

NEWS TODAY

Curated Insights from "The Hindu" newspaper

Staying updated with current affairs is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the world around us, especially for competitive exams like UPSC and BPSC.

- 1. Relevance Across Exam Stages:** Current affairs are integral to all stages of the exam—Prelims, Mains, and the Interview. Familiarity with recent developments aids in answering questions effectively at each stage and demonstrates your up-to-date knowledge.
- 2. Informed Decision-Making:** Knowledge of current events enhances your ability to make informed decisions, develop well-rounded opinions, and understand the implications of various policies and issues.
- 3. Holistic Preparation:** A thorough grasp of current affairs ensures a more integrated approach to exam preparation, blending real-world context with theoretical knowledge.
- 4. Analytical Skills:** Engaging with current affairs sharpens your analytical abilities by encouraging you to evaluate and interpret complex information and its impacts from multiple perspectives.
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India's Renewed Act East Focus: Strengthening Ties with ASEAN through Strategic Visits

Periodic reset

India needs to engage with ASEAN consistently on trade and security

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Brunei and Singapore last week was part of a deliberate focus on India's "Act East" policy by the government in its third tenure. Not since 2018, when ASEAN leaders were in India for a summit and the Republic Day parade, has New Delhi reached out to the region in such a short time span. He is expected to travel to Laos for the ASEAN-India summit, the Philippines, and Indonesia, later this year. In addition, New Delhi has laid out the red carpet for the Prime Ministers of Vietnam and Malaysia. The message to reconnect with each of the countries in South East Asia, and even forge new ties, is well considered and overdue. Mr. Modi's visit was the first bilateral visit by any Indian Prime Minister. This neglect of ties with a country that has strategic ties with the U.S., trade ties with China, and is situated in the middle of ASEAN is telling. While India's trade with the ASEAN region has doubled in the past decade, it has actually declined with Brunei, with India ramping up its oil imports from Russia since 2022. The two sides do not have a strategic partnership, although the leaders discussed defence and geo-strategic issues, and Mr. Modi took a virtual job at China. The two sides renewed their space cooperation, which hinges on Brunei hosting an ISS station, and it remains to be seen whether other discussions on trade, investment and energy cooperation will bear fruit. In Singapore, the spotlight during Mr. Modi's visit was on semiconductor issues, given that Singapore is a major player in all parts of the electronics supply chain. As India seeks more technical expertise and investment in rare earths and chip making and Singapore seeks to defray some of the growing land and labour costs of its semiconductor industry, the two could make a perfect fit, also derisking the process from U.S.-China-Taiwan tensions. American protectionist policies and Chinese predatory practices. This could also correct the drop in Singapore's FDI levels into India.

Hopes for more intense exchanges in technology, trade and investment can be realised only if the India-ASEAN engagement is more consistent. India's exit from the ASEAN-India FTA in 2010 was a blow, and cuts India out of a large regional FTA. While New Delhi has refused to revise the decision despite ASEAN's entreaties, it must update the 2009 AITIGA and the 2005 CECA with Singapore. India's commitment to "ASEAN centrality" on all strategic issues in the Indo-Pacific has been warmly received, but it needs to coordinate more closely on geopolitical issues including Myanmar, the South China Sea and Quad engagement. While India's historical ties with the region date more than a millennium, modern ties need a periodic reset, as governments have carried out in the past with the "Look East" policy (1992) and the Modi government's Act East policy (2014).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to **Brunei and Singapore** underscores India's renewed focus on the **Act East** policy. This is the first significant engagement with **ASEAN** nations since 2018, aiming to strengthen ties with the region.

The visit to **Brunei** was the *first by any Indian Prime Minister*, highlighting India's previous neglect of this strategically positioned country. Discussions with Brunei covered **defence, geo-strategic issues, and space cooperation**.

In **Singapore**, the focus was on semiconductors, with both nations looking for cooperation in *rare earths and chip-making*. India's exit from **RCEP** in 2019 affected its trade relations, and it now needs to update existing agreements like **AITIGA (2009)** and **CECA (2005)** to foster closer ties.

AITIGA (2009): The **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement** focuses on facilitating tariff reductions and boosting trade between India and ASEAN nations.

CECA (2005): The **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement** between India and Singapore, covering trade in goods, services, and investment.

India's Semiconductor Ambitions

India's **Semiconductor Mission (2021)** launched a massive Rs 76,000 crore incentive scheme to encourage semiconductor manufacturing. This initiative also includes a partnership with the **Tata Group** and Taiwan's **PSMC** to establish a fabrication plant. So far, five semiconductor units have been approved, including assembly units under the incentive scheme.

Singapore's Semiconductor Legacy

Singapore has long been a global leader in the semiconductor industry, contributing around **10% of global semiconductor output** and excelling in all segments of the value chain, from design to manufacturing and equipment production. With nine of the world's top 15 semiconductor firms operating there, Singapore has built a thriving ecosystem, supported by **cutting-edge infrastructure and skilled talent development**.

