

TODAY'S NEWS

Curated Insights from 'The Hindu' Newspaper

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Team BPSC POINT

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Growth matrix

Economic outlook is evenly poised but reforms need acceleration

The first official gauge of the economy's performance so far in 2024-25 pegs real GDP growth at 6.7% between April and June, a five-quarter low and below the central bank's projection. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which expects a 7.2% GDP growth through 2024-25 following last year's 8.2% surge, had revised its estimate for Q1 from 7.2% to 7.1% earlier this month. The actual numbers are underwhelming and mark a clear cooling in the economic momentum, although some base effects are in play. Growth in the Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy came in higher at 6.8%, after a year of widening divergences with the GDP print. At the onset of this fiscal year, major hopes hinged on a normal monsoon boosting farm sector output and easing inflation, which could lift the weak rural demand and private consumption witnessed last year. Higher demand would bolster private firms' propensity to invest in new capacities, and ease the pressure on public spending to prop up growth. That the government would still ramp up capital expenditure by 17% to ₹11.11 lakh crore this year, while it waited for this narrative to unfold, was the other pillar underpinning this year's growth aspirations. As things stand, this script is yet to fully play out. The stretched general election has sharply scuppered public capex, and the government will need to redouble efforts to meet its spending goals. The good news is that private consumption spends bounced to a six-quarter peak of 7.4%, partly thanks to easing headline inflation. But food prices remain elevated. The monsoon has been better than last year but a tad erratic and uneven, temporally as well as spatially. Farm GVA growth has moved up to a four-quarter high of 2% but the next few weeks will determine whether the sector rebounds in earnest (and food inflation cools). Projections of above-normal downpours in September may well affect standing *kharif* crops. This is a key monitorable for the RBI, whose independent monetary policy panel members have flagged a 1% GDP growth loss this year and next, if interest rate cuts are delayed. India may still grow 6.5% to 7% this year, but most expect growth to slip to 6.2% in 2025-26, with the medium-term potential hovering around that number. This is too slow for comfort. As top IMF Gita Gopinath pointed out recently, policymakers need to urgently pursue meaningful reforms across all aspects of the economy, and improve the efficiency of its institutions and the judiciary. This is critical to lift its growth potential and fulfil hopes of creating gainful employment for its young, fast enough for India's demographics to yield a dividend.

India's Economic Growth in Q1 2024-25

India's real GDP growth for the first quarter of FY 2024-25 is **6.7%**, below the **RBI's** projection of **7.1%**. **GVA** growth is slightly higher at **6.8%**, indicating cooling economic momentum.

Impact of Monsoon and Inflation

Uneven monsoons and **high food prices** have affected the anticipated boost in the farm sector, **rural demand**, and **private consumption**.

Disruptions and Growth Projections

Private consumption reached a **six-quarter peak of 7.4%**, but **public capital expenditure** has been disrupted by the general election. **RBI** warns of potential growth losses if **interest rate cuts** are delayed. Growth is expected to be **6.5% to 7%**, with a **medium-term potential of 6.5%**.

Call for Economic Reforms

IMF's Gita Gopinath calls for **urgent reforms** and improved **institutional efficiency** to boost growth and create employment opportunities for India's youth.

Hateful, baleful

Assam CM is transgressing his oath by making hateful remarks against Muslims

Hate speech, especially by elected authorities and targeting a specific community, has been repeatedly flagged as a possible trigger for ethnic conflagrations and atrocities that could have catastrophic consequences. Politicians in India are well aware of this but this does not deter the most cynical among them from using hate speech to further a polarising agenda. A case in point is the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma. The BJP leader continues to revel in making communally sensitive remarks, targeting the State's minority communities. On Tuesday, he explicitly said that he would take sides against "Mya Muslims" – a discriminatory euphemism for the minority Bengali Muslim community – and would not let them "go to Upper Assam". These remarks were in the context of a debate on the law and order situation after a gangrape of a minor in Dibrugarh. During the 2024 general election, Mr. Sarma, in speech after speech, had used rabidly communal language to target Muslims, with nary a response from the Election Commission of India. He even said, "Islamophobia is real for many of us [Hindus]". By making these statements repeatedly, Mr. Sarma is going against the oath he took as the Chief Minister – that he will bear true faith and allegiance to India's secular Constitution. He should be condemned for explicitly saying that he will side against a particular community. Second, by amplifying demands by groups that have threatened an entire community to leave "Upper Assam" and suggesting that the minority community does not have the right to free movement, he is furthering hate in a State which has been affected by ethnic violence. From violent anti-immigrant agitations to militancy and a flawed process of identifying "foreigners" that has brought misery to the poor, Assam has been through crises; some of those issues continue to fester. Instead of finding ways of reconciliation, all-round harmony and peace, he uses the cruel ploy of fostering division in order to reap the benefits out of the politics of hate. As actions in nearby Myanmar and the plight of the Rohingya show, repeated use of hate speech to characterise a minority community and the amplification of communalism have disastrous consequences. The Union government and the BJP leadership have shown no inclination to rein in the errant Chief Minister. Unlike party leaders who have been reprimanded for utterances targeting sections such as farmers, Mr. Sarma uses hate speech against Muslims. But if the government is serious about improving the lot of the Assamese people – the State has among the poorest HDI indicators in the country – it has to put an end to hate speech as a communally charged environment militates against all-round development.

