

CURRENT AFFAIRS

For UPSC, PCS and Other Exams

| Pre & Mains Practice Questions

Gyps indicus

INDIAN VULTURE OR INDIAN LONG-BILLED VULTURE

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: peninsular India, southeast Pakistan, southern Nepal

HABITAT: open and wooded country, ravines, valleys; mostly dry, scrub, and deciduous forests

A medium-sized vulture

Pale body and wing coverts

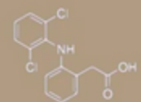
Mature individuals have a pale bill

POPULATION about 30,000

WEIGHT 5.5 - 6.3 kg

WINGSPAN 1.96 - 2.58 m

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED
Population crashed by more than 97 per cent between 1992-2007



MAIN THREAT

- Single greatest threat is Diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug given to livestock.
- Vultures that feed on carcasses of livestock treated with Diclofenac die of kidney failure



OTHER THREATS

- Poisons in the environment
- Changing carcass disposal practices with less available for vultures
- Use of other toxic veterinary drugs

CONSERVATION ACTION

- Captive breeding centres
- Banning of Diclofenac in India in 2006
- Establishment of vulture sanctuaries and reserves

WHY ARE VULTURES SO IMPORTANT?

As very efficient scavengers, they are quick at disposing of carcasses. This prevents both deadly bacteria developing and the spread of zoonotic diseases.

Equitable Distribution on Taxes: PAC Report On GST

Changing Rainfall Patterns Threaten Agriculture

Mangrove Forest Cover Increase

\$1bn Funds on the Creative Economy

Petition on CAG Appointment Process

Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)

First Glacier Declared Dead Due to Climate Change

Seabed Warfare in a New Era of Geotech Conflicts

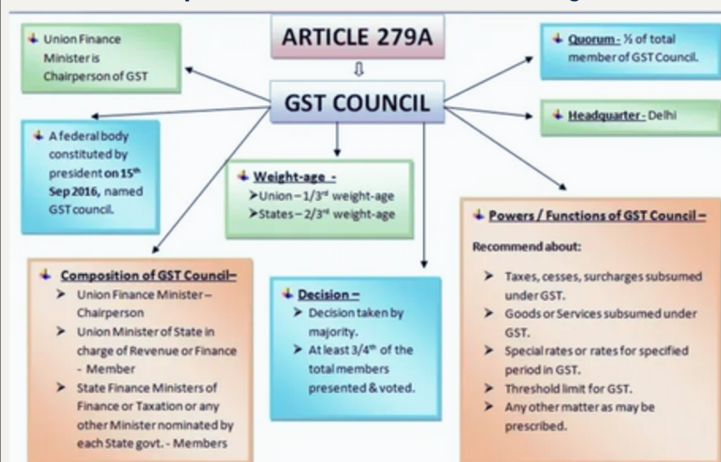
Global Forest Vision 2030

Equitable Distribution on Taxes: PAC Report On GST

Context: The **Public Accounts Committee (PAC)** has highlighted inefficiencies in India's GST framework and proposed reforms under "GST 2.0" to improve revenue distribution and compliance.

Issues Identified in the PAC Report:

- **Revenue Disparity:**
 - High-revenue states (Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka) feel **disadvantaged in revenue redistribution**.
 - Economically weaker states **struggle with low tax collection capacity**.
- **Impact on Fiscal Federalism:**
 - GST rates, exemptions, and procedural **rules are centrally controlled**, limiting state autonomy.
 - The delay in finalizing the **States' Compensation Fund** has strained fiscal relations.
- **Structural and Procedural Challenges:**
 - Complex **registration processes** hinder compliance.
 - **Tax evasion & fraudulent claims** reduce revenue efficiency.
 - **Criminal penalties for minor errors** discourage businesses.



Key Recommendations for GST Reforms:

- **GST 2.0:** States' revenue share should increase to **70-80% (from the current 50%)**.
- **Tech Integration:** AI-based **real-time transaction monitoring** to curb tax evasion.
- **Simplification & MSME Support:** Streamlining compliance and improving the GST portal.
- **GST Compensation Extension:** Support for weaker states for another **3-5 years**.
- **Progressive Revenue Distribution Formula:** Ensuring fairness based on economic capacity and needs.
- **Periodic Review of GST Rates:** Adjusting based on economic conditions.

Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

- **Established:** 1921 (Under Government of India Act, 1919)
- **Type:** Parliamentary Committee
- **Members:** 22 (15 from Lok Sabha, 7 from Rajya Sabha)
- **Chairperson:** From Opposition (Appointed by Lok Sabha Speaker)

Functions

- **Examines government expenditure** from the Consolidated Fund of India
- **Reviews CAG reports** on public spending
- Ensures **accountability & financial discipline**
- **Checks misuse** or irregularities in public funds
- Strengthens **parliamentary oversight** on public finances

Limitations

- **Cannot question** policy decisions
- Recommendations are **not binding**

Conclusion: PAC's recommendations emphasize a **more equitable and efficient GST system**. Strengthening federal cooperation and implementing tech-driven solutions can enhance compliance, revenue generation, and fiscal autonomy.

Justice Varma Case: Revisiting NJAC

Context: The Justice **Yashwant Varma case** has reignited debates on **judicial accountability** and the process of judge appointments, bringing the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) back into focus.

Judicial Appointments in India: Evolution

- **Pre-Collegium Era (1950-1973):** Executive had primacy in appointing judges.
- **First Judges Case (1981):** Gave more power to the executive.
- **Second Judges Case (1993):** Established the Collegium System, giving primacy to the judiciary.
- **Third Judges Case (1998):** Clarified the Collegium's composition.

National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)

- Introduced via the **99th Constitutional Amendment (2014)** to replace the Collegium System by including the executive and eminent persons.
- Struck down by the **Supreme Court (2015)** as unconstitutional for compromising judicial independence.

Need to Revisit NJAC

- **Lack of Collegium Transparency:** No clear criteria for selection, concerns over favoritism.
- **Legislative Consensus:** NJAC was passed with near-unanimous support in Parliament and ratified by 16 states.
- **Delays in Appointments:** Collegium system is secretive and slow, affecting judicial efficiency.
- **Lack of Diversity:** Current system does not ensure representation from marginalized groups.
- **Case Backlog:** Over 4.4 crore pending cases necessitate faster judicial appointments.
- **Balancing Independence and Oversight:** A revised NJAC can ensure executive involvement without compromising judicial independence.

Way Forward

- **Global Best Practices:** UK's **Judicial Appointments Commission (JAC)** ensures merit-based selection.
- **Modified NJAC Composition:** Judiciary-majority body with limited executive participation.
- **Transparency Mechanisms:** Clear guidelines for selection, public disclosure of decisions.
- **Timely Appointments:** Mandated timelines for judicial selections.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Ensuring representation from all sections of society.

Conclusion

Revisiting NJAC could create a **transparent, accountable, and independent** judicial appointment system. The Supreme Court must lead reforms to restore public trust and ensure judicial integrity.

Changing Rainfall Patterns Threaten Agriculture

Context

Changing rainfall patterns due to climate change threaten Indian agriculture, affecting crop cycles, food security, and farmers' livelihoods.

Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture

1. Rising Temperatures & Declining Yields

- 1°C rise → **4-5% decline in wheat, rice, maize yields**.
- Rainfed rice yields could drop **by 47% by 2080**.
- Unseasonal rains reduce wheat production in **Punjab & Haryana**; erratic rainfall affects **sugarcane & cotton in Maharashtra**.

2. Erratic Rainfall Patterns

- **Delayed monsoons** → Late sowing, lower yields.
- **Excess rainfall** → Waterlogging damages crops like paddy, sugarcane.

3. Extreme Weather Events

- **Droughts** → Water scarcity.
- **Cyclones & floods** → Crop loss in coastal states like Odisha, WB, Andhra Pradesh.

4. Soil Degradation

- Heavy rains → **Soil erosion, loss of fertility**.

5. Water Scarcity

- **50% of agriculture** depends on monsoons → High vulnerability.
- **Groundwater depletion** in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan threatens irrigation.

6. Pest & Disease Outbreaks

- **Rising temperatures** → More pests (fall armyworm, locusts).
- **Humidity** → Increased fungal & bacterial infections in crops.

Government Response & Policies

- **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)** – Climate-resilient agriculture.
- **PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)** – Improved irrigation efficiency.
- **Soil Health Card Scheme** – Monitors soil nutrients.
- **PM Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** – Crop insurance.
- **Research on Climate-Resilient Crops** – Drought-resistant varieties.

Climate-Proofing Strategies for Agriculture

1. **Climate-Smart Crops** – Heat & flood-resistant varieties.
2. **Efficient Water Management** – Drip & sprinkler irrigation, rainwater harvesting.
3. **Agroforestry & Soil Conservation** – Zero tillage, organic farming.
4. **Technology Use** – AI-based weather forecasting, precision farming.
5. **Diversified Livelihoods** – Integrated farming (livestock, fisheries).