Challenges and Collaboration Opportunities

Singapore's industry primarily focuses on **mature-node chips** (28 nm and more), which are used in appliances, cars, and industrial equipment. However, with increasing production costs and limited land, there are opportunities for **India** to collaborate with Singapore, offering its competitive labour and vast land resources for semiconductor expansion. Additionally, there is scope for India to collaborate in **talent development** and best practices in semiconductor park management.

Opportunities for India: India can engage with Singapore's semiconductor equipment manufacturers to strengthen its own semiconductor ecosystem, leveraging its abundant land and lower production costs.

For **India-ASEAN engagement** to grow, India *needs to adopt a more consistent approach*, coordinating more on **geopolitical issues** like **Myanmar**, the **South China Sea**, and **Quad** activities. Modern ties require periodic resets, much like the past policies of **Look East** (1992) and **Act East** (2014).

India's Historic Performance at the 2024 Paris Paralympics

India achieved its best-ever performance in the **Paralympics** with **29 medals**, marking a significant improvement from previous years. With *seven gold, nine silver, and thirteen bronze medals*, India's para-athletes excelled, particularly in para-athletics, which contributed the majority of the medals.

Key highlights include **Avani Lekhara** and **Sumit Antil** defending their golds, **Mariyappan Thangavelu** winning his third consecutive medal, and 17-year-old **Sheetal Devi** becoming the youngest Indian to win a medal. New records were set, and historical milestones were reached with *India's first track and para-judo medals*.

Team	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1. China	94	76	50	220
2. Great Britain	49	44	31	124
3. United States	36	42	27	105
4. Netherlands	27	17	12	56
5. Brazil	25	26	38	89
6. Italy	24	15	32	71
7. Ukraine	22	28	32	82
8. France	19	28	28	75
9. Australia	18	17	28	63
10. Japan	14	10	17	41
11. Germany	10	14	25	49
12. Canada	10	9	10	29
13. Uzbekistan	10	9	7	26
14. Iran	8	10	7	25
15. Switzerland	8	8	5	21
16. Poland	8	6	9	23
17. Spain	7	11	23	40
18. India	7	9	13	29

The event saw strong public support, with over two million tickets sold and a near-capacity crowd at Stade de France.

The success of the Games, combined with the Indian athletes' remarkable achievements, underscores the *need for increased government and corporate backing* to further advance para-sports in India.

Wide open

With more state support, Indian Paralympians are on a high

Following the disappointment of several near-misses in the recent Olympics, India's best-ever show of 29 medals for an 18th place finish in the Paris Paralympics is reason to celebrate. From four medals and 43rd spot in Rio 2016 to 19 medals and 24th rank in Tokyo 2020, this is a significant ascent and depicts the Indian Paralympians' constant improvement in sync with the increased government support. Since the challenges are different, it may not be fair to compare the achievements of the para-athletes with those in the Olympics. India's performance in the 2024 Paralympics reflects its para-athletes' quest for excellence despite the unimaginable odds they face. Of the seven gold, nine silver and 13 bronze medals, the majority (17 in all) came from para-athletics. The javelin throwers and high jumpers contributed the most, with four medals in different categories classified as impairments. Para-Badminton (two), para-shooting (four), para-archery (two) and para-judo (two) completed the country's medal tally. Shooter Avani Lekhara and javelin thrower Sumit Antil, who set a new Paralympic record, defended their gold medals, high jumper Mariyappan Thangavelu claimed his third successive medal, 17-year-old armless archer Sheetal Devi became the youngest Indian to win a medal and Harinder Singh won the first para-archery gold.

Preethi Pal bagged India's first-ever track medal as she picked up a bronze in women's 100m T53 event followed by another in 200m and Kapil Parmar captured India's first para-judo medal. Nagaland's 40-year-old Army man Hokato Sema, who shone as a shot putter despite losing a leg in the line of duty in the prime of his youth, cornered glory to underscore the indomitable human spirit. Overall, the spectators' response to the Paralympics 2024 was heart-warming – organisers sold over two million tickets for the Games. The Stade de France witnessed a near-capacity crowd thronging the iconic venue daily to watch and support the heroic efforts. It was a huge encouragement for the 4,400-plus para-athletes competing in 549 medal events in 22 sports and might contribute to the growth and acceptance of para-sports. It complemented the French authorities' attempt to make the Paralympics more inclusive, which is apparent from the emblem, mascot, and motto – Games Wide Open – used for the Olympics. The successful conduct of the Paris Paralympics and the Indians' praiseworthy performance should draw more government and corporate support for these athletes in India to ensure improved shows on the field and a better life as part of the mainstream.