The Danger of Hate Speech by Elected Officials

Hate speech by elected officials **can trigger ethnic violence and atrocities**. In India, some politicians, like Assam's Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma**, use such rhetoric **to push divisive agendas**.

The Case of Himanta Biswa Sarma

Sarma has made **communally charged remarks** against the minority **Bengali Muslim community** in Assam, including statements opposing their presence in Upper Assam following a recent gangrape incident.

Violation of Constitutional Oath

These statements violate Sarma's oath to uphold India's **secular Constitution** and worsen communal tensions in a state with a history of ethnic violence.

Lack of Action and Need for Reform

The **Union government** and **BJP leadership** have not restrained Sarma, despite his divisive rhetoric. For Assam, one of the poorest states in India, ending hate speech is crucial for achieving **all-round development**. A **communally charged environment hinders progress and negatively impacts the lives of the people** in the state.

The collapse of categories and post-individualism

Categorization, the counting and the labelling of people, places, time, events, and human activities form the basis of all governance and politics. The 2019 Paris Olympics demonstrated, on the one hand, the rigidity and the brutality of categories, and on the other, the fluidity, blurring, and even the impossibility of it. Indian woman wrestler Vinesh Phogat was disqualified for being overweight by 100 grams for her category – the objective of which has not been questioned by anyone including the wrestler herself. Imane Khelif, the Algerian boxer who won the gold in her weight category, had her sex questioned.



Yashesh K. Sonawale

In 2021, the International Boxing Association (IBA) had disqualified her for failing a "separate and recognized test, whereby the specific remains confidential". The Paris Olympics organizers said they also went by the passport which identifies Ms. Khelif to be a woman, her sex assigned at birth. Some media reports linked Ms. Khelif's disqualification to a gender identity test, and, thus, not participating in the world championship in New Delhi in 2023 in boxing. President Vladimir Putin, all add, a person's sex is to be known as an inalienable attribute, as bit or her weight. The methods to identify a person's sex – chromosomes, hormone levels, genitalia, have been contested. To the extent that sex is a biological fact, it is an increasingly alterable one. When combined with gender, it is a question of personal choice, according to the increasingly popular view in the United States. The sex and gender debate is a major trigger for the social and political dogmatism in the West.

The fluidity of categories

The fluidity of categories has been a serious governance challenge throughout history. Who is a citizen and who is alien? What kind of violence is crime and what kind is honorable? What is legitimate politics and when is not? Where does homeland end and foreign land begin? Such questions have pushed societies to conflict and counter to wars, as agreements are difficult to come by, and harder to hold. Conversely, the political categorization over categories include the fluidity of Canada's ethnicity. Is the more Asian-American than African-American? Should Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes communities be categorized into subgroups for better achievement of social justice in India?

Modernized colonized individuals as a higher level of social evolution, and communities that bind individuals to social norms, faith and traditions came to be viewed as regressive, through to less. The building blocks of modern, secular communities, and nations, are supposed to be atomized individuals who share their belief in atomized individuals with other atomized individuals. The individual participated in politics and market as the fundamental atomism unit.

Gender debates appear to be deepening social fragmentation in the West.

of humanity. The individual was indivisible, indivisible. Sex categories, male and female, are at least used to be a rare point of agreement across religious faiths, political ideologies, and science. In fact, western creationists in recent years began citing British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in support of their position that humans are divided into male and female. Prof. Dawkins has argued that categories in general do not hold because the natural world is a fluid continuum, but sex is a remarkable and undeniable exception. It is the union of clearly differentiated male and female reproductive cells that makes procreation possible. He notes, however, individuals exist, but for only prove the rule of sexual division. What has modified this rare point of universal agreement of faith and science is the relatively new idea of sex as choice, guided by gender perception.

