new seats varied greatly—suggesting communal bias.

Communal Polarisation:

- If delimitation is used to redraw constituencies along religious lines, it may inflame social divisions.
- There is a risk that border-state practices could be extended nationwide, threatening unity.

Way Forward:

- Maintain equitable representation without marginalising any region.
- Options like freezing Lok Sabha seats, increasing state Assembly seats, and rebalancing Rajya Sabha representation could help.
- Transparency and non-partisanship in the process are essential.

Conclusion:

Delimitation must not weaken federalism or pluralism. Policymakers and civil society must work together to ensure the 2026 exercise upholds democratic integrity and national unity.

10. Electoral Reforms in India – Challenges and Solutions

Why in News:

The Election Commission (ECI) has initiated consultations with political parties to address electoral integrity and transparency.

Why Reforms are Needed:

- Issues like fake voter IDs, EVM doubts, unchecked campaign spending, and criminal candidates have raised concerns about electoral fairness.
- Despite existing laws, loopholes remain in enforcement and transparency.

Legal Framework:

- Article 324: Empowers the ECI to oversee elections.



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- Representation of People Acts (1950 & 1951): Cover voter registration and elections.
- MCC: Regulates conduct during campaigns.
- Yet recent polls exposed flaws in voter rolls, campaign conduct, and vote counting.

Major Challenges:

1. EVM and VVPAT Trust Deficit:

- While all EVMs now have VVPATs, concerns persist. The SC has mandated 5% verification in suspicious cases.

2. Voter Roll Manipulation:

- Duplicate voters and mismatched EPIC numbers have been reported. ECI cites legacy data errors, promises audits.

3. Unregulated Spending:

- While candidates have spending caps, parties don't. This leads to massive spending, often using undisclosed funds.

4. Criminalization of Politics:

- Nearly half of Lok Sabha MPs have criminal records, many facing serious charges. Party disclosure rules exist but lack enforcement.

5. Model Code Violations:

- Leaders regularly make communal and caste-based appeals, spread misinformation. ECI lacks strong enforcement powers.

Proposed Reforms:

● EVM/VVPAT:

- Increase sample size for VVPAT checks.
- Use Totaliser machines to conceal booth-wise results, reducing booth-level tampering.

● Voter List Integrity:

- Consider linking Aadhaar to EPIC with adequate safeguards.
- Conduct pre-election audits of rolls.

● Campaign Finance:

- Cap party spending and ensure candidate-party expense disclosures.

● Decriminalisation:

- Enforce SC directives on background disclosures.
- Ban habitual offenders from contesting.

● MCC Strengthening:

- Revoke "Star Campaigner" status for repeated offenders.
- Penalise parties under the Election Symbols Order.
- Regulate social media misuse.



Conclusion:

India's electoral system needs urgent legal and administrative reforms to preserve democratic fairness. ECI, political parties, and civil society must act decisively to ensure elections reflect the will of the people, not the power of money or muscle.

11. Supreme Court's Stand on Linguistic Secularism and Language Rights in India

Why in the News?

Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister has accused the central government of imposing Hindi through the National Education Policy (NEP), which he claims is undermining Tamil Nadu's educational progress.

Background:

The Supreme Court has been pivotal in shaping language policies and advocating for linguistic secularism, which supports the inclusion of various language communities. This was reinforced by the 2014 U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan case, where the Court ruled that language laws should be flexible and promote harmony in India's diverse linguistic landscape.

Key Supreme Court Judgments on Language Policies:

- **U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan vs. State of U.P. (2014):** The Court upheld that language laws should evolve organically, stressing the need for linguistic secularism to maintain national unity.
- **State of Karnataka vs. Associated Management of Primary/Secondary Schools (2014):** The Court recognized the right to choose the medium of instruction under Article 19, ensuring states can't impose a specific language on students.
- **Sunil K.R. Sahastrabudhey vs. Director, IIT Kanpur (1982):** The Court clarified that the Union's promotion of Hindi under Article 351 does not mandate education in Hindi.

Language Conflicts and Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 343 & The Official Language Debate:** Hindi is the official language of India, but it is not the national language. The 1949 Munshi-Ayyangar formula was designed to respect regional language interests while promoting Hindi.
- **Article 29(1) & Minority Language Rights:** This provision safeguards linguistic minorities, ensuring their right to preserve their language and culture.
- **Article 351 & The Promotion of Hindi:** While the government is encouraged to promote Hindi, the Court has made it clear that it should not be forced upon individuals.



National Education Policy (NEP) and Language Controversy:

The NEP 2020 has reignited debates, with critics alleging it prioritizes Hindi over regional languages. The Supreme Court's previous rulings highlight the need for voluntary language adoption, as language is deeply tied to cultural and emotional identities.

Future Implications of Linguistic Secularism:

- **State Autonomy in Language Policy:** States will continue to have the right to decide on language policies based on regional needs.
- **Protection of Regional Languages:** The principle of linguistic secularism ensures regional languages are preserved and not overshadowed by Hindi or English.
- **Legal Oversight:** Any attempt to impose a particular language could be challenged in courts, maintaining inclusivity and federal harmony.

12. Challenges and Complexities of Federalism in India

Context:

India's federal system is grappling with challenges related to power distribution, state representation, and regional disparities. Issues like delimitation, language disputes, and financial allocations are creating friction between the Centre and states.

Key Challenges:

- **Regional Representation and Delimitation:** Balancing the representation between North and South India remains contentious, with Jammu & Kashmir awaiting full statehood.
- **Centre-State Conflicts:** Disputes over language, education policies, and central control over areas like health and education have led to tensions, particularly in Tamil Nadu.
- **Horizontal and Vertical Imbalances:** Economic disparities between states create regional inequalities, and the division of power between the Union and states requires reassessment.
- **Political and Administrative Federalism:** Political dominance by national parties weakens state autonomy, and the anti-defection law has reduced legislative oversight, further centralizing power.
- **Financial Federalism and GST:** The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is an example of collective decision-making, which could be extended to other areas for more balanced financial governance.
- **Inter-State Cooperation:** Many issues, such as air pollution and water disputes, require states to work together independently, but political parties complicate this cooperation.



Conclusion:

India's federalism remains a complex system influenced by political, economic, and administrative challenges. Addressing these issues requires a re-evaluation of the balance between party politics and the autonomy of states.

13. Women in Judiciary - Progress, Challenges, and the Path Ahead

Context:

While India has seen significant progress in the participation of women in law, their representation in the higher judiciary remains low.

Challenges in Higher Judiciary:

- **Glass Ceiling in High Courts:** Women make up only 14.27% of High Court judges, and many courts have very few or no women judges. Women judges are often appointed later in life, limiting their career prospects.
- **Underrepresentation in the Supreme Court:** The Supreme Court has only two female judges currently, with no new appointments since 2021. Only one woman has been appointed directly from the Bar, compared to nine men.
- **Barriers to Women's Appointment:** Systemic gender bias, a lack of transparency in the collegium system, and a reluctance from the government have hindered women's appointments.

Need for Gender Equality in the Judiciary:

- A gender-balanced judiciary is essential for inclusivity, legitimacy, and public trust.
- Diverse representation ensures courts reflect societal diversity, leading to more balanced judgments.

Steps Towards Equality:

- **Reform the Collegium System:** Introduce transparent, merit-based criteria for judicial appointments.
- **Prioritize Gender Diversity:** Strive for at least one-third women judges, alongside representation from different states, castes, and religions.
- **Normalize Women's Representation:** Women judges should not be treated as exceptions, but as regular members of the judiciary.

Conclusion:

India's judiciary needs a transformative shift towards gender equality. A transparent and merit-driven system is crucial to ensure a balanced and inclusive judiciary.



14. Empowering Women in Panchayati Raj - Overcoming Proxy Leadership

Context:

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have reserved 33-50% seats for women to ensure their representation in local governance. However, many women leaders still face challenges of proxy leadership, where male family members dominate.

The Challenge of Proxy Leadership:

- Many elected women sarpanches (village heads) are overshadowed by male relatives, undermining their authority. This is due to patriarchal norms, lack of education, and systemic biases.
- Training programs often fail to address women's leadership needs adequately.

Strengthening Women's Leadership:

- **Capacity Building and Training:** Structured training programs focusing on governance, budgeting, and digital literacy can empower women leaders. Such training should be regular and extensive.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Suggestions include mandating a minimum qualification of 12th grade for elected representatives and involving former sarpanches in policymaking.
- **Improving Remuneration and Resources:** Providing dignified salaries, access to smartphones, and official transport can reduce women's reliance on male family members.
- **Whistleblowing and Accountability:** Proxy leadership should be reported, and safeguards should be put in place to prevent misuse.

Conclusion:

Empowering women leaders in Panchayati Raj can lead to more inclusive and effective local governance. Strengthening institutional support and training will ensure true democratic participation and foster transformative rural governance.

General Studies III

1. India's Textile and Apparel Export Goal: Roadblocks and Way Ahead



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Overview:

India has set a bold target to triple its textile and apparel (T&A) exports from \$34.8 billion in 2023–24 to \$100 billion by 2030. Achieving this milestone will require significant policy and structural reforms.

Current Scenario:

- From FY2001 to FY24, India's T&A exports rose from \$11.5 billion to \$34.8 billion, capturing a modest 4% of the global market.
- Apparel exports (HSN 61 and 62) make up 42% of this figure.
- India's share in global apparel exports remains stagnant at 3%, while nations like Bangladesh and Vietnam have expanded rapidly.
- Despite China's declining share (from 34.8% to 29.8%), India has failed to seize the opportunity.

Major Challenges:

- **Falling Cotton Output:** Cotton production has dropped from a peak of 39.8 million bales in 2013–14 to a projected 30 million bales in 2024–25, with India now expected to become a net importer.
- **Dependence on Cotton over MMFs:** India's fibre consumption ratio (60:40 cotton to MMF) is skewed compared to the global standard of 30:70, reducing competitiveness due to costlier MMF inputs.
- **Structural Limitations:** A large portion of garment units operate in an unorganised setup, restricting scalability and modernization.
- **Trade Barriers:** Indian exports face higher tariffs (EU: 9.7%, US: 11.47%) compared to near-zero tariffs enjoyed by Bangladesh and Vietnam under preferential trade agreements.