Evolving Public Health Policies in India: Challenges and Criticisms

The essence of the text revolves around the evolving landscape of public health policies and their impact on India's health care system:

- Diverse Public Health Needs:** India's public health needs are diverse, spanning felt needs (e.g., diseases of poverty) and projected needs (e.g., environmental and chronic illnesses). **Felt needs** are those **directly experienced by people**, while **projected needs** are **identified by experts**.
- Current Policy Criticisms:** Recent public health policies have faced criticism for not adequately addressing these needs, particularly in the social sector. The emphasis on publicly funded health insurance schemes like PMJAY has shifted focus away from strengthening public sector health care.
- Historical Context:** The National Rural Health Mission (2005) and National Health Mission (2013) marked a shift from commercialisation towards strengthening public health infrastructure. Despite this, subsequent policies have **prioritised insurance schemes over direct public health system improvements**.
- Impact of PFHII Schemes (Publicly Funded Health Insurance Schemes):** The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) has **inadvertently benefited the private sector** by outsourcing secondary and tertiary care services. This has led to a **reliance on private hospitals** and **weakened the public health system**.
- Challenges with Health Centres:** The transformation of existing health centres into Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and their recent renaming to **'Ayushman Arogya Mandir'** has been criticized for undermining their original role and failing to address curative care effectively.
- Overall Threats:** The public health system faces threats from weakened public sector infrastructure, increased commercial interests in health care, and the misalignment of health centre roles. These issues undermine trust and efficacy in both private and public health care sectors.

In summary, India's public health policies *need a more balanced approach, addressing both felt and projected needs*, and focusing on *strengthening public health infrastructure alongside insurance schemes*.

Balancing Act: India's Ambitious Manufacturing Vision vs. Chinese Influence

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transforming India into a *global manufacturing hub* is supported by the 'Make in India' initiative and the **Production Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme**. The **2024-25 Union Budget** boosts the PLI allocation for electronics manufacturing and research & development, reflecting this ambition. However, despite these efforts, *Chinese smartphone companies* have become *significant players* in India, leveraging the large consumer market and local support.

The Indian government's strategy includes *increasing domestic production* and *reducing reliance on Chinese companies*, exemplified by efforts to Indianise operations and attract Taiwanese investments. Challenges persist, such as the *need for a robust supplier network, technological infrastructure, and better conditions for workers*. The Indian government faces a balancing act: fostering indigenous manufacturing while accommodating ongoing Chinese investments and operations.

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Legal and Social Challenges in Protecting Unconventional Relationships in India

The case of Shraddha Walkar, a 26-year-old woman allegedly murdered by her live-in partner, highlighted significant issues related to **privacy and social norms** in India. Despite the high-profile media coverage and intense scrutiny, the case *did not spark a broader debate* on privacy violations but *rather reinforced societal biases* against **unconventional relationships**.

In India, arranged marriages remain predominant, with societal pressures and inadequate legal protections influencing youth choices. While the **Domestic Violence Act, 2005**, extends protection to individuals in live-in relationships, and Supreme Court judgments have supported such relationships, legal ambiguities and societal conservatism persist.

Indian courts have historically struggled with integrating unconventional relationships into the existing legal framework. Recent judgments have shown reluctance to fully recognise and protect live-in and interfaith relationships, often defaulting to traditional norms and practices.

The vulnerability of live-in couples

In 2022, investigations began into the disappearance of a 26-year-old woman, Shraddha Walkar, allegedly murdered by her live-in partner, who was later found dead. The case, which involved a woman who had been in a live-in relationship with her partner for several years, highlighted the legal and social challenges faced by unconventional relationships in India.

Such couples, however, the courts have not provided them with the same level of protection as married couples. In the case of *Shraddha Walkar v. State of Maharashtra*, the Bombay High Court, while acknowledging the couple's relationship, did not grant them the same legal status as married couples. The court noted that the couple had not gone through the legal process of marriage, and thus, they were not entitled to the same legal protections.

Legal ambiguity has been a major issue for live-in couples. The courts have often been reluctant to grant them the same legal status as married couples. This has led to a lack of legal protection for these couples, particularly in cases of domestic violence or inheritance. The courts have often cited the lack of legal recognition as a reason for not granting them the same rights as married couples.

The restrictive nature of legal provisions for live-in couples allows social conservatism to find its way back to the secular institutions of justice in modern India. This, in turn, has led to a lack of legal protection for these couples, particularly in cases of domestic violence or inheritance. The courts have often cited the lack of legal recognition as a reason for not granting them the same rights as married couples.

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The legal system's approach reflects a preference for conventional marriages, with restrictive criteria that undermine the rights of those in non-traditional relationships. Non-state actors and advocacy groups are working to support individuals in expressing their autonomy, but **substantial changes in legal attitudes and community support** are needed to ensure fair treatment and protection for all relationships.

Centre's Funding Freeze on SSA Hits Opposition-ruled States: A Closer Look

Over the past year, the Centre has withheld funds from the **Samagra Shiksha (SSA) scheme** for five Opposition-ruled States—Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, West Bengal, and Delhi. The SSA is a key programme for school education, but the withholding of funds appears linked to the **States' reluctance to fully accept the PM Shri scheme and the National Education Policy**.

The **PM Shri (Prime Minister's School for Rising India)** scheme aims to establish exemplary model schools across India. These schools are designed to serve as benchmarks for quality education, providing leadership and best practices to other schools. The focus is on enhancing infrastructure, educational standards, and overall school performance.

The **National Education Policy 2020 (NEP)** is a comprehensive framework designed to transform India's educational landscape. Key objectives include:

- Emphasizing holistic and inclusive education.
- Integrating vocational training.
- Enhancing quality at all levels of education.
- Promoting flexibility in the curriculum and multi-disciplinary learning.
- Improving access and equity in education.