The new idea as 'choice'

According to the Canadian Institute of Health Research, "sex refers to a set of biological attributes" and "gender refers to the socially constructed traits, behaviors, expressions and identities." "...are usually categorized as female or male," while "gender exists along a continuum and can change over time." Sex is what one is, and gender is what one feels. The question becomes contentious over translating the feeling into being – gender affirming sex transition. Should that be allowed? If yes, what is the age of consent in this regard? Should public schools and public health systems facilitate this? These questions are polarizing the U.S. in the election season.

That an individual's thought is not a new thought. The individuality of a person has been about their thoughts and feelings, and not their bodies. The mind changes over time. People move from one faith to another, or from one line of political thinking to another, without altering their bodies, generally speaking. The mind determines an individual's relationship with others. Individuals live the inevitability of the individual – body and mind. The mind seeks to preserve the physical body – its liberty, safety and nourishment. The integrity of the physical body was taken for granted and considered sacrosanct; surgeries and interventions that modernity made possible were to restore the normative features and functions of the body, not to alter them.

Gender affirming sex transition changes that relationship between an individual's mind and body. It does not undermine the sexual binary, as it is often misperceived. In fact, it reinforces the binary – a person who wants to transition is in fact making medical intervention to achieve the normative anatomical features of one of the sexes, in the extremely familiar anatomical alien.

there was conflict between the body and the mind – being and feeling – feeling had to yield to being. Feeling could have been feeling, after all. That the body, not the mind, should change is the new idea. Individual autonomy elevated to this level, paradoxically, disintegrates the individual into components, and reconstitutes them into a new biological entity. The mind is fluid, and assuming that the body should keep pace with the fluidity of the mind, is a radically mind-bending idea. This throws out of the window one of the longest held, and universally shared truths – that there is man and woman. That there is nothing permanent about an individual being a man or woman is a bewildering post-truth. It is post-individualism; individualism dissolving itself.

This paradox mirrors the bigger dilemma of liberalism itself. Liberalism, by virtue of self-identification, has to tolerate all types of liberal ideas. For instance, liberalism has to accommodate religion and cultural practices, which in turn are expensive towards its very freedom. Liberalism that undermines itself, individualism and conflicting group claims have already caused disorienting social fragmentation. Sex transition makes fragmentation inside the individual, which was considered compatible.

Science and evidence

Proponents and opponents of gender affirming, can try to bolster their argument using data and science. Technology has given humanity the immense capacity to analyze categories by digitally profiling and labelling each individual. But, simultaneously, by choice and under duress, individuals increasingly defy categories by crossing geographical and social borders. Sex categories are the new frontier for human mobility. That the body should fall in line with the mind's feeling is an idea, ideas usually precede the technological know-how that translate it into reality – for instance, flight. Science will more likely maintain that idea, rather than prove or disprove anything about it. Science and technology do not just discover existing reality but also create new ones. As new technologies shift medical interventions from restorative to transformative, the body is set to lose its normative body as it takes for granted and considered sacrosanct. Sex could define gender, and all other markers of the mind, it will be about a body that one makes. One's mind is accessible to another only to the extent that it is articulated, which means, a person can only be what they claim. Gender ideology has set the U.S. and the West in general, a course of collective cognitive dissonance. One part of these societies seeks to hold on to their last truth, while the other is dismantling the notion of the indivisible individual that built them.

Understanding Changing Views on Sex and Gender

The article looks at how our ideas about sex and gender are changing and causing confusion and debate.

1. Olympic Controversies: At the 2024 Paris Olympics, there were notable cases where athletes faced issues due to sex and weight categories. For example, Indian wrestler **Vinesh Phogat** was disqualified for being just a little overweight, while Algerian boxer **Imane Khelif** faced questions about her gender identity, which led to her disqualification from a previous event.

2. Sex vs. Gender: Traditionally, sex (male or female) was seen as a fixed biological fact.

But now, many people view sex as something that *can be chosen based on personal feelings*, not just biology. This shift is creating debates about how we understand and categorize sex and gender.

3. Governance Issues: Throughout history, defining categories like citizenship and crime has caused conflicts. Today, similar debates are happening about things like ethnicity and social justice.

4. Changing Individual Identity: Modern society values personal choice and individual autonomy, including the ability to change one's body to match one's gender identity. This is challenging traditional views that sex and gender are fixed.