Conclusion

Climate change poses **severe risks to agriculture**, necessitating urgent adaptation strategies. **Resilient farming, technology integration, and government support** are key to mitigating climate-related risks.

Mangrove Forest Cover Increase

Context

Tamil Nadu's mangrove forest cover nearly doubled from **4,500 ha (2021)** to **9,039 ha (2024)** due to conservation efforts and new plantations.

Mangroves: Features & Importance

- **Salt-tolerant plants** in tropical & subtropical intertidal zones.
- **Climate resilience:** Act as **bio-shields**, reducing coastal erosion and storm impact.
- **Carbon sinks:** Store **4 times** more carbon than terrestrial forests.
- **Biodiversity hotspots:** Home to species like **Royal Bengal Tiger & river dolphins**.
- **Livelihood support:** Provide **fishing, timber, & fuelwood** to coastal communities.

Major Mangrove Regions in India

- **Bay of Bengal (60%)** – Includes **Sundarbans** (world's largest mangrove forest, UNESCO site).
- **Arabian Sea (27%)** – Found along Gujarat & Maharashtra coasts.
- **Andaman & Nicobar Islands (13%)** – Support rich biodiversity.

Threats to Mangroves

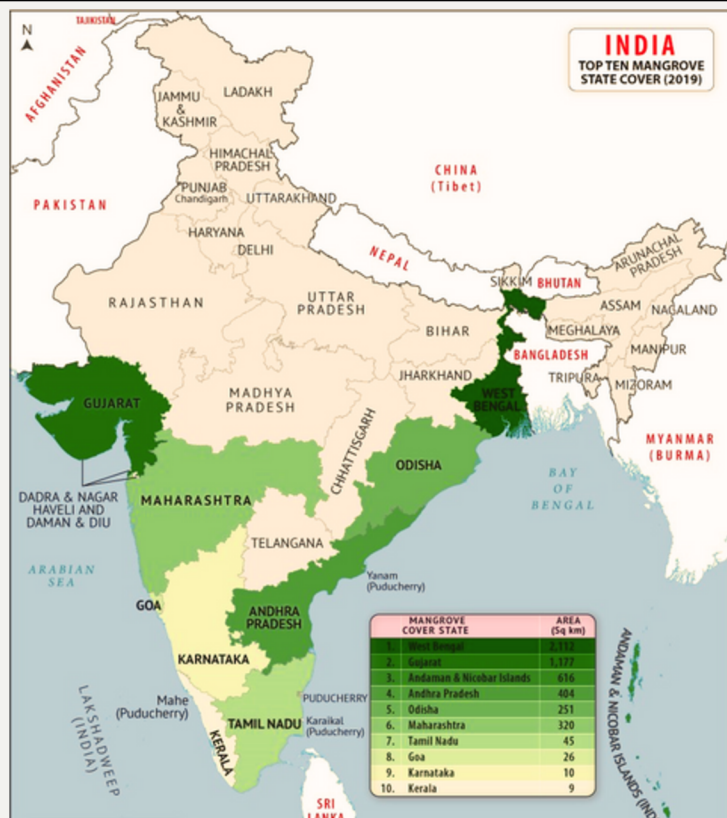
- **Coastal encroachment:** Population pressure & land-use changes.
- **Aquaculture & fisheries:** Restrict tidal flow, damaging ecosystems.
- **Pollution & industrial activities:** Degradation in **Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZs)**.

Government Initiatives

- **MISHTI Initiative:** Large-scale mangrove plantation under **MGNREGS & CAMPA Fund**.
- **Mangrove Alliance for Climate (MAC):** India joined at **COP27** for global conservation efforts.

Way Forward

- **Sustainable livelihoods:** Eco-tourism, carbon credit programs.
- **Community participation:** District-level conservation planning.
- **Strengthening legal frameworks:** Strict enforcement of **CRZ norms**.
- **Restoration efforts:** Expanding **mangrove buffer zones**.



India's Electronics Manufacturing and Export Market

Context

The IT Ministry launched a **₹23,000 crore incentive policy** over six years to boost domestic electronics manufacturing and reduce import dependence.

Key Features of the Policy

- **Incentives:** Based on **operational expenses (sales), capital investments, or a combination** of both.
- **Targeted Components:** Display modules, camera modules, PCBAs, lithium cell enclosures, resistors, capacitors, ferrites.
- **Annual Incentives:** ₹2,300 crore to ₹4,200 crore.
- **Eligibility:** Open to **greenfield (new) and brownfield (existing) investments**.

Global Electronics Market

- Valued at **\$4.3 trillion**, dominated by **China, Taiwan, USA, South Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Mexico, and Malaysia**.
- **China** leads with **60% of global electronics production**.

India's Electronics Industry

- **Market Size (FY23):** **\$155 billion**.
- **Growth:** Electronics production nearly doubled from **\$48 billion (FY17)** to **\$101 billion (FY23)**, with **mobile phones contributing 43%**.
- **Exports:** Expected to reach **\$120 billion by FY26**.
- **May 2024 Growth:** Exports rose **22.97% YoY** to **\$2.97 billion**.

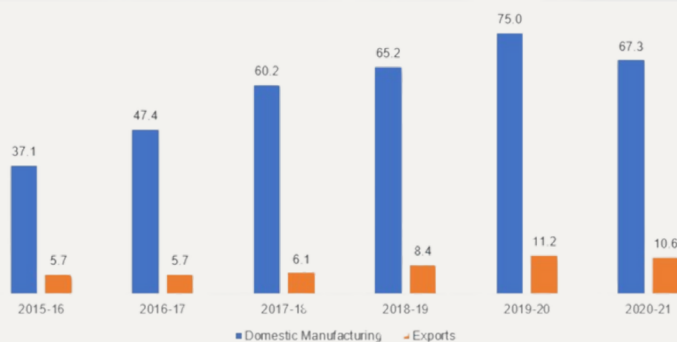
Government Initiatives

- **Make in India, Digital India, Startup India** – Boost domestic production.
- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI):** Incentivizes **mobile & electronic components** manufacturing.
- **National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019):** Aims to make India a **global hub** for electronics production.
- **Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0):** Develops industrial clusters.
- **Semiconductor Fabs Initiative:** Supports **semiconductor fabrication facilities**.
- **FDI Policy:** 100% FDI allowed under the **automatic route, 49% in defense electronics**.

Challenges

- **Low Global Share:** India's exports are **~\$25 billion, <1% of global electronics exports**.
- **High Investment Needs:** Component manufacturing offers lower returns (**₹2-4 per ₹1 invested**).

India's electronic goods exports and production by value (US\$ billion)



- **Skilled Workforce Shortage:** Lack of trained professionals in advanced manufacturing.
- **Capital Intensive:** Requires huge investments, long gestation periods, & high risks.

Way Forward

- **Target:** \$500 billion electronics production by 2030.
- **Localization:** Reduce import dependence on high-tech components.
- **R&D Investment:** Strengthen design & innovation capabilities.
- **Global Partnerships:** Collaborate with leading technology firms.

Standing Stones of Mudumal, Telangana

Context

The **Standing Stones of Mudumal** in **Narayanpet district, Telangana**, have been included in the **UNESCO Tentative List** for **World Heritage Sites**.

About the Mudumal Megalithic Menhirs

- **Megalithic menhirs** (large standing stones), some as tall as **10-14 feet**.
- Located near the **Krishna River**.
- Believed to have been used for **funerary rituals and astronomical observations**.
- Estimated to be **3,500 to 4,000 years old**, dating back to **1000 BCE – 300 BCE** (Iron Age).

Megalithic Culture in India

- Associated with **Neolithic and Iron Age societies (1500 BCE – 500 CE)**, especially in the **Deccan Plateau**.
- Similar traditions exist in **Karnataka and Kerala**.

Other Similar Sites in India

- **Hire Benekallu (Karnataka):** Menhirs, dolmens, and cave paintings; on UNESCO's **Tentative List (2021)**.
- **Vibhutihalli (Karnataka):** Rectangular stone formations with **solar alignments**.
- **Nilgiri Dolmens (Tamil Nadu):** Dolmens, stone circles, cists, and petroglyphs.

Global Comparisons

- **Stonehenge (UK), Carnac Stones (France)** – UNESCO-recognized megalithic structures.
- **Grand Menhir Brisé (France):** The **largest known menhir** (20.6 m tall).

Significance of Mudumal Menhirs

- **Astronomical Importance:** Align with **solstices and equinoxes**.
- **Cultural Relevance:** A specific menhir is worshipped as **Goddess Yellamma**.
- **Local Name:** 'Niluralla Thimmappa' (Thimmappa of the Standing Stones).

Path to UNESCO Recognition

- **Detailed Research & Documentation** to strengthen the nomination.
- **Government & Public Support** to push for recognition.
- **UNESCO Evaluation** of its cultural and historical significance.