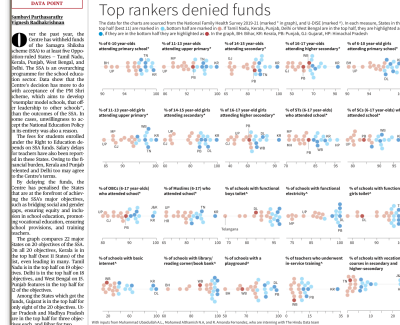
NEP aims to address disparities in educational outcomes across different regions and socio-economic groups, striving for a more equitable educational system.

This funding delay has **affected crucial areas** such as student fees and teacher salaries. Despite these States excelling in SSA objectives like bridging social and gender gaps, promoting vocational education, and ensuring equitable school provisions, the Centre's decision seems politically motivated.

The comparison of 22 major States shows that Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and West Bengal excel in SSA objectives, whereas States receiving funds like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar lag behind in many areas.

Samagra Shiksha fund delay punishes role-model States

The Centre's withholding of funds has more to do with acceptance of the NEP than the actual outcomes of the Samagra Shiksha scheme



Unique Cyclone Patterns in the Indian Ocean: Impact of Climate Change and Oceanic Dynamics

The **Indian Ocean** is unique due to its monsoonal circulation and its connections to the Pacific and Southern Oceans, which affect sea surface temperatures and cyclone activity. Despite high evaporation rates, the Indian Ocean experiences fewer cyclones compared to other regions because of factors like vertical wind shear and limited convective activity. Cyclones in the Indian Ocean **primarily occur** during the **pre- and post-monsoon seasons**.

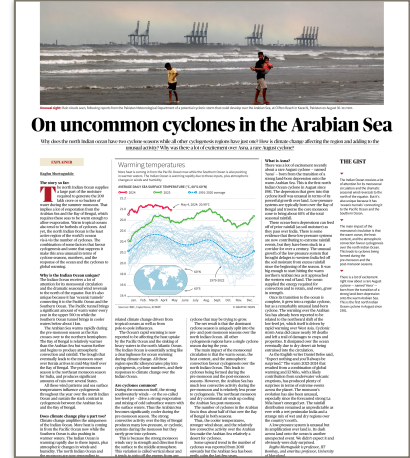
Vertical wind shear refers to the variation in wind speed or direction with height in the atmosphere. High vertical wind shear can disrupt cyclone formation by tilting or stretching the storm, while low vertical wind shear supports cyclone development by keeping the storm's structure aligned.

Limited Convective Activity

"Limited convective activity" refers to the reduced occurrence of convection processes in the atmosphere. Convection involves the upward movement of warm, moist air, which can lead to cloud formation and precipitation. When there is limited convective activity:

- **Fewer Clouds and Rain:** There is less cloud formation and precipitation because warm air isn't rising and cooling efficiently.
- **Reduced Storms:** The likelihood of storms, including cyclones, is diminished due to insufficient atmospheric instability and moisture.
- **Stable Conditions:** The atmosphere remains more stable, with less vertical movement of air.

Recent **climate change** has **intensified the warming of the Indian Ocean**, impacting global oceanic systems and cyclone patterns. The Arabian Sea, in particular, has seen fewer cyclones due to cooler temperatures and less convective activity. However, rare events, like the August 2023 **cyclone Asna**, have emerged due to unusual conditions, such as **land-based depression transitioning to the Arabian Sea**. This **reflects the broader impacts of global warming and changing climatic patterns** on cyclogenesis and extreme weather events.



Content	UPSC Syllabus Paper	Relevant Topics
Cyclones in the Indian Ocean	General Studies Paper I	Geography: Cyclogenesis, monsoonal circulation, and climatic phenomena related to cyclones.
Impact of Climate Change on Cyclones	General Studies Paper III	Environment: Climate change effects, disaster management, and response strategies for natural disasters.
Rare August Cyclone Asna	General Studies Paper II	International Relations: Disaster management and international collaboration in response to cyclones.
Cyclone Management and Response	General Studies Paper IV	Ethics and Integrity: Effective management and governance in disaster relief efforts and climate response.

The Study on Arctic Sea Ice and Indian Monsoon

Key Findings:

1. Monsoon Dynamics:

- The Indian summer monsoon (July-September) is influenced by **differential heating** between the **landmass** and **surrounding oceans**, creating a low-pressure zone that drives moisture-laden winds from the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal onto the Indian subcontinent.

2. Impact of Arctic Sea Ice:

- **Central Arctic:** **Reduced sea ice** in the central Arctic leads to **decreased rainfall** in western and peninsular India but **increased rainfall** in central and northern India.
- **Barents-Kara Sea Region:** **Lower sea ice levels** in this region delay the monsoon's onset and increase its unpredictability.
 - **Note:** Leading to more rain in northeastern India and drier conditions elsewhere.

3. Atmospheric Influences:

- **Increased central Arctic sea ice** leads to **cyclonic circulation** and **Rossby wave** (Planetary Wave) enhancements, affecting the Asian jet stream and causing more rain in western India.
- **Decreased sea ice in the Barents-Kara Sea region** results in **high pressure over northwest Europe** and disrupts atmospheric patterns over Asia, leading to more rain in northeastern India and drier conditions elsewhere.