Strategic Steps Forward:

- **Boosting MMF-Based Industry:** Remove QCOs on MMFs and cut raw material prices.
- **Speeding Up PM-MITRA Implementation:** Promote integrated textile parks to increase scale and efficiency.
- **Expanding Global Reach:** Sign FTAs with the EU and US; explore markets like Japan, Brazil, and Russia.
- **Enhancing Cotton Productivity:** Accelerate GM crop approvals, expand irrigation, and adopt advanced farming to close productivity gaps with China and Brazil.

Conclusion:



While the \$100 billion export target is ambitious, it is achievable through bold reforms, better integration, and international competitiveness. Without such efforts, the goal will remain elusive.

2. China's Rising Clout in Africa's Nuclear Energy Push

Background:

The global energy realignment following the Russia-Ukraine conflict has pushed African countries to explore nuclear power as a solution to energy insecurity. This transition has also sparked intense international competition.

Africa's Nuclear Vision:

- Currently, only South Africa has an operational plant (Koeberg).
- Countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia are now planning nuclear integration.
- By 2035, Africa could add 15,000 MW of nuclear capacity, attracting investment worth \$105 billion.

Global Competition:

- France's past dominance in Francophone Africa is fading.
- The US has initiated the US-Africa Nuclear Energy Summit but its role remains uncertain under Donald Trump's leadership.
- Russia's Rosatom has agreements with multiple nations, though its economic troubles and sanctions may limit progress.
- South Korea has shown interest through KHNP.

China's Strategic Gains:

- Since 2012, China has trained African talent in nuclear tech via IAEA partnerships.
- Currently operating over 50 reactors, China leads nuclear deployment.
- In 2024, Nigeria and Uganda signed MoUs with China to build nuclear plants, while Kenya and Ghana also consider or combine Chinese and Western collaborations.
- Chinese SOEs like CGN and CNNC are leading these projects.

Implications for India:

- India's nuclear goals (from 8,180 MW to 100 GW by 2047) make African uranium vital.
- Deals with Namibia and Niger could be at risk due to China's growing presence.



- China's infrastructure integration via BRI could deepen its control over Africa's energy systems.

Conclusion:

Africa's nuclear shift presents both a solution to power issues and a new front in geopolitical competition. China's proactive involvement has given it an edge, raising concerns over future dependencies for African nations and limiting strategic space for countries like India.

3. Goodbye Equalisation Levy: India's Digital Tax Strategy Recalibrated

Overview:

India is planning to scrap the 6% Equalisation Levy on digital advertising (effective from April 1, 2025) as part of the Finance Bill 2025. The move coincides with Indo-US trade discussions and avoids potential retaliatory taxes from the US.

Origin and Purpose:

- Introduced in 2016 through the Finance Act to tax online ads by foreign tech giants.
- Designed outside the Income-tax Act to avoid conflicts with global tax treaties.
- Faced criticism from multinational corporations over double taxation.

Global Tax Reform Context:

- OECD's BEPS framework addressed tax base erosion but failed to resolve digital taxation.
- India was a first mover, but its unilateral approach attracted global pushback.
- Dissatisfaction among developing countries led to the UN taking a more inclusive role.

International Diplomacy:

- India advocated for revenue-sharing models, while the US pushed to tax only residual profits.
- In 2024, 110 countries backed a UN-led tax convention, though implementation remains uncertain.

US Pressure and Trade Threats:

- The US initiated investigations in 2020, calling the levy discriminatory.
- Under US pressure, India earlier rolled back a 2% levy on e-commerce services.
- With Donald Trump returning, India may have acted pre-emptively to ease tensions.

Impact and Concerns:



- The levy raised ₹4,000 crore in 2022.
- Its removal may benefit advertisers and platforms but revives concerns due to the absence of a global tax regime.
- India's assertiveness in digital taxation set an example for other developing nations.

Conclusion:

The repeal of the Equalisation Levy marks a strategic shift amid global negotiations. While India's tax was effective, geopolitical realities have forced its rollback. The issue highlights the need for a global consensus on taxing digital economies.

4. Status of India's Bioeconomy

In the News:

The *India BioEconomy Report 2024* by the Department of Biotechnology estimates India's bioeconomy at over \$165 billion—around 4.2% of GDP. Projections suggest this may grow to \$300 billion by 2030 and \$1 trillion by 2047.

What is Bioeconomy?

It involves using biological resources—plants, animals, microorganisms—for industrial production of goods and services.

- **Traditional Uses:** Healthcare, agriculture, and pharmaceuticals.
- **Expanding Applications:** Now includes fuels, textiles, plastics, chemicals, and construction materials, due to benefits like sustainability and cost-efficiency.
- **Examples:** Ethanol from sugarcane/corn as fuel; synthetic biology for engineered microorganisms.

India's Bioeconomy Growth

- Nearly doubled from \$86B in 2020 to \$165B in 2024—surpassing the \$150B target for 2025.
- Number of biotech companies grew 90% (2021–2024) and expected to double again by 2030, potentially generating 35 million jobs.
- **Sectoral Contribution:**
 - Industrial biotech (biofuels, bioplastics): \$78B (~47%)
 - Pharma: 35%, driven by vaccines
 - Fastest growth: Research & IT (biotech software, bioinformatics, clinical trials)

Regional Disparities



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- Five states (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh) generate over 66% of the bioeconomy's value.
- Eastern and Northeastern states contribute under 6%.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Sustaining growth needs innovation, scale-up incentives, and policy reforms.
- Regional equity and regulatory improvements are vital.
- India's bioeconomy lags nations like Spain and Italy (where it's ~20% of GDP).

BioE3 Policy (2024)

Aims to position India as a global biotech R&D and manufacturing hub.

● Focus Areas:

- Bio-based chemicals, precision biotherapeutics, marine & space biotech
- Climate-smart agriculture

● Implementation:

- Assam is the first to adopt the framework
- Establishment of Bio-AI Hubs, Bio Foundries, and Bio-Enabler Hubs

Other Key Initiatives

- Startup growth: From 50 in 2014 to over 10,075 in 2024
- Mentorship: BioSaarthi program supports startups with diaspora mentorship
- Innovations:
 - Nafithromycin (India's first homegrown antibiotic for respiratory illness)
 - Gene therapy trials for hemophilia
 - India's complete genome sequencing of 10,074 individuals across 99 communities
- Collaboration with ISRO on space biotechnology
- R&D expenditure rose from ₹60,196 crore (2013–14) to ₹1,27,381 crore (2024)

Way Forward

- Establish a National Bioeconomy Mission
- Streamline biotech innovation through a single-window regulatory mechanism
- Resolve GM crop-related regulatory hurdles

5. Role of Communities in Conserving Water

In the News:

On *World Water Day 2025*, PM Modi emphasized collective responsibility for water



conservation. The *Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain 2025* campaign was also launched, highlighting community participation.

Community Role in Water Governance

- Present water policies offer limited local decision-making power.
- Indigenous and local knowledge remains underutilized.
- Water User Associations (WUAs) exist, but lack actual policy influence—resulting in a top-down approach.

Challenges in Water Governance

1. Marginalization in Access:

- Vulnerable groups face unequal water access.
- Equitable water governance must involve these communities and value their traditional knowledge.

2. Fragmented Policies:

- Water, land, forest, and biodiversity are governed separately—leading to inefficiencies.
- Traditional practices like *orans* (sacred forests) in western India offer a more holistic, integrated model for water and ecosystem conservation.

3. Need for a More-than-Human Perspective:

- Globally, laws are recognizing the intrinsic rights of nature.
- Some Indian communities already consider animal and ecosystem needs in irrigation practices.
- India's laws still focus solely on human needs and must evolve to reflect ecological interdependence.

Climate Change and Water

- Climate change is widening India's water deficit.
- **Policy priorities:**
 - Develop climate-resilient water infrastructure
 - Restore ecosystems to mitigate floods and droughts
 - Combine traditional methods (stepwells, check dams) with modern tech (smart irrigation, responsive storage)

Way Forward

- Move from symbolic to genuine community involvement in decision-making
- Address limitations in traditional practices with capacity-building and scientific awareness
- Adopt ecosystem-based, climate-resilient, and inclusive water governance models



6. Grok Controversy: AI, Free Speech & Accountability

In the News:

Controversial outputs from Grok, X's AI chatbot, led to government scrutiny. It has been accused of biased and offensive responses, including labeling conservative figures as spreaders of misinformation.

What is Grok?

- Developed by Elon Musk's xAI; named after the sci-fi term for "deep understanding"
- Meant as an alternative to 'woke' AI systems
- Offers "unfiltered" replies, with a premium "Unhinged Mode"
- Unique access to real-time X data for contextual answers

Concerns

- Integration with X allows widespread, real-time dissemination of unmoderated content
- Risk of real-world harm from AI-generated misinformation
- Raises questions about AI ethics, accountability, and freedom of expression

Legal and Ethical Issues

- Platforms like X are protected under safe harbour laws, shielding them from user-posted content liabilities.
- But AI-generated content lies in a grey zone—unclear if protections apply.
- Legal experts argue it's difficult to assign responsibility—should it be developers, engineers, or platforms?

Free Speech Debate

- Indian constitutional free speech applies to humans—not machines.
- Grok's outputs are code-based, making "AI free speech" a questionable concept.

Precedent: Air Canada Case

- A court held the airline accountable for incorrect info given by its AI chatbot.
- This implies AI may be treated as a "publisher" in certain contexts—especially when linked to public services.

Context-Specific Responsibility

- AI used for medical or legal advice would attract more liability than casual chatbots



- A safe harbour for developers might be possible if they follow due diligence and transparency standards

Need for Regulation

- Issues raised: misinformation, platform accountability, moderation challenges, procedural safeguards
- Debate renewed after the government withdrew an earlier AI advisory, reflecting the tension between regulation and innovation

7. \$1 Billion Fund to Boost India's Creator Economy

Why in News:

The Indian government announced a \$1 billion investment to support the creator economy, aiming to enhance skills, improve production standards, and promote global outreach, as stated by Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

What is the Creator Economy?