Article Theme	Relevant UPSC Theme	GS Paper Reference	Description
Governance and Politics	Indian Polity and Governance	GS Paper II	Examines how categorization impacts policy-making and political processes.
Social Issues and Welfare	Social Issues and Social Justice	GS Paper II	Discusses social justice, gender equality, and the implications of changing identities on welfare policies.
Science and Technology	Science and Technology in Development	GS Paper III	Explores how advancements in science and technology influence and redefine established norms.
Ethics and Integrity	Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude	GS Paper IV	Reflects on ethical dilemmas related to individual freedom and societal norms.
Historical Perspectives	Modern History and Indian Culture	GS Paper I	Connects historical changes in identity and governance to current social and political issues.

5. Science and Technology: Advances in medicine are making it possible for people to change their sex through medical procedures. This is adding complexity to how we understand and categorize sex and gender.

6. Liberalism's Paradox: Liberalism supports individual rights and personal choices but also struggles with internal contradictions, especially when it comes to accommodating diverse views on gender and identity.

In short, the article explores how our traditional categories for sex and gender are being questioned and changed, leading to new debates about identity and societal norms.

Article Theme	Relevant BPSC Theme	Paper Reference	Description
Governance and Politics	Indian Polity	General Studies Paper II	Explores how categorization impacts policy-making and political processes.
Social Issues and Welfare	Social Justice and Welfare	General Studies Paper II	Discusses social justice, gender equality, and the implications of changing identities on welfare policies.
Science and Technology	The Role and Impact of Science and Technology in Development	General Studies Paper II	Examines how advancements in science and technology influence and redefine established norms.

A game plan for India's success as 2036 Olympic host

As the independent bid from India to the country, this August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that it was India's dream to host the 2036 Olympic Games, adding that preparations were being made for this. This is an ambitious announcement in the world. India has never hosted the Olympics before. India has almost always underperformed in the global athletic arena. India has limited world-class track and field infrastructure.



Narendra Sharma
Senior
analyst at the
high level of focus
and a specialist
of the Olympic
Games challenges

Yet, the Olympic ambition does not seem far-fetched. The country's sporting prowess is growing. Its development programme respects among their peers. The Indian sports ecosystem is at an all-time high. However, whether India succeeds in the Olympic bid or not will depend on how the country builds consensus both within and beyond its borders.

Facing the Future Host
Hosting an Olympic Games is a marathon effort, as the entire nation must be ready when visiting the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. There is a lot of ground to be covered in the infrastructure.

In Paris, for instance, there were 200 medal events in 12 sports including the four additional events that bring the best athletes in the world on one stage, one to witness the birth of nations. Since 2016, the process for host building has undergone a complete overhaul. These changes are part of the transformation in the International Olympic Committee (IOC) after the allegations of corruption were made in connection with the award of the 2020 and 2022 Tokyo Games. The revamped selection process was conducted to choose the host for the 2032 Olympic Games.

The selection criteria are now aligned in confidence with the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The IOC has a dedicated body to help the IOC. The extent of the first game beyond existing capacity, also even feasibility

assessment, studies environmental concerns and human rights standards as part of the process. The IOC is expected to hold an election at the conclusion of the bid process led by India. India is expected to hold an election at the conclusion of the bid process led by India. India is expected to hold an election at the conclusion of the bid process led by India.

Under the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the National Sports Development Code (NSDC), with an eye on improving the sports ecosystem from the grassroots level, the IOC has a clear vision and a goal. The IOC has a clear vision and a goal. The IOC has a clear vision and a goal.

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Planning ahead
The biggest expenditure for the country regarding the Olympics is from building sporting infrastructure. However, India can capitalise on existing venues and facilities, thus reducing the capital expenditure.

According to the Union Government, Tamil Nadu has nearly 200 Olympic standard sports venues and stadiums. Other states such as Andhra Pradesh and Odisha third with 90. Tamil Nadu, having hosted the South Asian Federation Games in 1985 and the South Asian Youth Games in 1985, has a long history of hosting international sports events.

There is much to make when India makes its bid for the 2036 Olympic Games. There is much to make when India makes its bid for the 2036 Olympic Games. There is much to make when India makes its bid for the 2036 Olympic Games.

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The article **discusses** India's ambitious goal of **hosting the 2036 Olympic Games**, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Although India has **never hosted** the Olympics and has limited infrastructure, the country's growing sporting prowess makes the dream feasible.