4. Climate Change Effects:

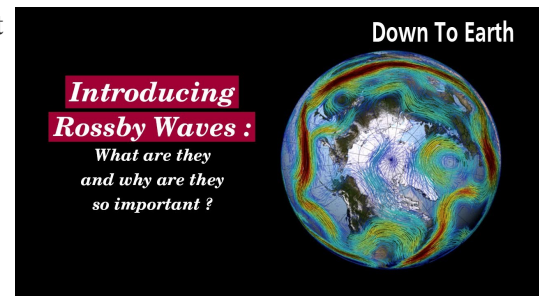
○ Accelerated reduction of Arctic sea ice due to climate change exacerbates the variability and unpredictability of the Indian monsoon, leading to more frequent droughts or excessive rainfall.

Implications:

- The study underscores the **complex interplay** between **Arctic sea ice variations** and the **Indian monsoon**, highlighting the **need for improved climate models and forecasts** to better predict monsoon behavior amidst ongoing climate change.



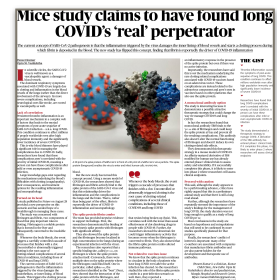
Rossby waves, also known as **planetary waves**, naturally occur in rotating fluids. Within the Earth's ocean and atmosphere, these waves form as a result of the rotation of the planet.



New Study Reveals Fibrin-Spike Protein Interaction as Key Driver of COVID-19 Inflammation and Complications

The **SARS-CoV-2 virus** is recognized as a **vasculopathic agent**, primarily affecting **blood vessels** and causing complications like **inflammation and clotting** in the lungs, leading to severe conditions such as strokes. This **vasculopathy** explains many symptoms of **long COVID**, which persists even after mild or asymptomatic infections.

A **new study**, published in **Nature (August 2024)**, has provided an **alternate explanation** for clotting and inflammation in COVID-19. The study found that the **fibrinogen and fibrin proteins**, essential in blood clotting, actively **bind to the spike protein** of SARS-CoV-2, driving inflammation in the lungs and brain.



This discovery **reverses the previous belief** that fibrin was merely a byproduct of the inflammation. Instead, it suggests that the **fibrin-spike protein interaction** is the cause of many COVID-19 complications, including those seen in **long COVID**.

Researchers also identified a **binding site (377-395)** on fibrinogen where the spike protein attaches, and vice versa. This interaction alters clot structures, making them resistant to clot-dissolving drugs, thus worsening inflammation.

A **monoclonal antibody (5B8)** has been **developed** to block this interaction and prevent complications without causing additional clotting issues. Early trials of this antibody are underway.

While promising, the study's findings are based on **animal models** and are still **preliminary**, requiring further investigation. Additionally, concerns have been raised about potential **conflicts of interest** due to the involvement of researchers with companies developing fibrin antibodies.

Planetary Protection in Space Missions

Concept: Planetary protection ensures the preservation of Earth's biosphere and that of other planetary bodies by preventing contamination by microbial life from Earth or from space. This principle is crucial in interplanetary missions to maintain the "pristine" state of celestial bodies and avoid "corruption" from external influences.

Legal Basis: The principle is enshrined in **Article IX** of the **Outer Space Treaty (1967)**, which mandates that space exploration must avoid "harmful contamination" and prevent "adverse changes" to the environments of Earth and other celestial bodies due to the introduction of extraterrestrial matter.

Mission Example: China plans to advance its Mars sample-return mission, **Tianwen-3**, to 2028 and commits to adhering to planetary protection protocols.

Technical Measures: To meet planetary protection requirements, spacecraft are thoroughly cleaned, often involving assembly in a dry room and baking at 120°C for three days. This process, though costly and technically demanding, is essential to keep planetary environments uncontaminated.

WHAT IS IT?

Planetary protection: keeping out 'toxic aliens'

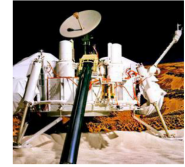
Vasudevan Mukunth

In space missions from the earth to another planetary body, planetary protection is the idea that it's important to preserve the biospheres of the earth and the body against contamination by "alien" microbial life.

It's an important principle of interplanetary missions, such as from the earth to the moon or Mars. It stems from the idea that we ought to keep the planetary biosphere "pristine" and from being "corrupted" by influences that may not exist had the space mission not been undertaken.

On September 5, China announced it would be pulling up the date for Tianwen-3, its ambitious Mars sample-return mission, to 2028, potentially ahead of the U.S. During the announcement, the mission's designer said it would abide by the planetary protection principle.

The principle has a legal basis in Article IX of the Outer Space Treaty (1967). It states that parties to the treaty explore outer space while avoiding "harmful contamination and ... adverse changes" in the earth's and the body's environments due to "the introduction of extraterrestrial matter". An important way to "clean"



A model of NASA's Viking 1 lander, which became the first spacecraft to land on Mars in 1976. It was designed and operated to facilitate planetary protection. FILE PHOTO

spacecraft ahead of interplanetary missions to conform to the planetary protection principle is to fully assemble the vehicle and bake it in a dry room for three days at 120 degrees C. This increases the costs and the technical strength of the spacecraft, but such are the demands of keeping biospheres 'clean'.