- Refers to a digital ecosystem where individuals like influencers, vloggers, gamers, educators, and artists earn through online platforms.
- Also called the *Orange Economy*, it includes monetization via ads, brand deals, subscriptions, merchandise, and NFTs.

Why India is Focusing on It:

- **Large Digital Base:** Over 800 million internet users with widespread smartphone usage.
- **Self-Employment & Entrepreneurship:** Encourages alternative careers outside traditional jobs.
- **Soft Power:** Showcases India's cultural richness globally through digital content.
- **Emerging Technologies:** AI, AR/VR, and blockchain open new income streams.
- **Rise of Vernacular Content:** Boosts regional engagement beyond English/Hindi audiences.

Key Challenges:

- Unreliable income and limited brand partnerships
- Harsh algorithms on platforms
- Weak intellectual property enforcement and content piracy

Government Measures:

- **\$1 Billion Investment** for capacity building and international expansion
- **Policy Ecosystem:** Digital India, Make in India, Startup India encourage digital entrepreneurship



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- **PLI Schemes:** Support for local production of devices (phones, cameras) used in content creation
- **Infrastructure Boost:** 5G rollout and better internet access
- **Regional Inclusion:** Promoting content in Indian languages
- **AI & Skill Training:** Programs to promote ethical content and upskilling

WAVES 2025 Summit:

- A global platform to boost media-tech collaborations, cultural diplomacy, and industry growth
- Will promote India as a hub for creativity, innovation, and entertainment industry investments

8. Online Gaming Sector: Opportunity Amidst Regulatory Uncertainty

Why in News:

The Economic Survey 2024–25 urged the government to reduce regulatory hurdles, including for the booming online gaming sector.

Overview of India's Gaming Sector:

- India has 650+ million smartphone users and a young, tech-savvy population.
- The sector was worth ₹33,000 crore in 2023 and is projected to double by 2028.
- Could generate 2–3 lakh new jobs in the coming years.
- However, taxation and unclear regulations threaten growth.

Taxation Challenges:

- Online gaming is taxed at **28% GST**, equating it with sin goods like alcohol and tobacco.
- **Retrospective tax demand of ₹1.12 lakh crore** creates financial stress, especially for startups.
- Courts have ruled that skill-based games are distinct from gambling, yet regulatory confusion persists.
- The **Supreme Court stayed** the GST demand, but uncertainty remains.

Key Industry Issues:

- High taxes reduce global competitiveness
- Lack of legal clarity on "gaming vs. gambling"
- Bans and litigation cause unpredictability
- Many startups struggle to survive

- Overregulation could drive users to **illegal offshore platforms**

Way Forward:

- Develop a **balanced regulatory framework** through industry-government collaboration
- **Reduce GST rates** and drop retrospective demands
- Clearly distinguish between **skill-based gaming** and gambling
- Encourage **responsible gaming** with in-app safeguards
- Focus on curbing **illegal betting** rather than penalizing legitimate companies

Conclusion:

With appropriate regulation, India's gaming sector could become a global leader in digital innovation, economic growth, and job creation.

9. World Air Quality Report 2024: India's Pollution Crisis

Why in News:

IQAir's *World Air Quality Report 2024* shows India continues to battle severe air pollution. Byrnihat (Assam) was the most polluted city globally, while Delhi remained the most polluted capital city.

Report Overview:

- Based on data from 40,000 stations across 138 countries.
- India ranked **5th most polluted country**, improving slightly from 3rd in 2023.





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India-Specific Highlights:

- **Delhi:** World's most polluted capital for the 6th year; 2nd most polluted city globally
- **Byrnihat:** Most polluted city worldwide (PM2.5 level of 128.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)
- **Average PM2.5:** Dropped 7% to 50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ from 54.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2023
- **Pollution Spikes:**
 - Jan 2024: Poor air in Delhi and Himachal
 - Nov 2024: Severe smog episodes in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh

Pollution Sources:

- **Crop Burning:** Contributed 60% of PM2.5 during peak season
- **Other Sources:** Vehicle emissions, industry, and construction dust

Global Perspective:

- Only **12 regions** met WHO's PM2.5 standard of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$
- Top 5 most polluted countries: **Chad, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Congo, India**
- Only 17% of nearly 9,000 cities met WHO air quality guidelines

Challenges in Control Measures:

- The **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**, launched in 2019, has shown limited success
- Implementation gaps, insufficient infrastructure, and weak enforcement limit effectiveness
- Although Delhi adopted BS-VI fuel and cleaner tech, enforcement remains poor

Way Forward:

- Strengthen NCAP with better monitoring, accountability, and funding
- Ensure real-time implementation, not just on-paper policies
- Promote integrated urban planning, clean energy, and public transport reforms

10. India's Spice Industry: Growth, Challenges, and Global Market Position

Why in the News?

Despite India being the top producer and exporter of a wide variety of spices, the World Spice Organisation (WSO) highlighted that the country's share in the global seasoning market is a mere 0.7%.

Overview:

India's favorable agro-climatic zones enable it to produce a diverse range of spices, making it the largest global producer. However, the country's contribution to the global \$14



billion seasoning industry is minimal compared to China (12%) and the USA (11%). This reveals a pressing need for improved value addition, expanded exports, and new applications for Indian spices.

Current Scenario:

- India produces approximately 1.5 million tonnes of spices annually, accounting for \$4.5 billion in exports—around 25% of the global spice trade.
- Main producing states include Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat, with emerging production in the Northeast, Odisha, and Jharkhand.
- Key exported spices:
 - **Black Pepper** – Predominantly from Kerala and Karnataka
 - **Cardamom** – High global demand, grown in South India
 - **Turmeric** – Used for culinary, medicinal, and nutraceutical purposes
 - **Cumin & Coriander** – Integral to Indian and Middle Eastern cuisines
 - **Chilies** – India is the world's top red chili producer, mainly from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
- Only 48% of exports are value-added; the rest are raw.

Major Challenges:

- **Low Value Addition:** India focuses more on exporting raw spices than processed or blended products. To hit the \$10 billion export target by 2030, value-added exports must rise to 70%.
- **High Production Costs:** Inefficiencies in farming, over-reliance on pesticides, and outdated processing raise costs.
- **Limited International Reach:** Competitors like Vietnam, China, Brazil, and some African nations are gaining global market space.
- **Quality & Safety Issues:** Stringent global safety standards are a concern. For instance, some MDH spice products were banned in markets like Singapore due to high levels of ethylene oxide.
- **Climate Vulnerabilities:** Spices are climate-sensitive. Irregular rainfall and rising temperatures reduce yields and quality.

Government & Industry Initiatives:

- **Spices Board of India** promotes R&D and export.
- **WSO** works with FPOs to improve cultivation practices.
- **ICAR** develops climate-resilient and high-yield varieties.
- Training programs on sustainable farming and pest control are being emphasized.

News Summary:

Although India leads in spice production, its role in the global seasoning market remains



limited. Only 48% of its spice exports are value-added. To boost its global standing, India must:

- Increase processing and value addition,
- Diversify markets and strengthen trade ties,
- Improve quality compliance and safety,
- Enhance productivity through modern farming methods.

With focused efforts, India can shift from raw spice dominance to a leader in the global seasoning and nutraceutical market.

11. Five Years of PLI Scheme: Review and Road Ahead

Why in the News?

As the first phase of the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme shows results, the government is now exploring reforms under PLI 2.0.

Introduction:

Launched in April 2020, the PLI scheme aims to increase domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependency, and attract global manufacturers across 14 sectors. It rewards companies for achieving incremental sales and is now being reconsidered for improvements, including a shift towards domestic value addition and export-based incentives.

Scheme Objectives:

- Enhance local manufacturing capacity.
- Reduce imports and attract global OEMs.
- Strengthen sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, and specialty steel.
- Integrate India into global supply chains and boost employment.

Achievements & Limitations:

- **Successes:** Mobile phones, pharmaceuticals, and food processing sectors have benefited.
- **Challenges:**
 - **Low Local Value Addition:** Even in mobile manufacturing, core components like chips are still imported.
 - **Limited Domestic Demand:** Sectors like electronics need export-led growth to scale.
 - **Dependence on Foreign Players:** Indian companies lack global competitiveness and rely heavily on imported technologies.



- **Weak R&D Base:** Indigenous capabilities in advanced tech areas like semiconductors remain underdeveloped.

PLI 2.0 – Key Proposed Reforms:

- **Value-Addition-Based Incentives:** Higher rewards for companies investing in domestic production of critical parts like PCBs and semiconductors.
- **Export-Oriented Focus:** Tying incentives to export growth to improve global competitiveness.
- **Component Ecosystem Development:** Promote joint ventures and local supply chains for components and advanced manufacturing.
- **Support for MSMEs:** Provide special incentives, credit support, and infrastructure aid to integrate small players into the larger ecosystem.
- **Semiconductor Focus:** Stronger incentives for semiconductor fabs and chip design to reduce import dependency.

Comparative Global Approaches:

- Inspired by industrial strategies of China, Japan, and South Korea:
 - These countries used foreign investment to build domestic manufacturing.
 - Emphasized technology transfer and skill development.
 - Focused on export-led manufacturing hubs.
- **Example:** China's EV sector leveraged Tesla's entry to strengthen local suppliers and create competitive domestic brands like BYD and Nio.

Conclusion:

The PLI scheme has laid the foundation for India's manufacturing ambitions, but further reforms are essential. PLI 2.0 must:

- Boost value addition,
- Strengthen local manufacturing of components,
- Support MSMEs, and
- Foster exports.

With strategic reforms, India can enhance supply chain integration and emerge as a major global manufacturing hub.

PRELIMS BOOSTER

Giloy (Guduchi / Amrita)

- **Nickname:** Known as *Amrita* in Sanskrit, meaning "*herb of immortality*", due to its wide-ranging medicinal benefits.



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- **Plant Description:** A large climbing plant with **succulent, corky, grooved stems**.
- **Distribution:** Found **throughout India**.
- **Parts Used:** **Stem, leaves, and roots** are used in traditional medicine.
- **Growth Conditions:**
 - o Grows well in **most soil types and climatic conditions**.
 - o Propagated by **stem cuttings**, mainly in **May-June**.
- **Medicinal Uses:**
 - o Used in treating **fevers and gouty arthritis**.
 - o Research indicates potential roles in **cancer therapy, autoimmune diseases, and inflammatory disorders**.