The selection process for the host city involves rigorous assessments by the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) **Future Host Commission**, which evaluates factors such as infrastructure, environmental concerns, and human rights standards.

India's preparations began with the **successful hosting** of the **2010 Commonwealth Games** and the launch of the **Khelo India Scheme in 2017**, which aims to improve grassroots sports infrastructure and identify talented athletes.

Critical Insights for UPSC/BPSC Aspirants

This article is a must-read for UPSC/BPSC candidates as it delivers vital perspectives on sports development, federalism, and global diplomacy, all essential components of effective governance and policy-making.

Tamil Nadu leads in terms of infrastructure, with other states like **Delhi** and **Odisha** also having significant facilities. The article suggests that leveraging these states' existing infrastructure could support a cost-efficient and eco-friendly Olympic bid.

However, the success of India's Olympic bid will depend on building consensus among various stakeholders, including state governments. A collaborative and representative approach is essential for crafting a strong bid that reflects India's potential.



The article details a tragic industrial accident at the **Escientia Advanced Sciences Private Limited factory** in the **Atchutapuram SEZ, Andhra Pradesh**, on August 21.

The explosion caused by a solvent leak led to the deaths of 17 workers leaving families in despair.

Despite multiple industrial accidents in the region, safety measures remain inadequate, leading to widespread anger among workers and residents.

The government announced compensation for victims and promised stricter regulations, but concerns about industrial safety persist.

The incident **underscores** the **recurring issue of negligence and inadequate safety protocols** in Indian industrial units.



The article delves into the **struggles faced by a nomadic community** in **Maharashtra**, which relies on traditional **sheep herding** for its livelihood.

The community, historically engaged in pastoralism, faces significant challenges due to **strict regulations** imposed by the **Forest Department**, including a ban on grazing in protected areas. This restriction has led to dire consequences for their livestock, with many sheep suffering from illness and starvation due to lack of fodder and harsh weather conditions.

The community's traditional grazing lands have been increasingly designated as **protected areas**, further limiting their access and exacerbating their plight.

Efforts to address these issues, such as petitions to government officials and public protests,

have yielded minimal progress.

The article highlights the community's ongoing struggle to balance their traditional way of life with legal constraints and environmental regulations, emphasizing their need for designated **grazing corridors** and **better support from authorities** to sustain their pastoral lifestyle.

UPSC Relevance

Aspect	Details
Environmental regulation vs. livelihood issues	The conflict between protecting forest ecosystems and accommodating traditional practices such as grazing.
Policy implementation and its impact on communities	The challenges in enforcing regulations that affect traditional livelihoods and the need for balanced policies.
Socio-economic disparities and policy response	Disparities faced by marginalized communities due to policy restrictions and the role of government response in addressing these issues.



A 30-acre farm in **Telangana** focuses on **cultivating exotic fruits** such as **Jabuticaba**, **dragon fruit**, and **avocados**.

Established in 2017, it has become a hub for growing and researching these fruits.

The farm has successfully introduced dragon fruit to the region, with a significant impact on local farmers who now grow the fruit across extensive areas. They also plan to plant 5 million avocado trees, partnering with international organizations for quality saplings and technology.

The farm supports around 2,000 farmers and supplies a large number of saplings annually. It has **transformed the local agricultural landscape**, shifting focus from traditional crops to high-value exotic fruits.

Research collaborations and **government subsidies** for dragon fruit farming highlight its role in **innovative agriculture**.

The success of these ventures indicates a growing trend toward exotic fruit cultivation in India, contributing to economic growth and diversification in agriculture.

Jabuticaba



Dragon Fruit



avocados



Aspect	Summary	UPSC Relevance
Exotic Fruit Cultivation	The focus on growing exotic fruits such as dragon fruit and avocados showcases innovative agricultural practices and development.	Agricultural Innovation
Economic Impact	The cultivation of exotic fruits is positively affecting local economies and offering new income sources for farmers.	Economic Development, Rural Livelihood
Government Support	Government schemes provide financial support for dragon fruit cultivation, demonstrating public policy's role in agriculture.	Government Schemes, Public Policy
Research and Development	Research on exotic fruit cultivation is enhancing agricultural practices and yield, emphasizing the role of R&D in agriculture.	Research and Development, Technological Advancements



The article narrates the struggles of a woman, Rasheeda Bano, living in a suburban area of Kerala, who has been **battling for Indian citizenship since 2008** after **moving from Pakistan**.