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Union Ministry Dissolves Standing Committee on Statistics Amid Census Delay Concerns

The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has dissolved the 14-member **Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS)**, led by economist **Pronab Sen**, citing overlap with the recently formed **Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys**.

Dr. Sen and other members were *not given a specific reason for the dissolution*, but it followed their queries about the delay in the 2021 Census.

The SCoS, formed in July 2023, was **responsible** for **advising on survey methodologies and tabulation plans**.

The new Steering Committee, chaired by Rajeeva Laxman Karandikar, will **assume similar roles**, with some SCoS members included in it.

Dr. Sen criticized the dissolution as contrary to the SCoS's mandate.

Statistics panel dissolved amid 'dissent' over Census

A.M. Jigesh
NEW DELHI

The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has quietly dissolved the 14-member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS), headed by economist and former Chief Statistician of the country Pronab Sen, allegedly after its members questioned the delay in conducting the Census.

The reason it is being dismantled, according to an email sent to the members by Geeta Singh Rathore, Director-General of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), is that its work overlapped with that of the recently formed Steering Committee for National Sample Surveys. A copy of her email is with *The Hindu*. Dr. Sen, however, told *The Hindu* that the members were not given any reason for dissolving the panel. He added that in their meetings, they had



PRONAB SEN
Head of SCoS

asked why the Census has not been conducted yet.

India's decennial census, scheduled for 2021, was initially delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and has yet to be notified. Formed in July 2023, the SCoS was supposed to advise the Union government on survey methodology, including sampling frame and design and survey instruments, and to finalise a tabulation plan of surveys.

In her letter to the members, Ms. Rathore said that, "The roles and responsibilities of Steering Committee are overlapping with that of Standing Committee on

Statistics as outlined in the respective Terms of Reference. In this context, I would like to convey that the Ministry has decided to dissolve the SCoS, constituted vide its order dated 13 July 2023."

The new panel is headed by NSC Chairman Rajeeva Laxman Karandikar, and at least four members of the SCoS have already been accommodated in it.

'Against the mandate' Dr. Sen said the mandate of the SCoS was to help the Ministry on methodologies of collecting and tabulating data and that the Centre itself had now gone against that mandate. "I have no idea of what happened. I got an email that the committee had been disbanded," he said.

Over the past year, the panel had held more than half-a-dozen meetings and discussed several issues in its domain with utmost seriousness.

Ukraine Seeks India's Active Role in Peace Process Amid Diplomatic Flurry

Ukraine is urging India to reconsider its stance on the **Swiss peace summit** document and actively participate in peace efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war. Ukraine's Ambassador to India, Oleksandr Polishchuk, emphasized that India, rather than merely acting as a mediator, could play a significant role in guiding the peace process or even hosting the summit. This comes as India's diplomatic outreach intensifies, with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval engaging in high-level meetings across multiple countries.

The **Swiss peace summit** was a June 2024 diplomatic event aimed at resolving the **Russia-Ukraine conflict**, but India did not endorse the outcome due to its exclusion of **Russia** and **Ukraine**.

Parliament's Department-Related Standing Committees to be Finalized by September 20

Department-related Standing Committees of Parliament are expected to be finalized by September 20. The Opposition is unlikely to head the Standing Committee on Home Affairs due to reduced numbers in the Rajya Sabha. The Congress is anticipated to chair three committees headed by Lok Sabha members, while other Opposition parties will lead one committee each. NDA allies like JD(U) and TDP may also be allocated committee chairmanships. The Congress is expected to push for key ministries such as Finance, Defence, and External Affairs in the new committee appointments.

Department-related Standing Committees in Parliament oversee the functioning of specific government departments. They review and report on budget allocations, policy implementation, and other departmental issues. Each committee is headed by a member of either the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha and plays a crucial role in scrutinizing government activities and expenditures.

India Establishes National Registry for Hand Transplantation

India has established its *first national registry for hand transplantation* under the **National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO)** to ensure transparent and priority-based allocation of donated hands.

Centre to Launch National Ranking System for Working Women's Hostels to Enhance Safety and Facilities

The Centre will soon launch a **ranking system** for working women's hostels across India, focusing on security and other key parameters. This initiative aims to improve the safety and participation of women in the workforce, especially in urban areas. A new portal will list and rank hostels based on criteria such as security and cleanliness, with a target of ranking 1,000 hostels over five years.

Additionally, the government plans to establish '**Nirbhaya**' hostels and improve facilities for women, including transit stays.

The scheme will also involve ranking creches in the future and will be implemented with state cooperation under the '**Sakhi Nivas**' scheme.

India's Recent Surge in Military Diplomacy: Key Exercises and Developments

Additionally, **India** and the **U.S.** are discussing the potential procurement and license-manufacture of **Stryker vehicles** and **Javelin ATGMs**.

Note: India conducts more military exercises with the U.S. than with any other country.