Santh Sevalal Maharaj

- Recognized as a **social reformer and spiritual guide** of the **Banjara community**.
- **Contribution:**
 - o Travelled extensively with his **Ladeniya Troupe** to assist **forest dwellers and nomadic tribes**.



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- o Known for his expertise in **Ayurveda and Naturopathy**.
- o Worked to **eliminate myths and superstitions** among tribal communities.

Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Location:** Situated in **Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh**.
- **Hydrology:**
 - o Acts as the **catchment area for the Pennar River**.
 - o The **Telugu Ganga canal** flows into its eastern region.
- **Vegetation Types:**
 - o Includes **Southern tropical dry deciduous forests, scrub forests, tropical thorn and dry evergreen forests**.
- **Wildlife Highlight:**
 - o The **only habitat for the endangered Jerdon's Courser** — a critically rare bird species.

Geological Survey of India (GSI)

- **Established:** In **1851** by **Sir Thomas Oldham**, originally to locate **coal for the Railways**.



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- **Legacy:** Celebrating **175 years of geoscientific service**.
- **Headquarters:** Kolkata.
- **Regional Offices:** Located in **Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong, and Kolkata**.
- **Functions:**

- o Conducts **geoscientific mapping, mineral exploration**, and maintains **national geoscientific data**.

- **Governance:** An **attached office under the Ministry of Mines**.
- **Presence:** Each Indian state has its own **GSI unit**.

Meteor Missile

- **Meteor** is an advanced **radar-guided Beyond-Visual-Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM)**.
- Developed under **MBDA** leadership by **six European countries – UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Sweden**.
- Designed to destroy targets at **long range with high precision**.

Reunion Island

- A **French overseas island** in the **Western Indian Ocean**, part of the **Mascarene Archipelago** along with **Mauritius and Rodrigues**.



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- Located **680 km east of Madagascar** and **180 km southwest of Mauritius**.
- Entirely **volcanic** with a base **4,000 meters below sea level**.
- Home to **Piton des Neiges** (highest peak in the Indian Ocean) and **Piton de la Fournaise** (one of the world's most active volcanoes).

Harpoon Missile

- **Subsonic anti-ship cruise missile** developed by **Boeing** for the **U.S. Navy**, introduced in **1977**.
- Designations: **RGM-84, UGM-84, AGM-84**.
- **All-weather, over-the-horizon** missile used by **over 30 countries**, including **India**.
- Launch platforms: **ships, submarines, aircraft, and shore batteries**.

Rushikulya River

- Major river of **Odisha**, flowing through **Kandhamal, Ganjam, and Boudh** districts.
- Originates at **1,000 m elevation** from the **Daringbadi hills** (known as '**Kashmir of Odisha**').
- Flows **165 km** to the **Bay of Bengal** without forming a **delta**.
- Major **tributaries**: **Baghua, Dhanei, and Badanadi**.

Olive Ridley Turtle Nesting Site (Rushikulya Beach)



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- Located near the **mouth of Rushikulya River**.
- Noted for the **Arribada phenomenon** – mass nesting of **Olive Ridley turtles** between **January and March**.

White Island (Whakaari)

- An **active stratovolcano** in the **Bay of Plenty, New Zealand**.
- Named by **James Cook in 1769**, declared a **private scenic reserve** in 1953.
- Known for **geothermal activity** – hot springs, geysers, and fumaroles.

***Epidelaxia* Spider Species**

- Two new **jumping spider species** discovered in **Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary**:
 - o ***Epidelaxia falciformis* sp. nov.**
 - o ***Epidelaxia palustris***
- First time genus ***Epidelaxia*** reported in **India**, previously believed to be **endemic to Sri Lanka**.

Aadhaar Good Governance Portal

- Launched by **Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY)**.
- Streamlines **Aadhaar authentication approval** for governance.



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- Based on **Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance Rules, 2025**.
- Aims to **enhance welfare service delivery**.

Einstein Ring

- A result of **strong gravitational lensing**, as predicted by **Einstein's General Theory of Relativity**.
- Occurs when a **massive foreground object** bends light from a **distant source**, forming a **circular ring** due to perfect alignment.
- Demonstrates **spacetime distortion** by gravity.

Firefly's Blue Ghost Lunar Landing

- **Firefly Aerospace** landed the **Blue Ghost lander** on the Moon near **Mons Latreille** in **Mare Crisium**.
- First **private mission** to land **upright** on the Moon.

Ultra-Conserved Elements (UCEs)

- Segments of **DNA** that remain **unchanged for over 80 million years**.
- Found in humans and other species (rats, mice, chickens, dogs, fish).
- Likely preserved due to **biological constraints**, indicating critical **evolutionary function**.

Selenium



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- **Essential trace mineral** found in food and supplements.
- Obtained as a **byproduct of metal sulphide ore refining**, not in pure form.
- Absorbed by plants in **organic forms: selenomethionine, selenocysteine**.
- Integral to **25 selenoproteins** such as **thioredoxin reductases, glutathione peroxidases**.
- Functions: **Thyroid regulation, DNA synthesis, immunity, antioxidant defense**.

Gangetic Dolphin

The Gangetic Dolphin is a rare freshwater river dolphin species found in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems across India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

Common names: Blind dolphin, Ganges susu, hihu, South Asian River Dolphin, side-swimming dolphin

Scientific name: *Platanista gangetica*

It is designated as India's National Aquatic Animal. Due to having lens-less eyes, it is often called the "blind dolphin." Being a mammal, it surfaces for air every 30 to 120 seconds.

Conservation Status:

- IUCN: Endangered
- Wildlife (Protection) Act: Schedule I
- CITES: Appendix I

World Wildlife Day

Celebrated annually on March 3, World Wildlife Day promotes awareness about global biodiversity. It was established by the UN in 2013 following a proposal from Thailand. The first observance was in 2014. The date marks the signing of the CITES treaty in 1973, which regulates global wildlife trade to prevent species extinction.

Theme for 2025: *Wildlife Conservation Finance: Investing in People and Planet*



Mission 300

An initiative targeting electrification for 300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. Spearheaded by the World Bank and African Development Bank, it is supported by partners such as the Rockefeller Foundation, GEAPP, SE4ALL, and ESMAP. Local communities are actively engaged in project planning and execution.

Lake Tanganyika

Located in East Africa, Lake Tanganyika is the world's longest and one of the deepest freshwater lakes, stretching over 400 miles. The Lukuga River drains it into the Lualaba River. The lake supports rice cultivation and subsistence farming, along with a modest fishing industry.

Ferrihydrite

A recent study suggests that Mars' red color may be attributed to ferrihydrite, an iron-rich mineral. Comprising about 20% (FeO_4) and 80% (FeO_6) units, it forms through rapid iron oxidation and hydrolysis. Ferrihydrite is a precursor to more stable iron minerals like goethite and hematite.

Copper in India

India's copper ore production in 2023–24 stood at 3.78 million tonnes, marking an 8% drop from 2018–19. Madhya Pradesh leads in production, followed by Rajasthan.

Swavalambini Programme

Swavalambini is a structured entrepreneurship development program for young women in Higher Education Institutions. It aims to cultivate entrepreneurial skills through mentorship, resources, and a stage-wise approach to building scalable businesses.

Right to Equality (Articles 14–18)

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection within India.
- **Article 15:** Prohibits discrimination by the state based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth; permits affirmative action.
- **Article 16:** Assures equal job opportunities in public sector employment.
- **Article 17:** Abolishes untouchability in all forms.
- **Article 18:** Bans state-conferred titles, except academic or military distinctions.



Crypto Strategic Reserve

A proposed federally regulated U.S. stockpile of major cryptocurrencies—Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple, Solana, and Cardano—intended to integrate digital assets into the national financial framework.

Mars – Quick Facts

- Fourth planet from the Sun with a reddish hue
- Two moons: Phobos (~6000 km away) and Deimos (~20,000 km)
- Has a thin, dusty atmosphere
- Gravity is about one-third of Earth's (3.711 m/s^2)
- Home to the largest volcano in the solar system, Olympus Mons
- Atmosphere composition: ~95% CO_2 , 2.7% N_2 , 1.6% Ar, trace oxygen

Gir National Park

Located in Gujarat's Saurashtra region, Gir was established as a sanctuary in 1965 and became a national park in 1975.

It is the only natural habitat outside Africa where Asiatic lions roam freely.

As per the 2020 census, lion numbers have risen from under 200 in the 1960s to 674.

The park also hosts 40 mammal species and 425 bird species.

What is the Wallace Line?

The Wallace Line is an imaginary demarcation identified by British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace in the late 1800s. It separates the distinct ecological zones of Asia from Wallacea—a transitional region between Asia and Australia. Fauna west of the line is largely Asian in origin, while the east displays a mix of Asian and Australian species. This clear biogeographical divide exists despite the regions being separated by just around 35 km.

Thorium's Energy Potential

Thorium is considered a highly efficient and safer alternative to uranium, capable of producing 200 times more energy. It eliminates the risks of meltdown, doesn't require water cooling, and results in minimal radioactive waste. Thorium molten-salt reactors (TMSRs) are emerging as a revolutionary technology for future energy generation.



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DISHA Program: Fostering Innovation

The DISHA Program (Developing Innovations, Successful Harnessing, and Adoption) is focused on propelling India toward a knowledge-driven economy. It supports academic professionals and students working on transformative technologies, promoting interdisciplinary research to keep India ahead in global innovation trends.

What is the Solar Cycle?

The Sun has a magnetic field akin to a bar magnet with poles that reverse approximately every 11 years. This magnetic polarity flip, caused by the movement of charged particles inside the Sun, is known as the solar cycle.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PMSYM) Scheme

- **Overview:** A voluntary, contributory pension scheme offering a guaranteed ₹3,000 monthly pension post-60 years of age. In the event of the subscriber's death after retirement, the spouse is entitled to 50% of the pension. If the subscriber dies before turning 60, the spouse can either continue or exit the scheme.
- **Implementation:** Managed by the Ministry of Labour & Employment and LIC.
- **Eligibility:** For individuals aged 18–40 years with monthly income up to ₹15,000; not covered under EPF, ESIC, or NPS.
- **Contributions:** Monthly payment ranges from ₹55 to ₹200 based on the age of entry.
- **Enrollment:** Can be done via Common Service Centres (CSCs) or the Maandhan portal.
- **Current Status:** As of March 2025, 46.12 lakh enrollments recorded across 36 States/UTs, with Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra leading.