NBRI Develops GM Cotton Resistant to Pink Bollworm

Context

Scientists at **CSIR-NBRI, Lucknow**, have developed the **world's first GM cotton resistant to Pink Bollworm (PBW)**.

Background

- **GM Cotton in India:** Introduced in **2002 (Bollgard I & II, Monsanto)**, controlling some bollworm species.
- However, existing GM cotton **failed to resist PBW**.

About Pink Bollworm (PBW)

- **Scientific Name:** *Pectinophora gossypiella*.
- **Damage:** PBW larvae burrow into cotton bolls, **ruining fiber quality**.
- **Spread:** Through **air & infected crop residues**.
- **Prevention:**
 - **Crop rotation** (avoid cotton planting for one season).
 - **Burn infected residues** to prevent further infestation.

What are GM Crops?

- **Genetically Modified (GM) crops** have altered DNA for pest resistance, higher yield, or better nutrition.
- **Modification Techniques:** Gene guns, electroporation, microinjection, Agrobacterium-mediated transfer.
- **Types of Modification:** Transgenic (foreign genes), Cis-genic (same species genes), Sub-genic (mutations).
- **Traits in GM Crops:** Herbicide tolerance (HT), Insect resistance (IR), Stacked traits (multiple modifications).

GM Crops in India

- **Bt Cotton (2002):** The **only GM crop approved in India**.
- **Future GM Crops:** Bt brinjal, DMH-11 mustard in different trial stages.

Regulatory Framework in India

1. **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** – Under MoEF&CC, regulates GM crops.
2. **Key Laws Governing GM Crops:**
 - Environment Protection Act (1986)
 - Biological Diversity Act (2002)
 - Plant Quarantine Order (2003)
 - Foreign Trade Policy GM regulations
 - Food Safety & Standards Act (2006)
 - Drugs & Cosmetics Rule (1988, 8th Amendment)

Conclusion

- **New GM cotton variety could revolutionize India's cotton industry** by eliminating PBW infestation.
- **Strict regulation & public awareness** are necessary before widespread adoption.

\$1bn Funds on the Creative Economy

Context

- The government has announced a **\$1 billion fund** to boost India's **creative economy**.
- The first **Indian Institute of Creative Technology (IICT)** is being set up in **Mumbai** with a fund of **₹400 crore**.

What is the Creative Economy?

Also called the "**Orange Economy**," it refers to an economic system where **creativity and intellectual capital** drive revenue and job creation.

Key Features

- Knowledge-Based:** Creativity is built through education, training, and traditional skills.
- Intellectual Property:** Monetization of creative work through **copyrights, patents, and trademarks**.
- Tech-Driven:** AI, automation, and digital platforms fuel industry growth.
- Cultural & Economic Impact:** Ideas are transformed into commercial products/services.

Significance of the Creative Economy

Economic Impact

- Global Growth:** Market expected to grow from **\$250 billion (2023) to \$480 billion (2027)**, creating **50 million jobs** worldwide.
- Exports:** Indian creative industries—**Bollywood, IT, fashion, handicrafts**—have high global demand.
- Boosts Other Sectors:** Enhances **tourism, hospitality, and retail**.

Social & Cultural Influence

- Youth & Women Empowerment:**
 - 23% of creative economy jobs are held by **youth (15-29 years)**.
 - Women hold **45% of creative industry jobs**.
- Soft Power:** Indian **cinema, music, yoga, and literature** enhance global influence.
- Sustainability:** Reduces dependence on natural resources.

Innovation & Tech Impact

- Startups & Digital Entrepreneurship:** Growth of **YouTubers, AI-driven artists, and game developers**.
- New Tech Integration:** AI, Virtual Reality (VR), and Blockchain shape **art, gaming, and media**.

Challenges in the Creative Economy

1. Digital & Infrastructure Gaps

- Rural Digital Divide:** Only **41% of rural India** has internet access.
- Cybersecurity Risks:** Digital piracy, NFT fraud, and hacking threats.

2. Economic & Policy Barriers

- Weak Intellectual Property Protection:** Patent processing in India takes **58 months** (vs. 20 months in China).
- Market Fragmentation:** Lack of structured platforms for creators.
- Limited Financial Access:** Creative MSMEs struggle to get funding.

3. Social & Career Constraints

- Preference for Traditional Careers:** Arts and design seen as **less stable** than medicine or engineering.
- Low Global Branding:** Indian creative industries are **under-marketed internationally**.

Way Forward: Strengthening India's Creative Economy

1. Expand Global Presence

- Promote **Indian films, music, fashion, and arts** internationally.
- Boost **exports** of handicrafts, digital art, and animation.

2. Financial & Policy Support

- Set up **credit guarantee schemes and crowdfunding platforms** for creative startups.

- Provide **incentives for digital creators and game developers**.

3. Strengthen Intellectual Property (IP) Rights

- Faster patent and copyright approvals.**
- Stronger copyright enforcement** for digital creators.

4. Develop Creative Hubs: Set up creative districts in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities to nurture local talent.

- Skill Development & Digital Education**
- Integrate **AI, design, and digital marketing** courses into education.

5. AI & Emerging Tech Governance

- Develop AI-based copyright policies** for digital content.
- Use **Blockchain** for securing **NFTs and digital art**.

Conclusion

India's **creative economy** is an untapped engine of **economic growth, global influence, and job creation**. By improving **infrastructure, financial support, and IP laws**, India can become a **global leader in creative industries**.

Petition on CAG Appointment Process

Context

- The **Supreme Court** is reviewing a petition challenging the **Centre's exclusive authority** to appoint the **Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)**.

What is the CAG?

- The **CAG** is responsible for auditing the **financial accounts of the Union, States, and Panchayati Raj institutions**.

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 148:**
 - The **President appoints the CAG**.
 - Removal follows the same process as a **Supreme Court judge**.
 - Salary and service conditions are fixed by **Parliament**.
- Article 149:** Defines the **CAG's auditing responsibilities**.
- Article 150:** The **President**, based on the CAG's advice, determines the format of **Union and State accounts**.
- Article 151:**
 - Union audit reports** are submitted to the **President and Parliament**.
 - State audit reports** are sent to **Governors and state legislatures**.
- Article 279:** The **CAG certifies the net proceeds of taxes and duties**.

Concerns Over the CAG's Appointment

- Lack of Independence:** The **executive controls the appointment process**, affecting neutrality.
 - Delays & Decline in Audits:** **Union government audits have decreased**, raising accountability concerns.
 - Recent Controversies:** CAG reports have **exposed financial irregularities**, such as:
 - Delhi's excise policy case**
 - Uttarakhand's afforestation fund mismanagement**
- These reports have caused friction between the CAG and the government.

Proposed Reforms

1. Appointment by a Neutral Committee:

- A selection panel including:
 - Prime Minister**
 - Leader of the Opposition**
 - Chief Justice of India**

2. Time-bound Presentation of Reports

3. Restructuring the CAG: Creating separate state auditing bodies, like in **Australia & the US**.

Conclusion

The **CAG is vital for financial accountability** in India. Strengthening its **independence, transparency, and efficiency** is key to **maintaining public trust in government finances**.

MHA to Review AFSPA in the Northeast

Context:

The **Union Home Ministry** is reviewing the extent of the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)** in Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam due to recent ethnic tensions, especially in Manipur.

About AFSPA:

- **Enacted:** 1958
- **Purpose:** Grants special powers to the armed forces in **disturbed areas** to maintain order.
- **Provisions:**
 - **Section 3:** Governor can declare an area as disturbed.
 - **Section 4:** Armed forces can search premises and arrest without warrants.
 - **Section 6:** Requires arrested persons to be handed over to police.
 - **Section 7:** Prosecution of armed forces personnel requires **Central Government approval**.

Need for AFSPA:

- **Insurgency and Terrorism:** Armed movements in the Northeast and J&K require quick military response.
- **Support to Civil Administration:** Army assists where police forces are inadequate.
- **Geopolitical Threats:** Border tensions with **China, Myanmar, and Pakistan**.
- **Strategic Deterrence:** Presence of military discourages insurgents.

Criticism and Concerns:

- **Human Rights Violations:** Extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence (highlighted by **Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee, 2005** and UN agencies).
- **Immunity & Lack of Accountability:** **Central Government sanction** delays justice.
- **Alienation of Locals:** Perception of excessive militarization breeds mistrust.
- **Judicial Observations:** Supreme Court (2016) emphasized that excessive force under AFSPA is unconstitutional.
- **Democratic Deficit:** Violates **federalism, rule of law, and civil liberties**.

Way Forward:

1. **Phased Withdrawal:** Gradual removal in stable areas.
2. **Strengthening Local Policing:** Enhance **state police capabilities, intelligence, and infrastructure**.
3. **Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish **civilian oversight bodies** for complaints.
4. **Legal Reforms:** Amend AFSPA to balance **security and human rights**, introduce periodic reviews and sunset clauses.