Exercise	Details
Yudh Abhyas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Location: Mahajan field firing ranges, Rajasthan• Participants: India and U.S.• U.S. Contingent: ~600 personnel, Stryker infantry vehicles, M142 HIMARS
Tarang Shakti	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Location: Jodhpur• Participants: India and 8 other countries (Australia, Greece, Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, UAE, U.S.)• Notable Aircraft: A-10 Thunderbolt II, F-16 jets• Bangladesh: Withdrawn
Malabar Naval Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timing: October (1st half)• Location: Off the Visakhapatnam coast• Participants: India, Australia, Japan, U.S.
Indra Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Location: Russia• Participants: India and Russia• Indian Contingent: Mechanized infantry

Stryker Vehicles

The **Stryker** is an 8-wheeled, armored fighting vehicle used by the U.S. Army. It is designed for rapid deployment and versatility, with various configurations including infantry carrier, reconnaissance, and command variants. The Stryker offers protection against small arms fire and artillery fragments, and features advanced communications and battlefield management systems. Known for its mobility, it can travel at high speeds on roads and traverse rough terrain.



Stryker

Javelin Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs)

The **Javelin** is a man-portable, fire-and-forget anti-tank guided missile system developed by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. It is designed to defeat modern main battle tanks and armored vehicles, featuring a top-attack mode where it targets the top of an enemy vehicle. The Javelin uses infrared guidance and has a high-explosive anti-tank (HEAT) warhead, known for its accuracy and effectiveness in combat.



Javelin Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)

Punjab's Employment Crisis and Migration Trends

Punjab is grappling with a severe employment crisis, with an unemployment rate of 7.7%—above the national average of 6.7%. Among urban youth aged 15-29, the unemployment rate is notably high at 17.4%, with 15% for men and 26% for women. Protests have emerged over the state's slow job creation and recruitment processes. Economists attribute the high unemployment to sluggish economic growth and insufficient investment, with 80% of employed youth expressing dissatisfaction with their jobs. Migration rates are rising, with approximately 13.34% of rural households having at least one member who has emigrated, driven by factors such as low income (72.81%), limited employment opportunities (72.97%), and corruption (72.97%).

Severe Employment Crisis in West Bengal: High Migration, Job Losses, and Recruitment Issues

- **High Migration:** A substantial number of workers from the state are registered on a migrant worker portal, reflecting a significant movement to other regions for employment.
- **Job Losses:** The state experienced a loss of 3 million jobs in unincorporated enterprises from 2015-16 to 2022-23, and welfare schemes like MGNREGA have been stalled.
- **Education and Recruitment Issues:** Recruitment for government jobs, particularly in schools, has been suspended due to scams, leaving many educated job seekers without opportunities.
- **Contractual Employment:** Recent contractual job appointments are criticized for not addressing the root of the employment problem.
- **Lack of Investment:** The absence of major private investments and a negative industrial image have further worsened the employment situation.

India Identifies Suspected Mpox Case in Returning Traveler; No Immediate Concern

A young male patient recently returned from a country with active **Mpox transmission** has been identified as a suspected case in India. He is isolated in a hospital, with his condition stable, while samples are tested. The Union Health Ministry and NCDC indicate no undue concern, though Mpox symptoms can resemble other diseases.

Manene Ritual: A Unique Expression of Love and Reverence for the Deceased in Indonesia's North Toraja

The **Manene** ritual in **Indonesia's** North Toraja regency involves families *exhuming, cleaning, and dressing the bodies of their deceased relatives in new clothes*.

Celebrated for the first time in 40 years in two villages, the ritual reflects the belief that the spirits of the dead remain in the world before their funeral ceremonies.

The practice, though shocking to some tourists, is viewed by locals as an expression of love and respect for their ancestors.



Bihar Special (if any)

[illegible]

हिन्दुस्तान

बंद चीनी मिलों के मजदूरों की मानदेय राशि वापसी का खतरा

एजिजट सेलेंट

राज्य, हिन्दुस्तान ब्यूरो। राज्य की बंद चीनी मिलों के मजदूरों की मानदेय राशि वापसी का खतरा सोते वाले प्रधानमंत्री के राशि सेलेंट को बख़तरा भंडारा रहा है। फिलहाल महीने नाम उद्योग विभाग के प्रधान सचिव की अध्यक्षता में हुई साप्ताहिक बैठक में इस पर चर्चा की गई थी। राशि सेलेंट अपने के बाद मजदूरों का भुगतान सीलेंट नहीं हो आया है।

मन्ना उद्योग विभाग की अप्रत्यक्ष में हुई बैठक में प्रधान सचिव मन्दीरधर



लाल ने इस संबंध में विस्तृत रिपोर्ट मानी थी। उन्होंने बिहार राज्य चीनी निगम, संयुक्त इंडियन को निदेश दिए हुए कहा है कि कार्य नहीं हो पाया है। फिलहाल महीने के मानदेय राशि वापसी का खतरा सोते वाले प्रधानमंत्री के राशि सेलेंट को बख़तरा भंडारा रहा है। फिलहाल महीने नाम उद्योग विभाग के प्रधान सचिव की अध्यक्षता में हुई साप्ताहिक बैठक में इस पर चर्चा की गई थी। राशि सेलेंट अपने के बाद मजदूरों का भुगतान सीलेंट नहीं हो आया है।