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution

Article 14 guarantees that the State shall not deny any person equality before the law or equal protection of the laws within India.

- It applies to all persons, including foreign nationals and legal entities like corporations and societies.



- **Key Judgments:**

- o *E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu (1973)*: Established that Article 14 also prohibits arbitrary actions by the State, emphasizing fairness and rationality in state decisions.

- o *Ram Krishna Dalmia v. Justice Tendolkar (1958)*: Clarified that Article 14 disallows arbitrary classifications but permits reasonable classification for legislation.

Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ)

- **Purpose:** A designated 10,400 sq. km area aimed at protecting the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri from air pollution.
- **Origin:** Formed in 1996 following a Supreme Court directive.
- **Mandate:** The Supreme Court ordered industries within the TTZ to shift from coal and coke to eco-friendlier fuels like natural gas to reduce pollution impact.

Agricultural Infrastructure Fund (AIF)

The AIF offers medium- and long-term financial support for agriculture-related infrastructure projects post-harvest. Running from 2020–21 to 2032–33, it facilitates ₹1 lakh crore in loans via banks, with interest capped at 9%. Eligible applicants include farmers, start-ups, FPOs, cooperatives, and public-private partnerships supported by the states.

What are Invasive Species?

Invasive plant species are foreign to an ecosystem and spread rapidly, often overpowering native plants in competing for sunlight, water, and nutrients.

They harm ecosystems by:

- Reducing biodiversity.



- Displacing or leading to extinction of native plant species.

Convention on Cluster Munitions

Lithuania has recently withdrawn from the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which bans the use of cluster bombs, due to security concerns regarding Russia. This move has been criticized by human rights organizations. The Convention prohibits the use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of cluster munitions. Member nations are expected to fully implement and promote its principles. Currently, there are 112 signatories, with 12 more yet to ratify the agreement. However, nations like India, the U.S., Russia, China, Ukraine, and Israel have not joined the convention due to military and strategic considerations.

T-72 Tank

The T-72 is a key main battle tank in the Indian Army, currently equipped with a 780 HP engine, though plans are underway to upgrade it to a 1000 HP engine. Originally designed in the Soviet Union by Uralvagonzavod and introduced in 1971, the tank has been widely used globally. In India, T-72 tanks are manufactured and upgraded at the Heavy Vehicles Factory in Avadi. These tanks feature precise targeting systems and an automatic loader, which enhances their firing efficiency.

Tunga River

The Tunga (or Thunga) River is a significant waterway in Karnataka, originating from the Varaha Parvata hill in the Western Ghats. Its source, Gangamoola, is a cave located within the hill. The river is known for its clear and clean water. The temple town of Sringeri lies along its banks, while the Gajanur Dam, built in an S-shape, is constructed over it.

World's Oldest Meteorite Impact Crater

Researchers in Australia have discovered the oldest known meteorite impact crater, estimated to be 3.47 billion years old, in the North Pole dome area of northwestern Australia.

What is an Impact Crater?

These craters are formed when a high-velocity asteroid or meteorite collides with a planetary body, causing massive explosions, ground deformation, and a circular depression. Well-known examples include the Barringer and Tycho craters.

Woolly Mice

Scientists have genetically engineered mice with traits from woolly mammoths, producing the first "woolly mice." This helps researchers understand how extinct species adapted to cold climates. Seven mammoth-related genes, such as FGF5 for long hair and MC1R for coat color, were inserted using CRISPR, resulting in eight precise genetic changes that recreated cold-resistant features.

Golden Passport Program

Vanuatu runs a Citizenship by Investment (CBI) scheme, often referred to as a "golden passport" program. It enables individuals to obtain citizenship by contributing financially



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to the country. The cost varies from \$135,500 to \$155,500 for individuals or families, with processing completed within 30 to 60 days post-application.

POSHAN Abhiyaan

Objectives:

- Reduce stunting and undernutrition among children (0–6 years).
- Decrease anemia rates in women and adolescent girls (15–49 years).
- Lower instances of low birth weight through better maternal and child care.

Mission Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 was launched in 2021, integrating earlier programs like the Supplementary Nutrition Programme and POSHAN Abhiyaan into one umbrella scheme.

Funding Model:

- 60:40 sharing for States/UTs with legislatures.
- 90:10 sharing for Northeastern and Himalayan states.

Capacity Building Commission

Formed in 2021, this three-member body is backed by a Secretariat led by a Secretary. It includes representatives from sectors like academia, private industry, public service, and civil society. Its goal is to standardize learning and development initiatives across the public sector.

Mission Karmayogi

Launched in 2020, Mission Karmayogi is a nationwide program aimed at enhancing the capabilities of civil servants. Managed by an apex body under the Prime Minister, it focuses on developing a future-ready bureaucracy equipped with the necessary skills, mindset, and knowledge to contribute to the vision of a “New India.”

Kursk Region

Kursk is a city that serves as the administrative hub of the Kursk Oblast, located near Russia’s southwestern frontier. It lies in the European section of Russia, roughly 450 km south of Moscow, along the upper Seym River. The region is part of the Black Earth Belt, famed for its nutrient-rich soil. Kursk experiences a moderately continental climate with marked seasonal differences.



Tejas LCA Mk1A

The Tejas LCA Mk1A is an upgraded version of India's domestically developed Light Combat Aircraft, created by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). Featuring over 40 enhancements compared to the earlier Mk1 model, this variant significantly improves combat performance and mission effectiveness. It has nine hardpoints and can deploy a range of weaponry, including Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles, air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles, and ASRAAMs.

What is Tejas LCA?

Tejas is a homegrown Light Combat Aircraft developed by the Aeronautical Development Agency and produced by HAL. It was inducted into the Indian Air Force in July 2016. The aircraft is available in three versions: Mark 1, Mark 1A, and a trainer model. It is designed to replace outdated aircraft like the MiG series in the IAF fleet.

Jalantheeswarar Temple

Also known as Thiruvooal, the Jalantheeswarar Temple is a historic shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, located in Thakkolam village of Ranipet district, Tamil Nadu. Originally built by the Pallavas and later expanded by the Cholas, the existing stone structure dates to the Nayak era in the 16th century. It is among the 275 Paadal Petra Sthalams celebrated in the Tevaram hymns by Tamil Saivite saints like Sambandar.

Madhav National Park

Madhav National Park lies in the Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh, on the northern edge of India's Central Highlands and part of the Upper Vindhyan range. Historically a royal hunting ground for Mughal rulers and Gwalior's Maharajas, it became a national park in 1958 (initially declared as a national park in 1955). It was recently designated as India's 58th and Madhya Pradesh's 9th tiger reserve, now home to five tigers including two newly born cubs.

Vanuatu

Lalit Modi, ex-IPL chief and a fugitive, recently gave up his Indian passport and acquired citizenship of Vanuatu—a small island nation in the South Pacific. Located east of Australia and north of New Zealand, it lies between Australia and Fiji. The country has several active volcanoes, including Mount Yasur, one of the most accessible active volcanoes globally. Vanuatu offers citizenship through investment, typically costing around USD 150,000. **What is Hantavirus?**

Hantavirus is a group of viruses responsible for causing severe respiratory and kidney-related illnesses. It can lead to Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS), which begins with flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, and muscle pain. In serious cases, it causes breathing difficulties and fluid accumulation in the lungs, which can be fatal.

What is Isolationism?

Isolationism is a policy stance where a country avoids political, military, and economic alliances or involvement with other nations. The idea originates from George Washington's caution against forming foreign alliances. In the 19th century, the U.S. largely stayed out of



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European wars while expanding influence in the Americas. It avoided joining the League of Nations and passed Neutrality Acts in the 1930s. Recently, “restraint” is viewed as a middle ground between isolationism and military overreach.

Natural Rubber

Natural rubber is an essential raw material derived from the rubber tree *Hevea brasiliensis*, originally from the Amazon basin. The British introduced it to tropical Asia and Africa in the late 1800s. The tree grows well in a range of climates and soils, needing around 200 cm of annual rainfall.

EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

The EUDR requires that all products entering the European Union must be free from deforestation post-December 2020. iSNR certification verifies compliance with this regulation.

About the Rubber Board of India

- Established under the Rubber Act of 1947
- Operates under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- Headquartered in Kottayam, Kerala
- Roles include research, training, industry development, marketing support, labor welfare, and issuing licenses to rubber stakeholders.

BioE3 (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment) Initiative

- Launched in 2024 by the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology
- Key Objectives:
 1. Advances in technology via Biomanufacturing, Bio-AI, and Biofoundries
 2. Supports goals like Net Zero emissions, sustainable lifestyles, and green growth



3. Encourages a Circular Bioeconomy for long-term sustainability

KHANJAR-XII

The 12th edition of the joint special forces military exercise between India and Kyrgyzstan, known as Khanjar-XII, is scheduled to be held in Kyrgyzstan. This annual exercise alternates between the two countries and began in December 2011 in Nahan, India.

Sarus Crane

Recognized as the tallest flying bird globally, the Sarus Crane inhabits regions of Southeast Asia, northern India, and northern Australia. In India, it is primarily found along the Gangetic plains and eastern Rajasthan, with fewer sightings in the southern parts of the country. The species is non-migratory and thrives in wetland habitats such as marshes, canals, and ponds, often close to human settlements.

Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
- **CITES:** Appendix II
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Schedule IV

Large Phased Array Radar (LPAR)

China has installed an advanced radar system in its Yunnan province near the Myanmar border. This LPAR has a detection range of over 5,000 km, enabling it to monitor large portions of the Indian Ocean and deep into Indian territory. It can detect and track ballistic missile launches in real-time. Unlike traditional radars, it uses electronic steering instead of mechanical rotation, allowing near-instantaneous area scanning.