Global Forest Vision 2030

Context:

The **Forest Declaration Assessment (FDA) 2023** reported a loss of **6.37 million hectares of forests**, threatening global **climate and biodiversity** goals.

About FDA & NYDF:

- **Forest Declaration Assessment (FDA):** Tracks global forest conservation progress.
- **New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) (2014):**
 - **Voluntary & non-binding** declaration adopted at the **UN Climate Summit**.
 - **Goal:** Halt deforestation by **2030** and restore **350 million hectares** of degraded land.
 - **India is not a signatory**.

Key Findings:

- **Massive Forest Loss:** 6.37 million hectares lost in 2023 (~9 million soccer fields).
- **Major Causes:** Palm oil, soy, beef, and timber production.
- **Regional Impact:**
 - **Amazon:** **Cattle ranching** causes **80% of deforestation**.
 - **Southeast Asia:** **Palm oil expansion** threatens

orangutans, Sumatran tigers.

- **Palm oil alone contributes 5% to tropical deforestation.**

Recommendations:

- Align national forest goals with **UNFCCC COP30 (Brazil, Nov 2025)**.
- Strengthen **deforestation-free trade** policies.
- **Ban imports** of products linked to deforestation.
- Increase **forest carbon finance** and payments for conservation
- Recognize **Indigenous Peoples' land rights**.
- Reform financial institutions to account for **forest-related risks**.
- Redirect **harmful subsidies** toward sustainable land use.

India's Role: Challenges & Opportunities

- **Challenges:**
 - High **import dependence** on **palm oil & timber**.
 - No specific **trade restrictions** on deforestation-linked products.
 - **Small farmers** lack technology to verify deforestation-free practices.
- **Opportunities:**
 - **Introduce deforestation-free import laws**.
 - Support farmers via **finance, capacity building, and technology**.
 - **South-South cooperation** for sustainable trade and agriculture.

Integrate with **existing policies** like **CAMPA, National Agroforestry Policy, and Bio-Energy Mission**.

Concerns Over Amendments to the RTI Act, 2005

Context:

Over **30 civil society organizations** have urged the **Union Government** to preserve the **Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005**, opposing amendments introduced through the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP), 2023**.

Concerns Over Amendments:

- **Key Issue: Section 8(1)(j)** now **prohibits disclosure of personal information**, even when it serves the **public interest**.
- **Government's Justification:** Aligns with **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy Case (2017)**, which recognized the **Right to Privacy** as a **fundamental right**.
- **Activists' Concerns:**
 - **Hinders transparency:** Makes it difficult to uncover **corruption** and verify **government programs**.
 - **Affects social audits:** RTI has been instrumental in monitoring **ration distribution, MGNREGS funds, and public spending**.
 - **Original RTI Act** balanced **privacy & transparency**; new changes undermine its purpose.

About the RTI Act, 2005:

- **Aim:** Promotes **transparency and accountability** in governance.
- **Scope:** Applies to **government departments, ministries, and organizations** substantially funded by the government.
- **Right to Access Information:** Citizens can request **records, documents, contracts, and decisions** of public authorities.
- **Exemptions:** National security, confidential matters, and ongoing investigations.
- **Response Time:** Authorities must respond within **30 days** (extendable to **45 days** in special cases).
- **Penalties:** Officials can be penalized for **delays, denial, or misinformation**.

Significance of RTI:

- **Empowers Citizens:** Enhances **government accountability** and prevents **corruption**.
- **Ensures Transparency:** Used in social audits of **MGNREGS, PDS, and government contracts**.
- **Promotes Good Governance:** Strengthens **democracy and trust in institutions**.

- **Exposes Corruption:** Helped uncover misuse of public funds and inefficiencies.

Criticism of the RTI Act:

- **Burden on Public Authorities:** High volume of RTI requests strains government resources.
- **Misuse:** Some requests are used for harassment or political motives.
- **Delays in Processing:** Despite deadlines, officials often fail to respond timely.
- **Lack of Training & Infrastructure:** Public authorities lack expertise to handle RTI requests efficiently.
- **Ambiguities in Exemptions:** Vague exemptions allow withholding crucial information.

Way Forward:

- **Define "Personal Information" Clearly:** Ensure public interest overrides privacy in cases of corruption, fund misuse, and public welfare schemes.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Consultation:** Include RTI activists, legal experts, and data privacy professionals in amendments.
- **Transparency with Privacy Protection:** Amendments should not weaken citizens' right to government accountability.
- **Codify Public Interest Clause:** Disclosure should be allowed when it ensures accountability in public schemes.

Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)

Context:

Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) have achieved a **96.28% case disposal rate**, ensuring **speedy justice** for **rape and POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences)** cases.

About FTSCs:

- **Purpose:** Dedicated courts to expedite heinous crime cases (rape & child sexual abuse).
- **Launched:** 2019 under the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law & Justice.
- **Funding:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS):
 - **60:40 (Centre: State)** for most states.
 - **90:10** for **Northeastern & Hilly States**.
- **Target:** 790 FTSCs planned, including **exclusive e-POCSO courts**.
- **Disposal Target:** 165 cases annually per court.

Need for FTSCs:

- **Supreme Court Mandate (2019):** Directed speedy trials for POCSO cases under CrPC & POCSO Act, 2012.
- **Judicial Backlog:** Prolonged trials delay justice for survivors.
- **Deterrence:** Swift punishments send a **strong message** against sexual crimes.

Key Recommendations by Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA):

1. **Continuation of FTSCs:** Retain & expand the scheme.
2. **Strengthen Judicial Infrastructure:** Appoint **special judges trained in POCSO cases**.
3. **Use Technology:** Equip courts with **e-filing, digitized records & video recording**.
4. **Enhance Forensic Capabilities:** Increase **forensic labs & trained personnel**. Ensure **timely DNA report submission**.
5. **Set Up Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centres (VWDCs):**
 - Ensure **child-friendly testimony recording**.
 - Appoint **child psychologists** for victim assistance.

Conclusion:

FTSCs are crucial for ensuring **timely justice** for victims of sexual crimes. Strengthening **judicial resources, forensic support, and technological integration** will enhance their effectiveness and uphold victims' rights.

First Glacier Declared Dead Due to Climate Change

Context:

- **Iceland's Okjökull Glacier** was officially declared **dead in 2014** due to **climate change**.
- **2023:** Iceland established the **world's first iceberg graveyard** for critically endangered glaciers.
- **UN (2025):** Declared the **International Year of Glaciers' Preservation & March 21** as **World Glaciers Day**.

Cryosphere & Its Importance:

- **Cryosphere:** Includes **glaciers, ice caps, permafrost, sea ice, and frozen ground**.
- **Regulates Climate:** Reflects sunlight (albedo effect), maintaining **Earth's temperature**.
- **Water Storage:** Holds **70% of Earth's freshwater**.
- **Sea Level Control:** Melting contributes to **rising sea levels**.
- **Himalayan Cryosphere (HKH):**
 - Source of **10 major river systems**.
 - Warming **twice the global average**, increasing glacial disasters.

Threats to the Cryosphere:

- **Global Warming:** Accelerates **glacier and sea ice melting**.
- **Rising Sea Levels:** Threatens **coastal regions**.
- **Permafrost Thawing:** Releases **carbon & methane**, worsening climate change.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** Affects **polar and alpine ecosystems**.

Global Initiatives for Cryosphere Conservation:

- **Paris Agreement (2015):** Targets **temperature control below 2°C**.
- **IPCC Reports:** Highlight **cryosphere vulnerability**.
- **CryoNet (WMO):** Tracks **ice loss globally**.
- **SDGs (Goal 13 & 15):** Address climate action and ecosystem conservation.
- **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE):** India's initiative under **NAPCC**.

Conclusion:

The cryosphere is **vital for climate stability** and **freshwater availability**. Urgent **global action** is needed to **mitigate glacier loss** and **control climate change impacts**.

Seabed Warfare in a New Era of Geotech Conflicts

Context:

With rising reliance on **undersea infrastructure** for **communication, energy, and military operations**, the **seabed** is becoming a **contested geopolitical space**.

What is Seabed Warfare?

- **Military operations on the ocean floor** targeting:
 - **Communication Cables** – 95% of **global internet & data flow**.
 - **Energy Pipelines** – Transport **oil, gas, and electricity**.
 - **Sensors & Surveillance** – Used for **military intelligence**.

Geotech Conflicts & Seabed Militarization:

- **Cyber & Hybrid Warfare:** AI-powered submarines & drones for **espionage & sabotage**.
- **Autonomous Underwater Systems:** **UUVs & ROVs** for reconnaissance & attacks.
- **Weaponization of the Seabed:** Deployment of **underwater mines & offensive drones**.

Strategic Importance of the Seabed:

- **Global Internet Backbone:** Disrupting **undersea cables** could cripple **finance & defense networks**.
- **Energy & Resources:** Seabed holds **oil, gas, rare earth metals, and polymetallic nodules**.
- **Military & Surveillance:** Nations are deploying **sensor networks & submarines** for dominance.