मन्ना उद्योग विभाग की अप्रत्यक्ष में हुई बैठक में प्रधान सचिव मन्दीरधर

72 करोड़ 40 लाख संवीकृत
जिलाधिकारी के शांति में हैं

■ विभाग के नौ बार सूचना देकर भी नहीं आ रहे दादा अग्रवाल

भुगतान नहीं होने के पीछे लापरवाही

मन्ना जमीन और मजदूरों के पीछे सेलेंट की राशि जिलाधिकारी के शांति में नहीं हो पाई है। भुगतान नहीं होने के पीछे मजदूरों का लापरवाही है। इस संबंध में चीनी मिल मजदूरों की संख्या लगने वाले अनुमान काफ़ी बड़ा है कि चीनी निगम के अधिकारियों-कर्मचारियों की नियमित वेतन देना को है।

राशि सेलेंट उनके पास है, वेतन में मजदूरों का नाम आकर पर अपना बिना मजदूरों की अधिक संख्या ने 254 करोड़ के नाम आकर पर जती किताब का उरी आकर पर सुलतन कर दिया जा। वह है कि उस में 50-15 करोड़ की राशि 72 करोड़ 40 लाख पर जिलाधिकारी के शांति में नहीं हो पाई है।

राशि जमीन, मजदूरों का नाम आकर पर जिलाधिकारी के शांति में नहीं हो पाई है। इनके मजदूरों को 2015 के कट ऑफ़ डट और सीजन-केसुलत कर्मियों को 1997 तक मजदूरों भुगतान के लिए अधिकृत करवा जा।

हल आला, विभाग की ओर से नौ बार सूचना देते के बाद भी नहीं आये दादा अग्रवाल नहीं आ रहे हैं। प्रधान सचिव

के निर्देश के बाद विभाग अब इस बार बिहार कर रहा है कि राशि सेलेंट की जाए, पर फिर कुछ दिनों तक और

राशि जमीन, मजदूरों का नाम आकर पर जिलाधिकारी के शांति में नहीं हो पाई है। इनके मजदूरों को 2015 के कट ऑफ़ डट और सीजन-केसुलत कर्मियों को 1997 तक मजदूरों भुगतान के लिए अधिकृत करवा जा।

"News Highlights: Key Updates in Brief"

International Relations

- **India** sent 1,000 tonnes of rice to drought-hit **Malawi**, which declared a state of disaster in March due to severe drought affecting 23 of its 28 districts.
- Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, **Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi**, arrived in **New Delhi** for a two-day visit aimed at strengthening India-UAE ties in **energy and connectivity**. He was warmly welcomed and will also visit Mumbai for a business forum. Prime Minister Modi and the Crown Prince are set to hold talks to further enhance bilateral relations.
- **India** and the U.S. have **swapped hosting duties** for the **Quad Summit**, with the U.S. now hosting the summit on September 21 in Delaware. India will host the summit in 2025. This change allows U.S. President Biden to meet with Prime Minister Modi, Australian Prime Minister Albanese, and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida. Modi will address a diaspora meet and the UN's "Summit of the Future" during his visit, while External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will speak at the UN General Assembly on September 28.
- On **International Literacy Day**, September 8, 2024, **Pakistan** declared an **education emergency** to address the issue of **26 million out-of-school children**, calling for collaboration from the private sector and civil organizations.
- **Typhoon Yagi**, one of the strongest in the past decade, struck northern **Vietnam**, killing at least 14 people and injuring 176. The storm caused widespread power outages, leaving over 3 million people without electricity, and officials warned of continued heavy rain despite the typhoon's weakening.
- **Algerian** authorities declared President **Abdulmadjid Tebboune** the winner with 95% of the vote, but turnout was 48% and a rival candidate alleged irregularities.
- **Australia** will include questions on **sexual orientation** and gender in the 2026 census after initially deciding to exclude them, with the questions being optional for those over 16. The change follows controversy and criticism of the earlier decision, aiming to ensure the LGBTIQ+ community is represented and counted.

Internal Security

- Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh met Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya to advocate for targeted action against militant camps and improved coordination amid escalating violence and drone attacks between the **Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities**.

Sports

- **India** **defeated** **China** 3-0 in their opening match of the **Asia Cup Hockey**, with goals from Sukhjeet Singh, Uttam Singh, and Abhishek.
- **Aryna Sabalenka** **won** her maiden **US Open title**, defeating Jessica Pegula, while Australia's **Max Purcell** and **Jordan Thompson** clinched the men's doubles title.
- **Indian** women finished **second** at the **U20 World Wrestling Championships**, winning one gold, one silver, and three bronze medals in the freestyle category.

End of Summary

This marks the end of today's summary from *The Hindu*. We trust this has added value to your exam preparation. Keep engaging with current affairs to sharpen your insights and strengthen your knowledge. We'll be back tomorrow with more updates to guide you on your path to success.

Thank you for reading. Stay focused and dedicated!

Understanding current affairs is crucial for **UPSC/State PSC preparation**, as it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, ensuring that candidates are well-informed, relevant, and capable of making insightful analyses on contemporary issues.

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