North Sea

The North Sea is a shallow extension of the Atlantic Ocean located in northeastern Europe, spanning about 570,000 square kilometers (220,000 square miles) between the British Isles and mainland Europe.

Boundaries and Connections:

It is bordered by Great Britain, the Orkney and Shetland islands, Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. It links to the Atlantic via the Strait of Dover and the English Channel and connects to the Baltic Sea through the Skagerrak, Kattegat, and Danish straits.



H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu)

Swine flu is a respiratory illness in pigs caused by influenza type A viruses, which can occasionally infect humans. India reported its first human case in May 2009, with notable outbreaks in subsequent years, including 2021 to 2023. The virus primarily spreads through respiratory droplets when infected individuals cough or sneeze, and occasionally through contact with contaminated surfaces.

Note: Currently, no vaccine is available specifically for swine flu.

Biju Patnaik

A prominent figure in India's independence movement and post-independence development, Biju Patnaik is celebrated as a key architect of modern Odisha. Known for using his aviation skills to aid freedom fighters and transport confidential messages, he also founded the Kalinga Foundation and initiated the Kalinga Prize to promote science. Indonesia honored him with the title "Bhumi Putra" and its highest civilian award, Bintang Jasa Utama, in 1996.

Vizhinjam Port

Location: Near Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Highlights: One of India's deepest ports, it is designed to handle Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs). Built under the Design, Build, Finance, Operate, and Transfer (DBFOT) model, the port aims to streamline cargo transport, reduce reliance on foreign transshipment hubs such as Colombo and Singapore, and enhance India's maritime capabilities.

Cassava ('Bread of the Tropics')

Also called yuca or manioc, cassava is a root crop propagated through stem cuttings. It is a tall, semi-woody plant native to South America and spread to Africa and Asia via Portuguese explorers. Today, Nigeria is its leading producer. Cassava is energy-rich and nutrient-dense, and under India's 2018 National Policy on Biofuels, it is recognized as a raw material for ethanol production, making it valuable beyond food security.

Wheat Production in India

Area & Output (2023-24): Wheat cultivation covered 318.33 lakh hectares, with an estimated production of 113.92 million tonnes. It is India's second-largest crop after paddy in terms of area.

Top Producing States: Uttar Pradesh leads, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

Main Export Destinations (2023-24): Nepal, Iraq, South Korea, UAE, and Mongolia.

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

The drying of Tamulidoba Beel, a key wetland in Assam's Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, highlights the urgent need for better habitat management. Located in the eastern part of Guwahati, Assam, the sanctuary was established in 1998 and spans 48.81 square kilometers. It includes the Rajamayong and Pobitora Reserve Forests and is renowned for having the highest density of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceroses in India.



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Tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis (TB) is a contagious disease primarily affecting the lungs, caused by bacteria that spread through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or spits. Roughly a quarter of the global population is believed to have TB bacteria, although only 5-10% will develop symptoms and the disease. TB is preventable and treatable with a standard 6-month regimen of 4 antimicrobial drugs, administered with support from a healthcare worker or trained volunteer.

Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB)

MDR-TB occurs when TB bacteria become resistant to the two most effective first-line drugs: isoniazid and rifampicin. Resistance can develop due to improper use of TB medicines, poor-quality drugs, or patients discontinuing treatment prematurely. MDR-TB can be treated with more expensive and toxic drugs.

CAR T-cell Therapy

CAR T-cell therapy is a treatment that harnesses the body's immune system to target and destroy cancer cells. This therapy is particularly used for blood cancers, including cases that have relapsed or did not respond to initial treatments. It involves collecting a patient's T-cells, modifying them in a lab to target cancer cells, multiplying them, and then reintroducing them into the patient.

Side Effects of CAR T-cell Therapy

Serious side effects can include hyperinflammation and organ damage, experienced by 12% of participants, leading to at least one death. Additionally, 61% of patients report low red blood cell counts, resulting in fatigue, while 65% experience thrombocytopenia (low platelet count), increasing bleeding risks. Moreover, 96% of patients suffer from neutropenia, which raises the risk of infections.

Foreign Exchange Reserves

Foreign Exchange Reserves (Forex Reserves) are foreign currency assets held by central banks, including marketable securities, gold, Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), and reserves in the IMF. These reserves are typically denominated in US dollars. China holds the world's largest forex reserves, and in India, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) manages them, with foreign currency assets and gold being the primary contributors.



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Melioidosis

Melioidosis is a bacterial infection caused by *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, which lives in soil and surface water, primarily in tropical and subtropical regions. It is endemic in Southeast Asia, northern Australia, the Indian subcontinent, and parts of southern China. The disease, also known as Whitmore's disease, has a high fatality rate ranging from 16% to 50%. Humans and animals can be infected, but transmission does not occur directly from animals. It spreads through contact with contaminated water, air, or soil.

Bhadra River

The Bhadra River flows east through Karnataka, originating from the Western Ghats. It is joined by tributaries such as Somavahini, Thadabehalla, and Odirayanahalla before passing through the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. It meets the Tunga River at Koodli, where they form the Tungabhadra, a major tributary of the Krishna River. The Bhadra Dam, located near Lakkavalli village, is built on the river.

Kyushu Island

Kyushu is the southernmost and third-largest of Japan's four main islands. It borders the East China Sea to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east, with the Tsushima Strait separating it from the Korean Peninsula. The island is home to volcanic ranges, including Mount Aso, the largest active volcanic crater in the world. Kyushu experiences a subtropical climate with heavy rainfall, supporting lush vegetation.

Subacute Sclerosing Panencephalitis (SSPE)

SSPE is a progressive brain disorder linked to measles infection, occurring several years after a person has recovered from measles. Though measles usually doesn't cause brain damage, an abnormal immune response to the virus can lead to severe, often fatal outcomes. SSPE is rare in Western countries but can occur globally, affecting more males and usually children and adolescents. There is no cure for SSPE, and it has a high mortality rate.

Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary

Located in the Murud region of Raigad district, Maharashtra, the Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary was recently the site of its first honey harvest. The sanctuary, established to protect the coastal woodland ecosystems of the Western Ghats, spans 17,250 acres of forests, grasslands, and wetlands. It was formerly part of the hunting grounds of the Murud-Janjira princely state and contains open grasslands, known locally as "mals."



End-Permian Mass Extinction (EPME)

The End-Permian Mass Extinction, also known as "The Great Dying," was Earth's most catastrophic extinction event, eliminating around 90% of species, including more than 95% of marine species and 70% of terrestrial species. This event wiped out over half of all taxonomic families and is considered the most severe of the five major extinction events in Earth's history.

Indian Long-billed Vulture (Gyps Indicus)

The Indian Long-billed Vulture is a medium-sized bird with pale brown feathers and a semi-bald head. Known for its long bill and broad wings, it inhabits cliffs, hills, and open landscapes in central and southern India. As one of nature's most efficient scavengers, it plays a critical role in disease prevention by disposing of animal carcasses.

Bodo Peace Accord (2020)

The Bodo Peace Accord was signed to promote peace and stability in Assam's Bodo-dominated areas, especially in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). It was a pact between the Government of India, Assam Government, and Bodo groups, including the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Key provisions include renaming the BTC to BTR with enhanced autonomy, excluding non-Bodo villages from the BTC, and recognizing Bodo as an associate official language of Assam.

Menhirs

Menhirs are large, upright stones, often tapered at the top, used in ancient times. The largest known menhir, the Grand Menhir Brisé in France, stood 20.6 meters tall. The term "menhir" is derived from the Brittonic words for stone ("maen") and long ("hîr"). These structures date back to the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age, approximately 3,800 to 4,800 years ago. The Mudumal menhirs in India, around 3,500 to 4,000 years old, are the oldest in the country.

Chandrayaan Missions

- **Chandrayaan-1 (2008):** It mapped the Moon's chemical, mineralogical, and geological features.



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- **Chandrayaan-2 (2019):** The lander crashed, but the orbiter sent numerous images of the Moon's surface.
- **Chandrayaan-3 (2023):** This mission successfully demonstrated the technology for a soft landing on the Moon's south pole.
- **Chandrayaan-4 (2027):** This upcoming mission will collect lunar soil samples for analysis.
- **Chandrayaan-5 (2027):** In collaboration with Japan, this mission will deploy a 250-kg rover to explore the Moon's surface.
- **Mount Fuji:**
Mount Fuji, also known as Fuji-san, is the tallest mountain in Japan, standing at 3,776 meters. Located near the Pacific coast, it is part of the Fuji Volcanic Zone, a volcanic chain that stretches from the Mariana Islands and the Izu Islands to northern Honshu. Though dormant since its last eruption in 1707, it is still considered an active stratovolcano by geologists. Along with Mount Tate and Mount Haku, Mount Fuji is one of Japan's "Three Holy Mountains."
- **River Betwa:**
The Betwa River, once known as Vetravati, flows through central and northern India and is a tributary of the Yamuna River. It originates in the Vindhya Range near Jhiri village in Madhya Pradesh, just north of Hoshangabad (now Narmadapuram), and runs northeast through Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, joining the Yamuna River east of Hamirpur after a 610-km journey. Its main tributaries are the Jamni and Dhasan rivers.
- **Sarthi Initiative:**
Launched in January 2023, the Sarthi system aims to digitize all internal workflows of the RBI. It allows employees to store and share documents securely, enhancing record management and data analysis through reports and dashboards. The system includes an online Sarthi Pathshala ('school') for training and local Sarthi Mitras in each RBI office to assist colleagues with system issues.



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- **Pravaah Initiative:**

Building on the Sarthi system, the Pravaah platform, introduced in May 2024, allows external users to submit regulatory applications digitally. It integrates seamlessly with the Sarthi database for processing within the RBI offices. The fully digital infrastructure, supported by centralized cybersecurity, has improved transparency and efficiency, reducing delays from paper-based systems. The launch of Pravaah has resulted in an 80% increase in monthly applications.

- **Kanger Valley National Park (KVNP):**

Located in Jagdalpur, Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, KVNP is named after the Kanger River, which flows through it. The park is home to over 15 limestone caves, including the famous Kotumsar, Kailash, and Dandak caves. The Kanger River, a tributary of the Kolab River, is known for the breathtaking Tirathgarh Falls, which drops from a height of 150 feet.