Major Players & Global Incidents:

- **United States:** **Seawolf-class & Virginia-class submarines** with seabed warfare capabilities.

- **United States:** Seawolf-class & Virginia-class submarines with seabed warfare capabilities.
- **China:** Underwater sensor networks, AI-driven submarines (e.g., Great Underwater Wall in South China Sea).
- **Russia:** Deep-diving submarines (Losharik, Yantar) involved in cable tampering.
- **NATO & Europe:** Post Nord Stream pipeline sabotage, increased focus on seabed security.

India's Seabed Warfare Efforts:

- **Strengthening Submarine Capabilities:**
 - **Project 75 & 75I:** Scorpène-class submarines (INS Kalvari).
 - **Nuclear Submarines:** INS Arihant for deterrence.
- **Undersea Infrastructure Protection:**
 - **Deep Ocean Mission** – For deep-sea mining & resource security.
 - **Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs)** – NIOT-led seabed monitoring projects.
- **Strategic Alliances:** QUAD Partnership: Enhancing Indo-Pacific seabed security.

Future of Seabed Security:

- **Seabed Surveillance:** AI-powered sensors, satellite tracking of underwater activities.
- **Legal Frameworks:**
 - **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)** – Needs stronger enforcement.
 - **New Global Agreement** required for seabed security & governance.
- **Defensive Technologies:** Development of anti-UUV & deep-sea monitoring systems.

US-China Trade War 2.0

Context

The **US-China trade war** has escalated, affecting **global markets, supply chains, and economic stability**.

What is a Trade War?

A situation where countries **impose tariffs & trade barriers** on each other, disrupting global trade.

Background

- Began in **2018** under **Donald Trump**, targeting China's **unfair trade practices**.
- Over **\$450 billion** worth of trade was affected due to **tariffs & countermeasures**.
- **India was impacted:** Faced **US tariffs on steel & aluminum** and lost **GSP status (2019)**.
- **February 2025:** Trump reintroduced a **10% tariff on Chinese imports**, prompting **Chinese retaliation**.
- **April 2025:** Trump's **reciprocal tariff policy** takes effect, aiming to reduce the **US trade deficit**.

Global Impact of Trade War

- **Stock Market Volatility:** Increased **uncertainty & market fluctuations**.
- **Supply Chain Disruptions:** Higher production costs forced businesses to **relocate manufacturing**.
- **Currency Depreciation:** Emerging markets faced **import cost inflation**.
- **Commodity Price Swings:** Disruptions in **oil, metals, & agricultural markets**.
- **Trade Shifts:** Countries sought **new trade partners & regional agreements**.

Impact on India

Negative Impacts

- **Electronics Industry:** Higher costs due to **Chinese component shortages**.
- **Pharmaceuticals:** **70% of India's APIs** (raw materials) come from China, raising **medicine prices**.
- **Automobile Industry:** **Delays & cost increases** due to disrupted spare parts supply.
- **Stock Market & Rupee:** Past trade wars led to **₹33,000 crore FII outflows & 9.5% rupee depreciation**.

Positive Impacts

- **Rise in Exports:** India benefited as the **US sought non-Chinese suppliers**.
- **Boost to IT Sector:** Increased **outsourcing of tech services** from India.
- **Agriculture Gains:** India increased **soybean & crop exports** to China.

Way Forward

- **Geopolitical Strategy:** India must **balance relations with the US & China**.
- **Supply Chain Diversification:** Strengthen **domestic manufacturing & alternate sourcing**.
- **Trade Agreements:** Expand deals with **US, ASEAN, & EU**.

Conclusion

- Trade wars **disrupt global trade**, affecting **businesses & consumers** worldwide.
- While **some Indian sectors gain**, overall **economic uncertainty & inflationary pressures** remain challenges.
- The **US is India's largest trading partner**, making **diplomatic & trade negotiations crucial**.

Mains Questions

Polity & Governance

1. Discuss the key findings of the PAC report on GST and its implications for equitable tax distribution in India.
2. Examine the significance of the Justice Varma case in the context of the NJAC debate. How does it impact judicial appointments in India?
3. Analyze the concerns over the recent amendments to the RTI Act, 2005. How do they affect transparency and accountability in governance?
4. The process of appointing the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has come under scrutiny. Should there be reforms in the appointment process? Discuss.
5. What are Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)? Evaluate their role in ensuring speedy justice in India.

Environment & Climate Change

1. How do changing rainfall patterns threaten Indian agriculture? Suggest strategies to mitigate the risks.
2. Mangrove forests are increasing in India. Discuss their ecological and economic significance.
3. Explain the objectives of Global Forest Vision 2030. How can India align its afforestation policies with this vision?
4. The world recently witnessed the first glacier declared dead due to climate change. What does this indicate about the urgency of climate action?

Economy & Trade

1. Discuss the current state of India's electronics manufacturing and export market. What challenges does the sector face?
2. The US-China Trade War 2.0 is reshaping global economic dynamics. Analyze its impact on India's trade and foreign policy.
3. The Indian government has allocated \$1 billion for the creative economy. How can this funding boost India's cultural and artistic industries?

Science & Technology

1. The National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) has developed genetically modified (GM) cotton resistant to pink bollworm. Discuss the potential benefits and concerns of GM crops in India.

Security & International Relations

1. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is reviewing the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the Northeast. Discuss the need for a balanced approach between security and human rights.
2. Seabed warfare is emerging as a new front in geopolitical conflicts. Explain its significance and the challenges it poses for global security.

Culture & Heritage

1. The Standing Stones of Mudumal, Telangana, are significant archaeological findings. Discuss their historical and cultural importance.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NASA ASTRONAUTS RETURN TO EARTH

Context:

NASA astronauts **Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore** returned to Earth after an extended nine-month stay aboard the **International Space Station (ISS)** due to technical issues with their return spacecraft.

Key Details:

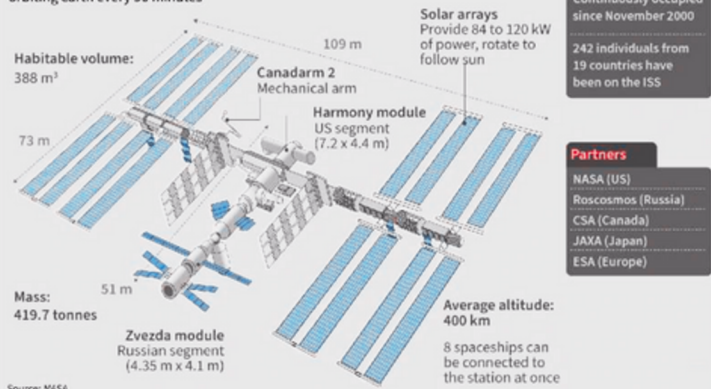
- They traveled to ISS on Boeing's CST-100 Starliner under NASA's **Commercial Crew Program**, which aims to develop private spacecraft for astronaut transport.
- They returned via **SpaceX's Dragon capsule** after their mission was prolonged.

Challenges of Prolonged Space Stay:

- Microgravity Effects** – Muscle atrophy, bone density loss, fluid redistribution.
- Radiation Exposure** – Higher risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases.
- Psychological Strain** – Isolation, stress, and interpersonal challenges.
- Life Support & Nutrition** – Dependence on ISS supplies, waste recycling systems.
- Technical Failures** – Spacecraft malfunctions, navigation, and communication delays.

International Space Station

As of March 2021 seven astronauts are working on the station, orbiting earth every 90 minutes



RISKS AND REWARDS OF USING UAVS

Context:

Chinese UAVs near Okinawa were perceived as less threatening compared to piloted aircraft, raising discussions on their strategic use.

Why UAVs Are Considered Low-Risk?

- No Human Loss** – UAVs do not endanger pilots.
- Lower Cost** – Cheaper to produce and replace than manned aircraft.
- Strategic Intelligence** – Used for surveillance, reconnaissance, and border monitoring.

Impact on India:

- Pakistan** – UAVs frequently smuggle arms and narcotics into India. India must develop cost-effective countermeasures.
- Bangladesh** – Deployment of Bayraktar TB-2 UAVs near the border raises surveillance concerns.
- China** – Advancements in **stealth UAVs and drone swarms** pose strategic threats along the LAC.

Way Forward for India:

- Enhancing Counter-Drone Technology** – Developing affordable defense systems.
- Strengthening UAV Capabilities** – Acquiring advanced UAVs like MQ-9B SeaGuardian and investing in swarm drones.
- Diplomatic & Legal Frameworks** – Establishing regional UAV-use agreements with neighbors.
- Cybersecurity Measures** – Protecting India's UAV systems from hacking threats.

SHORTCOMINGS IN SWADESH DARSHAN SCHEME

Context:

The **Public Accounts Committee (PAC)** criticized the Ministry of Tourism for poor implementation of the **Swadesh Darshan Scheme**, highlighting inefficiencies.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- Launched:** 2014-15, revamped as **Swadesh Darshan 2.0** for sustainable tourism.
- Theme-Based Circuits:** Spiritual, Cultural, Heritage, Wildlife, and Coastal circuits.
- Funding:** Ministry of Tourism funds states/UTs for tourism development.

Key Issues Highlighted by PAC:

- Lack of Feasibility Studies** – Projects launched without assessment.
- Financial Mismanagement** – Budget overruns and approvals without DPRs.
- Poor Monitoring & Delays** – No evaluation mechanism, incomplete projects.
- Discrepancies in Ministry Claims** – Govt. claimed 75/76 projects were completed, but several (e.g., **Kanwar route in Bihar, Tribal circuit in Telangana**) were incomplete or non-functional.

Way Forward:

- Physical Inspection of Projects** – PAC directed the Ministry to submit a detailed status report within 3 weeks.
- Employment & Tourism Impact Assessment** – Evaluation of how the scheme has impacted jobs and tourist footfall.

INDIAN LONG-BILLED VULTURE

About:

- Scientific Name:** *Gyps indicus*
- Features:**
 - Medium-sized vulture with **pale brown feathers** and a **semi-bald head**
 - Long bill and broad wings**
- Habitat:** Cliffs, hilly crags, open landscapes in **central & southern India**
- Role in Ecosystem:**
 - Efficient scavenger**—prevents disease spread by consuming carcasses

Threats:

- 97% population decline since 1990s** due to **diclofenac poisoning**
- Diclofenac (veterinary drug)** banned in 2006 (India, Nepal, Pakistan), but illegal use continues
- Declining vulture population → **increase in feral dogs**, spreading **rabies & anthrax**

Conservation Status:

IUCN Red List: **Critically Endangered**

BODO PEACE ACCORD (2020)

Background:

- Bodos:** Largest tribal group in Assam
- Bodoland Movement (1980s)** demanded **separate Bodoland**, leading to insurgency
- Major Bodo Insurgent Groups:**
 - National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)**
 - Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT)**

Previous Accords:

- Bodo Accord (1993):** Formed **Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)**
- Bodo Accord (2003):** Created **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)** under **Sixth Schedule**

Key Features of 2020 Accord:

- BTC renamed** as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) with **more autonomy**
- Non-Bodo villages excluded** from BTC
- Bodo recognized** as an **associate official language** of Assam

CHANDRAYAAN-5 MISSION

About Chandrayaan Missions:

- **Chandrayaan-1 (2008):** Discovered **water molecules** on the Moon
- **Chandrayaan-2 (2019):** Orbiter successful, lander failed
- **Chandrayaan-3 (2023):** Successful soft landing at Moon's South Pole
- **Chandrayaan-4 (2027):** Lunar soil sample return mission

Chandrayaan-5 (Upcoming)

- **India-Japan collaboration**
- **250 kg rover** (vs. Chandrayaan-3's **25 kg rover**)
- **Objective:** Detailed Moon surface study

Future Indian Space Missions:

- **Gaganyaan:** India's human spaceflight mission
- **Bharatiya Antariksh Station:** India's own **space station project**

GOMIRA DANCE

About:

- Traditional **masked dance** of **North Bengal**
- **Performed by:** Rajbongshi & Polia communities
- **Spiritual Influences:**
 - **Mahayana & Tantric Buddhism**
 - **Shaivite & Shakta traditions**

Performance Elements:

- **Masks:** Made of **papier mâché, bamboo, wood, clay**
- **Music:** Performed to **Dhak & Kansar** (percussion instruments)



PRAVAAH & SARTHI – RBI DIGITAL INITIATIVES

Context: RBI won the Digital Transformation Award 2025 (London)

Pravaah:

- **Regulatory application platform** for **external users**
- **Purpose:** Seamless submission & tracking of regulatory applications

Sarthi:

- **Internal workflow digitization system** for **RBI departments**
- **Purpose:** Paperless record management, data analysis, and automation

Impact:

- Enhanced transparency & cybersecurity
- Reduced manual paperwork & operational delays

BUDDHIST THEMATIC CIRCUIT – SWADESH DARSHAN

Key Points

- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme (2014-15):** Develops thematic tourism circuits; Buddhist Circuit is a priority.
- **PRASHAD Scheme (2014-15):** Focuses on religious and heritage tourism, including Buddhist sites.
- **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI):** Preserves Buddhist heritage sites, provides visitor amenities.

Key Buddhist Sites in India:

- **Bodhi Gaya (Bihar):** Buddha's enlightenment site.
- **Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh):** First sermon.
- **Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh):** Mahaparinirvana site.
- **Rajgir & Nalanda (Bihar):** Learning centers.
- **Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh):** Stupas & monuments.

Significance: Boosts cultural diplomacy, spiritual tourism, local economy, and heritage conservation.

DIGITIZATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN INDIA

Key Points

- **National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA) (2007):**
 - Documents India's **built heritage & antiquities**.
 - Budget Allocation (2024-25): ₹20 lakh.
- **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act) 1958:**
 - Defines **Ancient Monument:** Any structure, cave, inscription, etc., over 100 years old.
 - Regulates excavation and conservation of heritage sites.
- **Digital Technologies in Heritage Preservation:**
 - **3D Scanning & Photogrammetry:** Used for Ajanta Caves & Hampi.
 - **AI Restoration:** Used for Nalanda University, Virupaksha Temple.

AI Analysis: Studies ancient scripts & paintings (e.g., Bakhshali Manuscript – earliest use of zero).

MISSION SAFFRON

Key Points

- **Mission Saffron (2010-11):** Initially for **Jammu & Kashmir (Pampore)**, expanded to Northeast in 2021.
- **Saffron Bowl Project:** NECTAR implementing cultivation in **Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya**.
- **Scientific Name:** *Crocus sativus* (Saffron Crocus).
- **Growing Conditions:**
 - **Altitude:** 2,000m above sea level.
 - **Soil:** Loamy, sandy, calcareous (pH 6-8).
 - **Climate:**
 - Summer: Below 40°C.
 - Winter: As low as -20°C.
- **Production in India:**
 - **Kashmir Saffron** (GI-tagged) – Grown in **Pampore, Pulwama, Budgam**.
 - **Challenges:** Low domestic production, leading to imports.
- **North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR) (2014):** Under **Department of Science & Technology (DST)**.
- Promotes **tech-driven agriculture & economic development** in the Northeast.

'MICROLIGHTNING' IN WATER DROPLETS

Key Points

- **New Study:** Found **microlightning** (tiny sparks from oppositely charged water droplets) can create organic compounds.
- **Potential Role in Origin of Life:**
 - Generates **hydrogen cyanide, glycine, and uracil** (key organic molecules).
 - May have played a role in early Earth's prebiotic chemistry.
- **Miller-Urey Hypothesis (1952):**
 - Suggested lightning + water + gases could form life-essential molecules.
 - Criticized as **lightning was infrequent in oceans**.
 - **New study suggests water sprays (e.g., waves, waterfalls) could solve this issue.**

COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA (CCI)

Key Points

- **Establishment:** **2009**, under the **Competition Act, 2002**.
- **Ministry:** **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**.
- **Purpose:**
 - Prevents **anti-competitive practices** and **cartels**.
 - Promotes **market competition** and protects **consumer interests**.

- **Composition:** Chairperson + 6 Members, appointed by the **Central Government**.
- **Powers & Functions:**
 - Investigates **anti-competitive agreements & abuse of dominance**.
 - Imposes **penalties** for violations.
 - Advises **government** on competition policy.
- **Key Cases:**
 - **Google Antitrust Case (2023):** Fined **₹1,338 crore** for anti-competitive practices in the Android ecosystem.
 - **Amazon-Future Group Case:** Investigated Amazon's stake in **Future Coupons**.
 - **Recent Development:** Conducted **raids on global ad agencies** over alleged **IPL ad rate fixing**.

ONLINE ASSURANCES MONITORING SYSTEM (OAMS)

Key Points

- **What is OAMS?**
 - **Digital platform** by **Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA)**.
 - Enhances **transparency & efficiency** in tracking government **assurances**.
- **What are Assurances?**
 - **Promises/commitments** made by Ministers in Parliament.
 - Must be **fulfilled within 3 months** of being made.
- **Governance:** MoPA implements assurances under the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961.

NATIONAL MISSION FOR CLEAN GANGA (NMCG)

Key Points

- **Recent Issue:** Facing **₹243.74 crore tax demand** due to PAN classification issues.
- **About NMCG:**
 - **Established: 2011**, under **Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
 - **Upgraded to 'Authority'** in 2016 under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- **Structure:**
 - **National Ganga Council** (PM as Chairperson).
 - **Empowered Task Force (ETF)** (Union Jal Shakti Minister).
 - **NMCG** – Implementation body.
 - **State & District Ganga Committees**.
- **Functions:**
 - **Pollution control & rejuvenation** of Ganga & its tributaries.