- **Caracal:**

A rare caracal was recently spotted in Rajasthan's Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve, sparking excitement among wildlife enthusiasts. This medium-sized nocturnal wildcat, known as "siya gosh" in India, can be found in rocky hills or grasslands across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. With an estimated population of 50 in India, primarily in Rajasthan and Gujarat, caracals are notable for their ability to leap up to two meters in the air to catch birds. They are classified as "Least Concern" by the IUCN.

- **Buddhist Tourism and Development Initiatives:**

- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme (SD):** Launched in 2014-15, this scheme focuses on the integrated development of tourist circuits across India, with the Buddhist Circuit being a key component.

- **PRASHAD Scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive):** Also launched in 2014-15, this scheme aims to enhance facilities at important Buddhist pilgrimage sites to promote religious tourism.



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Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj:

Born in 1627 at Shivneri, Shivaji was a pivotal figure in the rise of the Maratha Empire. He is remembered for his benevolent rule, religious tolerance, and focus on public welfare. His governance centered around Hindu self-rule (Hindavi Swarajya) and national independence, and he introduced administrative innovations, including the "Astapradhan" council of ministers, based on ancient Hindu political principles.

Ancient Monument:

Under the AMASR Act 1958, an "Ancient Monument" refers to any structure, monument, inscription, cave, or rock sculpture that is of historical, archaeological, or artistic importance and has existed for over 100 years. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958 aims to preserve such monuments and regulate archaeological excavations.

Mission Saffron Initiative:

Launched in 2010-11, Mission Saffron aims to boost saffron cultivation in Jammu and Kashmir by providing financial, technical, and infrastructural support. Since 2021, the initiative has been expanded to the Northeast under the "Saffron Bowl Project" by NECTAR, to take advantage of the region's suitable agro-climatic conditions and ensure price stability for saffron.

Ana Sagar Lake:

Located in Ajmer, Rajasthan, Ana Sagar is an artificial lake built by Arnoraja Chauhan in the 12th century. The lake is fed by the Luni River and features Baradari pavilions built by Shah Jahan and Daulat Bagh Gardens constructed by Jehangir. The lake tends to dry up each summer.

Exercise Varuna:

The bilateral naval exercise between India and France, initiated in 1993 and renamed 'Varuna' in 2001, has become a key symbol of their strategic relationship. The 23rd edition, VARUNA 2025, will take place in the Arabian Sea.



International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):

The IAEA, an autonomous organization within the United Nations, is dedicated to promoting the safe and peaceful use of nuclear technology. It maximizes the benefits of nuclear science while ensuring compliance with safety standards. It reports to both the UN General Assembly and Security Council and has 178 member states.

Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI):

Launched by India in November 2019, the IPOI aims to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region. It builds upon India's "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) initiative and promotes cooperation to strengthen maritime safety, stability, and development.

Tren de Aragua:

The U.S. President invoked the Alien Enemies Act (1798) for the first time since World War II to deport members of the Venezuelan gang, Tren de Aragua (TdA).

Rangpanchami:

Celebrated five days after Holi, Rangpanchami marks the conclusion of the Holi festivities. Primarily observed in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, it involves applying colored powders (gulal) to one another in celebration of the arrival of spring.

Competition Commission of India (CCI):

Established in 2009 under the Competition Act, 2002, the CCI is a quasi-judicial body under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. It aims to promote market competition, protect consumer interests, and prevent anti-competitive practices. The CCI investigates violations of competition laws and advises the government on related policy matters.

Online Assurances Monitoring System (OAMS):

Implemented by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, the OAMS is a digital platform designed to track and manage government assurances. Assurances made by ministers in parliamentary sessions are expected to be fulfilled within three months, and the system enhances transparency and efficiency.



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PM-YUVA 3.0 Launch:

This initiative nurtures young writers under 30, offering mentorship and exposure to help them develop their creative writing skills. Building on previous YUVA programs, it focuses on three themes: the Contribution of the Indian Diaspora in Nation Building, Indian Knowledge Systems, and the Makers of Modern India (1950-2025).

LIC:

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) is the largest public sector life insurance company and a significant institutional investor in India. It is based in Mumbai and plays a key role in the nation's financial markets.

Motto: "Yogakshemam Vahamyaham" (From the Bhagavad Gita) – "Your welfare is our responsibility."

LIC was established in 1956 under the Life Insurance Corporation of India Act, which nationalized the insurance industry by merging 245 private insurers into a single entity. It operates through 8 zonal offices in cities like Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and more.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI):

The IRDAI is a statutory body created by the IRDAI Act of 1999 to oversee and regulate India's insurance sector.

Powers & Functions:

- Promotes competition to benefit consumers and ensure fair pricing.
- Ensures the financial stability of the insurance market.
- Regulates entities under the Insurance Act, 1938.
Other relevant laws: Marine Insurance Act, 1963, and Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991.

APAAR ID:

APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) is part of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to streamline student records. It is linked to Aadhaar and stored in DigiLocker for easy access, generated through UDISE+. While voluntary, states like Uttar Pradesh are working to ensure 100% student enrollment.



Sagareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary:

Located in Maharashtra's Sangli district, Sagareshwar is India's first man-made wildlife sanctuary, featuring an artificially cultivated forest. The sanctuary, which has been named after an ancient Shiva temple, houses several other temples and is part of southern dry mixed deciduous and thorn forests.

Merchant Discount Rate (MDR):

MDR, also known as Transaction Discount Rate (TDR), is the fee merchants pay to payment processors for digital transactions via cards, UPI, etc. This fee compensates the involved banks and service providers. It typically ranges from 1% to 3% of the transaction amount, and under RBI regulations, merchants cannot pass these charges on to customers.

Exercise Bongosagar:

A bilateral naval exercise between India and Bangladesh, Bongosagar aims to enhance interoperability through maritime operations. Commencing in 2019, Bongosagar 2025 will mark its fifth edition.

Major Types of Puppetry:

- **String Puppets (Kathputli):** Controlled by strings, common in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- **Shadow Puppetry:** Leather puppets for casting shadows, found in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.
- **Rod Puppetry:** Puppets controlled by rods, popular in West Bengal and Assam.
- **Glove Puppets:** Worn on the puppeteer's hand, notably in Kerala (Pavakathakali).

Squad' Alliance:

India has been invited to join the Squad, a multilateral alliance formed in 2024 with countries like Australia, Japan, and the US. The alliance aims to counter China's influence in



the South China Sea through joint maritime activities. India is already part of the Quad alliance, focusing on strategic responses in the Indo-Pacific region.

National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD):

Launched in 2014 and revised in 2021, the NPDD aims to modernize dairy infrastructure, boost productivity, and increase farmers' income.

Components:

- **Dairy Infrastructure Enhancement:** Strengthening dairy infrastructure in underserved regions, like creating dairy cooperatives and funding chilling plants.
- **Dairying Through Cooperatives:** Collaborating with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to enhance dairy production, processing, and marketing.
- **Rashtriya Gokul Mission:** Focuses on genetic improvement of bovines through artificial insemination, IVF, and sex-sorted semen production.

Ashwini Radar:

Developed by DRDO's Electronics & Radar Development Establishment (LRDE), Ashwini Radar uses advanced solid-state technology to detect and track targets up to 200 km. It can track both fast-moving fighter jets and slower aerial threats like UAVs and helicopters.

Anthurium

India achieved a significant milestone in its floriculture industry by successfully exporting Anthurium flowers from Mizoram to Singapore. Anthurium is a tropical ornamental plant known for its aesthetic appeal and air-purifying qualities. It is mainly grown indoors, where it helps eliminate harmful substances such as formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene, and allergens. Recognized by NASA for its air-purifying properties, Anthurium is also considered an effective plant for improving indoor air quality.

Hemavati River

The Hemavati is a crucial tributary of the Kaveri River, originating in the Western Ghats at an altitude of approximately 1219 meters near Ballala Rayana Durga in Karnataka's Chikmagalur District. The Hemavati Reservoir, a masonry dam with a central spillway and earthen flanks, is constructed across the river near Gorur village.



United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) 2025

The 2025 UN World Water Development Report highlights the threat posed by retreating glaciers to the food and water supply of around 2 billion people worldwide. This report, published annually on World Water Day (March 22), offers a comprehensive assessment of global freshwater resources and provides policy recommendations, best practices, and in-depth analysis. UNESCO, on behalf of UN-Water, publishes the report, which focuses on a different theme each year.

Sheathia rosemalayensis

A new species of freshwater algae, *Sheathia rosemalayensis*, was discovered in Rosemala, located in Kerala's Western Ghats, and is named after the place of its discovery. This species is important because *Sheathia* algae are rare in India. Prior to this, only one other species had been recorded from the Himalayas. *Sheathia rosemalayensis* is found only in the southern Western Ghats, a distinct geographical area, while other *Sheathia* species have broader distributions.

Doctrine of Precedent

The doctrine of precedent, or 'stare decisis,' dictates that courts must adhere to previous decisions. Once a point of law is established by a court, it should be applied to future cases with similar facts. This ensures legal consistency, predictability, and stability. Article 141 of the Indian Constitution stipulates that the law declared by the Supreme Court is binding on all lower courts in India.

Lapis Lazuli

Lapis lazuli, a striking blue metamorphic rock, is valued both for its color and as a semi-precious gemstone. The blue hue comes from lazurite, a rare mineral that constitutes 25-40% of the stone. Afghanistan, Chile, Russia, and the United States are major sources of lapis lazuli, with the highest-quality stone coming from Badakhshan province in Afghanistan. Lapis lazuli has been mined for over 6,000 years and was imported to India as early as 1000 BCE, with ornaments made from it discovered at Indus Valley Civilization sites.

World Tuberculosis Day

World Tuberculosis (TB) Day, observed on March 24, aims to raise awareness about TB and efforts to eliminate it. The 2025 theme is "Yes, We Can End TB: Commit, Invest, and Deliver." India is working towards eliminating TB by 2025, ahead of the global target of



2030 set by the WHO End TB Strategy.