INDIA'S RANKING IN FREE SPEECH SURVEY

Key Points

- **Survey by:** **The Future of Free Speech** (Oct 2024).
- **India's Rank:** **24th** out of **33** countries.

Global Trends:

- Declining support for **free speech**, even in **democratic nations**.
- **Norway (87.9) & Denmark (87.0)** ranked highest.
- **Indonesia, Malaysia & Pakistan** showed improvement but remained low.

India's Findings:

- **Score:** 62.6 (Between **South Africa (66.9)** and **Lebanon (61.8)**).
- **37% of Indians** support government preventing criticism of **policies** (highest among surveyed nations).
- Contrasts with **UK (5%) & Denmark (3%)**.

Freedom of Speech in India:

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Right to **freedom of speech & expression**.
- **Includes:**
 - Right to **propagate** views.
 - Freedom of **press & silence**.
 - Right against **pre-censorship & telephone tapping**.

Restrictions (Article 19(2)): Speech can be restricted for **security, defamation, public order, morality, etc.**

WORLD'S LARGEST WHITE HYDROGEN DEPOSIT

Key Points

- **Discovery:** France's Moselle region – 46-million-ton white hydrogen reserve (\$92 trillion value).

What is White Hydrogen?

- **Naturally occurring** hydrogen (Earth's crust).
- **No CO₂ emissions**, unlike **grey, blue, or green** hydrogen.
- **Other Hydrogen Types:**
 - **Green Hydrogen** – Electrolysis using **renewable energy**.
 - **Grey Hydrogen** – Natural gas + SMR (Steam Methane Reforming) (Emits CO₂).
 - **Blue Hydrogen** – Natural gas + CO₂ capture & storage.

THE COLORS OF HYDROGEN



WORLD'S LARGEST WHITE HYDROGEN DEPOSIT

Key Points

- **Date: March 21** – Recognizes puppetry as a **global art form**.
- **Purpose:** Celebrates **puppeteers** and their contribution to performing arts.
- **Puppetry in India:**
 - **String Puppets (Kathputli):** Rajasthan, Gujarat.
 - **Shadow Puppetry:** Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala.
 - **Rod Puppetry:** West Bengal, Assam.
 - **Glove Puppetry:** Kerala (**Pavakathakali**).

Some of the popular versions of puppetry from all over India

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



'SQUAD' ALLIANCE**Key Points**

- **Formation: 2024** – Includes **Australia, Japan, Philippines, & the US**.
- **Objective: Counter China's influence** in the **South China Sea**.
- **India's Status:**
 - **Invited to join** alongside South Korea.
 - India is already a part of **Quad** (US, Japan, Australia) – strategic Indo-Pacific alliance.
- **Operations:** Conducts **joint maritime exercises** in **Philippines' EEZ**.

**APAAR ID****Key Points**

- **Full Form: Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry.**
- **Purpose:** Unique **12-digit ID** for students to store:
 - **Scorecards, mark sheets, degrees, certificates.**
- **Initiative:** Part of **'One Nation, One Student ID'** under **NEP 2020**.
- **Platform:** **UDISE+ (Unified District Information System for Education Plus)**.
- **Concern:** **Schools are pushing for it aggressively** despite its voluntary nature.

REVISED NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR DAIRY DEVELOPMENT (NPDD)**Key Points**

- **Cabinet Approval: ₹2790 crore** allocated (2021-26).
- **Aim:** Modernizing **dairy infrastructure** & increasing **farmers' income**.
- **Components:**
 - **A: Dairy Infrastructure Enhancement** – Strengthens **milk chilling plants, testing labs**.
 - **B: Dairying Through Cooperatives (DTC)** – Supported by **Japan's JICA** in **9 states**.
- **Achievements:**
 - **30,000+ jobs created.**
 - **10,000 new Dairy Cooperatives** planned.

National Programme for Dairy Development

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REVISED RASHTRIYA GOKUL MISSION (RGM)**Key Points**

- **Cabinet Approval: ₹3,400 crore** (2021-26).
- **Aim:** Conserving & developing indigenous cattle breeds.
- **Key Components:**
 - **Artificial Insemination Programme.**
 - **Progeny Testing & Pedigree Selection.**
 - **IVF Technology** for genetic upgradation.
 - **Sex-Sorted Semen Production** (Govt. labs in 5 states).
 - **MAITRIs** (AI technicians for farmers).
- **Latest Additions:**
 - **35% capital assistance** for **Heifer Rearing Centres**.
 - **3% interest subvention** for **High Genetic Merit (HGM) IVF heifers**.
- **Achievements:**
 - **63.55% rise in milk production** (2013-24).
 - **471g/day per capita milk availability** (vs. 307g/day in 2013-14).
 - **22 IVF labs established** – **2,541 high-genetic calves born**.

पशुपालन और डेयरी विभाग
Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying

RASHTRIYA GOKUL MISSION**Objectives**

Enhance bovines' productivity & increase milk production



Promote breeding of high genetic merit bulls



Strengthen Artificial Insemination coverage



Promote conservation of indigenous bovines

WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT 2025**Key Points**

- **Published by:** University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre + Gallup & UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- **Parameters:** Social support, GDP per capita, health, life expectancy, freedom, generosity, corruption perception.
- **Rankings:**
 - **Finland** ranked **1st** (happiest nation).
 - **Afghanistan (last), Sierra Leone, Lebanon** lowest-ranked.
 - **India: 118/147 (Lowest: 144 in 2012, Best: 94 in 2022).**
- **March 20: International Day of Happiness** (declared by UN in 2012).
- **Origin:** Concept proposed by **Bhutan** (prioritizes **Gross National Happiness** over GDP).

OEKO-TEX CERTIFICATION FOR ERI SILK**Key Points**

- **Issued by:** **Germany** (tests textiles for **harmful substances**).
- **Importance:** Ensures **eri silk** is **safe for human use**.

Eri Silk

- **Produced by:** **Samia Cynthia Ricini** worm.
- **Non-Violent Silk:** Processed **without killing silkworms** → Called **"Ahimsa Silk"**.
- **Origin of Name:** "Eri" from Assamese **"erranda"** (castor plant).
- **Found in:** Northeast India (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh), China, Japan, Thailand.

- **Found in:** Northeast India (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh), China, Japan, Thailand.
- **India's Silk Production:**
 - **2nd largest** producer globally.
 - Only country producing all 4 major silk varieties: **Mulberry, Eri, Tassar, Muga**.

Types of Silk Fabric By Animals

Mulberry Silk	Muga Silk	Eri Silk	Tassar silk	Spider Silk
				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth texture • Naturally radiant • Pure white luster • Excellent drapability <p>Uses: High-end fashion garments Luxurious home textiles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced in India • Derived from the Assam silkworm cocoon fibers • Distinct golden-yellow color <p>Uses: Traditional and ceremonial attire Mekhela Chadors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alias Endi silk • From India • Naturally soft texture • Off-white or creamy colors <p>Uses: Traditional garments, scarves, and sarees; curtains and home furnishings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alias Tussoh silk • Natural color that ranges from golden to beige • Moisture-wicking and breathability • Affordable <p>Uses: Sarees, scarves, shawls, and traditional clothing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced by spiders • Extraordinary strength and elasticity <p>Uses: Bulletproof vests, protective clothing, medical uses, and lightweight structural materials</p>

UNIFIED LOGISTICS INTERFACE PLATFORM (ULIP)

Key Points

- **Launched:** September 2022, under **National Logistics Policy (NLP)**.
- **Purpose:**
 - **Single-window logistics platform** → Increases efficiency, reduces costs.
 - **Real-time logistics tracking** using **government + private sector data**.
- **Developed by:** NITI Aayog.
- **Operator:** NICDC Logistics Data Services Ltd. (NLDSL) (Joint venture: **Govt of India + NEC Corporation, Japan**).
- **Milestone:** Crossed **100 crore API transactions**.