Derivatives

Derivatives are financial contracts whose value is derived from an underlying asset, index, or rate. They are used for risk hedging, speculation, and portfolio diversification. Common underlying assets include stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, interest rates, and market indexes. Exchange-Traded Currency Derivatives (ETCDs) are standardized contracts allowing investors to speculate on future currency exchange rates, unlike private Over-the-Counter (OTC) derivatives.

Inner Line Permit (ILP)

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) system, introduced through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) of 1873, remains a vital tool for safeguarding indigenous tribal communities in India's Northeastern states. The ILP is an official document issued by state governments to regulate the entry of non-residents into restricted areas. Indian citizens not permanently residing in these areas must obtain an ILP. The states currently requiring an ILP are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur.

Strait of Hormuz

Iran recently installed missile systems on three disputed islands near the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, amid tensions with the US. The Strait connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and is considered one of the most economically significant choke points globally, with around 30% of the world's liquefied gas and 25% of oil passing through it.

Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru

Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru were members of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), a revolutionary group advocating the overthrow of British rule through direct action and armed rebellion. Bhagat Singh, influenced by Marxist and anarchist ideologies, became famous for his bold actions, including the bombing of the Central Legislative Assembly in 1929 to protest against repressive laws.

Anti-dumping Duties

Anti-dumping duties are imposed to counter unfair trade practices like dumping, where foreign producers sell goods below cost to undercut domestic industries. These duties are



in accordance with World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations and aim to protect domestic industries from harm. The imposition of such duties is based on recommendations from India's Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR).

About Anthurium Flowers

The Anthurium plant is native to the Americas, spanning from northern Mexico to northern Argentina, and is widely cultivated in India, especially in Mizoram and other northeastern states. It is also grown commercially in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal. Anthuriums are herbaceous plants, often epiphytes, and are characterized by a central spike (spadix) and colorful bracts (spathe) in shades of red, pink, or orange. The plant's sap contains irritants, such as calcium oxalate crystals, that can cause skin and eye irritation.

Jnanpith Award

The Jnanpith Award is India's highest literary honor, recognizing exceptional literary contributions in any of the 22 languages listed in the Indian Constitution, including English since 2013. Proposed by Rama Jain, the award consists of a citation, a bronze replica of 'Vagdevi,' and a cash prize of ₹11 lakh.

Vikramshila University: Located in Bhagalpur, Bihar, along the Ganges River, Vikramshila University was a key historical site in eastern India. Founded by King Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty during the late 8th to early 9th century AD, it was established in response to the decline in educational standards at Nalanda University. The university became a prominent center for Tantric and Vajrayana Buddhism, playing a significant role in spreading these traditions. Scholars like Atisa Dipankara, who helped establish Buddhism in Tibet, emerged from Vikramshila. The university was managed by a Kulpati or Mahasthavir, a leadership role that ensured its operation. It was destroyed by Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji around 1203 AD, marking the decline of Nalanda as well.

IOS Sagar: IOS Sagar is an initiative for maritime security cooperation in the Southwest Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Participants include India and nine African nations: Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and South Africa.

AIKEYME (Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement): Co-hosted by the Indian Navy and Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF), AIKEYME, meaning 'Unity' in Sanskrit, is a maritime engagement initiative. Held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, it involves India and ten



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African nations—Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, and Tanzania. The training phases include tabletop and command post exercises focusing on piracy and maritime information sharing, as well as seamanship training, small arms firing, helicopter operations, and maritime security drills.

Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR): Situated in the Nallamala hill ranges of Andhra Pradesh, NSTR is the largest tiger reserve in India, covering 5937 sq. km. It has the highest tiger population in the Eastern Ghats. The reserve includes Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary and Gundla Brahmeswaram Wildlife Sanctuary. The Krishna River flows through the reserve for about 270 kilometers. Vegetation consists of tropical dry deciduous forests, with bamboo and grass undergrowth.

Equalization Levy: Introduced in India in 2016, the Equalization Levy aims to tax digital transactions, particularly business-to-business exchanges, and is often referred to as the "Google Tax." The tax is withheld by the service recipient when payment is made to a non-resident service provider exceeding Rs. 1,00,000 annually. It does not apply to technical services or royalties. The tax rate varies depending on the type of service or transaction.

PM VIKAS Scheme: The Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan (PM VIKAS) Scheme is a central initiative by the Ministry of Minority Affairs aimed at the upliftment of six minority communities (Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis). It consolidates five existing schemes and focuses on skill development, women's leadership, education, infrastructure, and credit linkages for beneficiaries. The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts is a partner in promoting the initiative.

Dalle Chilly: Known for its pungency, bright red color, and high nutritional value, Dalle Chilly is a chili pepper with Scoville Heat Units ranging from 100,000 to 350,000. In 2020, it was awarded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, enhancing its market identity. The Indian government promotes organic farming of Dalle Chilly in North East India, contributing to Sikkim's reputation in the global spice market.

Geographical Indication (GI) Tag: A GI tag is used for products that have a specific geographical origin and possess unique qualities or a reputation tied to that origin. In India, GIs are regulated by the Geographical Indications of Goods Act, 1999, and are typically associated with agricultural products, foodstuffs, handicrafts, and industrial goods. A GI



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registration lasts for 10 years and can be renewed.

AIKEYME (Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement): AIKEYME is a large-scale maritime exercise co-hosted by the Indian Navy and the Tanzania Peoples' Defence Force (TPDF) with participation from Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, and Tanzania. The event, which signifies 'Unity' in Sanskrit, will be held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, in mid-April 2025. The exercise includes various maritime security drills and training phases.

South Island

A powerful 6.7 magnitude earthquake recently hit off the coast of New Zealand's South Island. It is the larger and southernmost of the country's two main islands, located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. The island is separated from the North Island by the Cook Strait to the north and from Stewart Island by the Foveaux Strait to the south.

Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary (Bhadra Tiger Reserve)

Located across the Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga districts of Karnataka, this sanctuary is named after the Bhadra River. It was the first tiger reserve in India to complete a village relocation program by 2002. The reserve's terrain includes hills and valleys, including Karnataka's highest peak, Mullayanagiri, as well as the Baba Budangiri and Muthodi ranges.

Lyme Disease

Caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, Lyme disease can affect the skin, heart, brain, and joints. It is transmitted to humans through deer tick bites but is not spread by other ticks, mosquitoes, fleas, or lice. It cannot be transmitted between humans or from pets to humans.

Water Hyacinth

Water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) is a free-floating aquatic plant native to South America, now found worldwide except in Antarctica. Known for its rapid growth, it forms dense mats that degrade water quality, obstruct water flows, and disrupt ecosystems. It was introduced to India during British colonial times as an ornamental plant.

Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Founded by the FAO in 1983, this commission addresses plant genetic resources (PGR) and later expanded to cover all genetic resources relevant to food and agriculture,



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including plants, animals, forests, aquatic organisms, and microbes. With 179 member countries, India is also a member of the commission.

The Third Battle of Panipat

Fought on January 14, 1761, between the Maratha Empire and a coalition led by Ahmad Shah Durrani of Afghanistan, this battle is one of the largest and bloodiest of the 18th century. Despite early successes, the Marathas were eventually besieged, leading to their devastating defeat, with tens of thousands killed, halting their northern expansion for nearly a decade.

Vikramshila University

Founded by King Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty in the late 8th to early 9th century AD, Vikramshila was one of India's major Buddhist learning centers, second only to Nalanda. Renowned for its Tantric studies, it was destroyed in the late 12th century by Bakhtiyar Khalji. The Buddhist scholar Atisa Dipankara played a significant role in its legacy.

Regional Rural Banks (RRBs)

Created in 1975 following the Narasimham Working Group's recommendations, RRBs aim to support the rural economy by offering banking services to farmers, artisans, and small entrepreneurs. They are funded through a tripartite model involving the Indian government, state governments, and sponsoring banks, and are supervised by NABARD.

Gold Monetisation Scheme

Launched on September 15, 2015, the Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS) aims to reduce India's gold imports by mobilizing gold held by households and institutions. It includes short-term, medium-term, and long-term deposit options, with implementation through scheduled commercial banks.

GSAT-18

GSAT-18, a communication satellite, was launched by ISRO on October 5, 2016. Weighing 3,404 kg, it has a 15-year mission life. The satellite, placed in a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit, provides television, telecommunication, and VSAT services and replaces aging satellites in ISRO's fleet.



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PM SHRI Scheme

PM SHRI (PM Schools for Rising India) is a centrally sponsored scheme under NEP 2020 that aims to establish 14,500 model schools offering holistic education. The scheme focuses on experiential learning, infrastructure improvements, and 21st-century skill development, with a budget of ₹27,360 crore over five years.

Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, 2023

The DPDP Act's Section 44(3) amends the RTI Act by restricting the disclosure of personal information under RTI requests, eliminating the public interest clause. This amendment strengthens privacy rights but raises concerns about diminishing transparency and accountability.

Bandipur Tiger Reserve

Located at the convergence of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, Bandipur is part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site. It shelters the largest population of wild Asian elephants in South Asia and is bordered by the Kabini and Moyar rivers.

Gounsa Temple

Recently, wildfires devastated parts of the Gounsa Temple complex in South Korea, destroying two buildings that were national treasures. The temple is the headquarters of the Jogye-jong Order, Korea's largest Buddhist sect.

Bedmap3

Building on the Bedmap2 dataset, Bedmap3 incorporates new data from 84 surveys and 52 million data points. It fills significant gaps in knowledge, especially concerning Antarctica's mountain ranges, interior, and coastlines.

Privilege Motion

A privilege motion is raised when a Member of Parliament believes there has been a breach of parliamentary privileges. If admitted, it is investigated by the Committee of Privileges, which may call witnesses and submit a report for parliamentary consideration.

Samagra Shiksha Scheme

The Samagra Shiksha Scheme aims to provide inclusive and quality education from pre-



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primary to class XII, in line with NEP 2020. It focuses on addressing diverse educational needs and ensuring equitable education for all.

MRI Technology

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is a non-invasive imaging technique used to obtain detailed images of internal body structures. Unlike X-rays or CT scans, it does not involve ionizing radiation, making it safer for frequent use.

Abel Prize

Named after Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel, the Abel Prize, established in 2002, is regarded as the Nobel Prize of mathematics. It is awarded annually and includes a cash prize and a plaque designed by Norwegian artist Henrik Haugan.