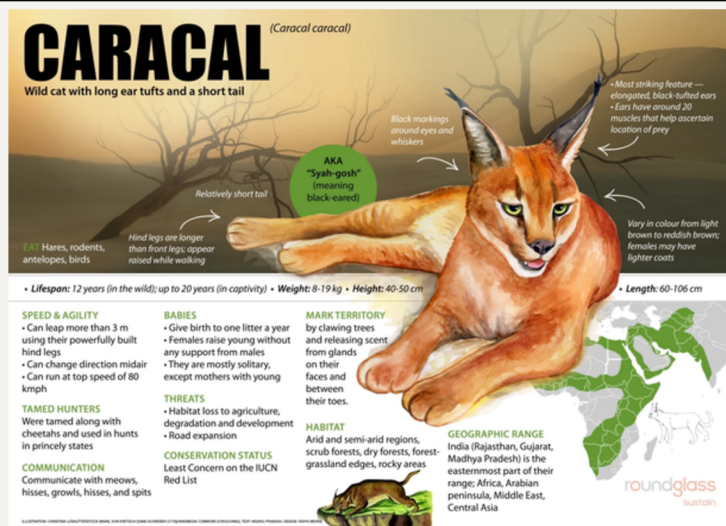
CARACAL IN MUKUNDRA HILLS TIGER RESERVE

Key Points

- **Species:** Caracal (medium-sized wild cat).
- **Distinctive Feature:** Black-tipped, pointy ears (Turkish origin: "karakulak" = "black ears").
- **Habitat:** Africa, Middle East, Central & South Asia.
- **India's Caracal Population:**
 - **Declining** (est. <50 individuals).
 - Found **only in Rajasthan & Gujarat**.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN:** Least Concern (LC).
 - **India:** Critically Endangered (2021, by NBWL & MoEFCC).
 - **CITES Protection:** Appendices I & II.

Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Rajasthan (**3rd Tiger Reserve** after **Ranthambore & Sariska**).
- **Declared TR:** 2013.
- **Part of:** **Vindhyan range** (extends **Chambal River** → **Kalisindh**).
- **Includes:** Mukundra National Park, Dara Sanctuary, Jawahar Sagar Sanctuary, Chambal Sanctuary (Garadia Mahadev → Jawahar Sagar Dam).



DEMANDS FOR GRANTS

Key Points

- **Recent Development:**
 - **Lok Sabha passed ₹50 lakh crore** Demands for Grants for 2025-26.
 - **Used Guillotine Method:** Grants were deemed approved without discussion.
- **What is Demand for Grants?**
 - **A proposal for expenditure** from the **Consolidated Fund of India**.
 - Presented in **Lok Sabha** (as per **Article 113 of the Constitution**).
- **Scope:**
 - **Covers:** Revenue & capital expenditure, grants to states/UTs, loans & advances.
 - **Presented separately by each ministry/department** (e.g., Defence, Railways).
- **Powers:**
 - **Lok Sabha:** Can **approve, reject, or reduce** demands.
 - **Rajya Sabha:** **Cannot vote**, but can discuss.
 - **Approval Process:** Requires **President's prior approval** before being presented.

MADRAS HIGH COURT ON NIRF RANKING

Key Points

- **Recent Development:** **Madurai Bench of Madras HC** restrained the **Ministry of Education & NBA** from publishing **NIRF 2025 rankings**.
- **What is NIRF?**
 - **Launched in:** 2015 (by **NBA**, under the **Ministry of Education**).
 - **Purpose:** Ranks **higher education institutions (HEIs)** in **India**.
 - **Parameters:** Institutions must submit data on:
 - Student & staff strength
 - Salaries
 - Graduation index
 - Placements
 - Research funding
- **Significance:**
 - Helps **students make informed choices**.
 - Encourages **competition & quality assessment** in HEIs.
 - Supports **policy planning** in education.
- **Criticism:** Issues with **data accuracy & ranking criteria**.

RAISINA DIALOGUE 2025

Key Points

- **Event:** 10th edition of **Raisina Dialogue** (held in **New Delhi**).
- **Organized by:** Observer Research Foundation (ORF) & Ministry of External Affairs.
- **Chief Guest:** Christopher Luxon (New Zealand PM).
- **Theme:** "Kālachakra – People, Peace, and Planet".
- **Purpose:** **Global discussions on:**
 - Climate change
 - Digital transformation
 - **Economic competition**

- Economic competition
- Geopolitical conflicts
- **Participation:** Leaders from **125+ countries** (Ministers, military commanders, industry leaders).

FARM DISTRESS INDEX (FDI)

Key Points

- **Recent Development:**
 - **Pilot study (2020-21 & 2021-22)** → Evaluated agrarian distress in Telangana & Andhra Pradesh.
 - **Systematic national-level** assessment lacking.
- **Objective:** Predict & warn about farmer distress.
- **Key Parameters:**
 - Exposure to risk
 - Adaptive capacity
 - Sensitivity
 - Triggers (climate variability, price volatility)
 - Psychological impact
 - Mitigation strategies
- **Significance:**
 - **Early Warning System:** Predicts **distress 3 months in advance.**
 - **Efficient Govt Support:** Ensures **timely intervention.**
 - **Planning Tool:** Helps **design location-specific solutions.**

PRELIMS QUESTION

1. What is the Farm Distress Index (FDI) designed to assess?

- Crop yield fluctuations
- Economic distress among urban workers
- Farmers' distress due to climate and economic factors
- Food inflation trends

2. Under which article of the Constitution are Demands for Grants presented in the Lok Sabha?

- Article 110
- Article 113
- Article 117
- Article 148

3. What is the primary objective of the Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP)?

- Enhancing digital payments in e-commerce
- Improving logistics efficiency through data integration
- Reducing import dependence on logistics services
- Promoting privatization of transportation infrastructure

4. Which of the following statements about Oeko-Tex Certification is correct?

- It ensures that textiles are free from harmful substances
- It is a compulsory certification for all silk exports from India
- It only applies to cotton textiles
- It is issued by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

5. The APAAR ID has been introduced for which sector in India?

- Health
- Education
- Banking
- Transport

6. What is the key focus of the Revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)?

- Conservation of indigenous cattle breeds
- Enhancing dairy exports
- Promoting artificial insemination in buffaloes
- Increasing milk subsidies for farmers

7. Which institution regulates the Competition Commission of India (CCI)?

- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Corporate Affairs
- Reserve Bank of India
- Securities and Exchange Board of India

8. The Raisina Dialogue is co-hosted by which organizations?

- Observer Research Foundation & Ministry of External Affairs
- NITI Aayog & Ministry of Home Affairs
- UNDP & World Economic Forum
- Ministry of Defence & Indian Council of World Affairs

9. The 'Squad' Alliance refers to a grouping of countries working together in which field?

- Counter-terrorism
- Semiconductor manufacturing
- Maritime security
- Space exploration

10. What is the key objective of the Bodo Peace Accord (2020)?

- Granting full statehood to Bodoland
- Ending the insurgency in Assam's Bodo region
- Merging Bodoland with Arunachal Pradesh
- Establishing a new Bodo paramilitary force

11. The world's largest White Hydrogen deposit was recently discovered in which country?

- Australia
- United States
- France
- Brazil

12. What does 'Microlightning' in water droplets refer to?

- Miniature electrical discharges within water droplets
- A new type of bio-luminescence in marine life
- Static charge accumulation in atmospheric clouds
- Artificial lightning used for water purification

13. Pravaah & Sarthi, recently launched by RBI, are associated with which sector?

- Digital Banking & Financial Inclusion
- Cryptocurrency Regulations
- E-commerce and Retail Payments
- AI-based fraud detection

14. Which statement about the Chandrayaan-5 mission is correct?

- It is India's first attempt at a crewed moon landing
- It aims to establish a permanent lunar base
- It focuses on lunar polar exploration
- It will bring back lunar soil samples

15. The Caracal, recently spotted in Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve, belongs to which category of species in India?

- Critically Endangered
- Endangered
- Vulnerable
- Near Threatened

16. Where is Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve located?

- Maharashtra
- Madhya Pradesh
- Rajasthan
- Karnataka

17. The Indian Long-billed Vulture is categorized as which of the following?

- Extinct in the Wild
- Critically Endangered
- Vulnerable
- Least Concern

18. Which of the following is covered under the Buddhist Thematic Circuit of the Swadesh Darshan scheme?

- Ajanta and Ellora Caves
- Bodhi Gaya
- Sanchi Stupa
- All of the above

19. What is a major challenge faced by the Swadesh Darshan Scheme?

- a) Lack of public-private partnership in tourism infrastructure
- b) Absence of a digital tourism platform
- c) Lack of funding from international agencies
- d) Restriction on foreign tourists visiting heritage sites

20. Which of the following is a key objective of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)?

- a) Development of new hydroelectric projects
- b) River interlinking for irrigation
- c) Rejuvenation and pollution control of the Ganga River
- d) Increasing fishery production in the Ganga basin

21. Which country topped the World Happiness Report 2025?

- a) Finland
- b) Switzerland
- c) Denmark
- d) Sweden

22. Why did the Madras High Court recently restrain the Ministry of Education from publishing NIRF rankings?

- a) Allegations of bias in ranking criteria
- b) Discrepancies in data submission by institutions
- c) Delay in funding of ranking projects
- d) Legal dispute over the ownership of NIRF methodology

23. What is the primary objective of Mission Saffron in India?

- a) Increasing the production of saffron in Kashmir
- b) Expanding saffron cultivation to the Northeast
- c) Exporting saffron to international markets
- d) Creating a new saffron variety through genetic modification

24. India's ranking in the Free Speech Survey reflects concerns over which of the following?

- a) Internet shutdowns
- b) Media restrictions
- c) Digital surveillance
- d) All of the above



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