Despite the challenges, including social ostracism and bureaucratic hurdles, she has successfully secured citizenship for some of her children but continues to fight for herself and her youngest son. Her efforts have involved extensive legal battles, multiple visits to the **Pakistani High Commission**, and enduring social isolation due to the stigma associated with her background.

The article **highlights** the **broader issues faced by individuals** of Kerala origin **who moved to Pakistan and later returned**, many of whom struggle to obtain Indian citizenship.

The woman in the story remains determined, engaging in various jobs to support her family while continuing her fight for legal recognition.

The narrative underscores the **need for a more compassionate and streamlined process** for such cases, emphasizing the emotional and financial toll on those affected.

Core Theme	Explanation	Relevant UPSC Paper
Citizenship and Legal Rights	The struggles related to the Citizenship Act of 1955 and Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 , focusing on the complexities and challenges in acquiring citizenship.	Indian Polity and Governance (GS-II)
Human Rights and Social Justice	Issues of social ostracism, lack of government support, and the role of the judiciary in protecting the rights of marginalized individuals.	Social Justice (GS-II), Essay
Ethical Governance and Bureaucracy	Bureaucratic challenges and the ethical responsibilities of public officials in ensuring justice and fairness in governance.	Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude (GS-IV)
Interstate and International Relations	The impact of historical events like Partition on individuals, and issues related to international relations and foreign policy concerning persons of Indian origin.	International Relations (GS-II)
Role of Judiciary	The intervention by the judiciary, particularly the Kerala High Court , in safeguarding individual rights and ensuring lawful executive actions.	Indian Polity and Governance (GS-II)



Avani Lekhara made history as the **first Indian woman** to win **two Paralympic gold medals** by successfully defending her title in the **women's 10m air rifle event**, setting a new record score in **Paris** on Friday.

Cyclone Asna forms over Kutch; heavy rain batters Gujarat

The Hindu Bureau
New Delhi

Cyclone Asna has formed over the Kutch coast in Gujarat and adjoining areas of Pakistan, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday. The cyclonic storm – a rare land-originating one in August and headed to the Arabian Sea – is expected to move further away from the western coast in the next 48 hours.

On the back of the cyclone, light to moderate rainfall occurred at most places in Gujarat and heavy to very heavy rainfall was reported at isolated places in Kutch and adjoining districts of Saurashtra on Friday, the IMD noted. This is the first cyclonic storm in the Arabian Sea in August since 1976. The name Asna, meaning "the one to be acknowledged or praised", has been given by Pakistan. Between 1891 and 2023, only three cyclonic storms formed in the Arabian Sea in August (in 1976, 1964, and 1944), according to IMD.

Low pressure off A.P. Simultaneously, a well-marked low pressure area – a very early precursor to a cyclone – has formed in the Bay of Bengal off north Andhra Pradesh and south Odisha. It is likely to move further west-northwest.



Emergency services personnel work on removing water from a flooded underpass on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, A.P.

wards towards north A.P. and adjoining south Odisha coasts and intensify into a depression during the next 36 hours. The IMD has forecast light rain over both States.

The build-up from cyclone Asna resulted in torrential rainfall in Gujarat this week. Rain-related incidents in Gujarat claimed 32 lives since Sunday. More than 18,000 people have been relocated, and around 1,200 rescued from flood-affected areas.

In some cases, security forces used helicopters to evacuate people to safer locations, according to the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC). It reported that the State has witnessed almost 10% rain fall so far, and more rain has been forecast till September 5. Region-wise, Kutch has witnessed 17% rainfall, Saurashtra 12%, north Gujarat 88%, east central region 105% and south Gujarat 11%.

Vadodra, the worst-hit city from the recent downpour, experienced some relief as water level in the Vishwamitri river dropped from 37 feet to 23.36 feet on Friday. However, several low-lying areas remain flooded.

Rainfall in August has been excessive in the country and much more than what the IMD forecast on August 1.

Cyclone Asna, a rare **land-originating** cyclone, has formed over the **Kutch coast in Gujarat** and parts of Pakistan, heading towards the Arabian Sea.

This is the **first cyclonic storm** in August in the Arabian Sea since **1976**.

It has caused **heavy rainfall** in Gujarat, leading to 32 deaths and displacing over 18,000 people.

Additionally, a **low-pressure area** in the **Bay of Bengal** is expected to intensify into a depression, bringing light rain to Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Aspect	Land-Originating Cyclone	Sea-Originating Cyclone
Formation	Forms over land or coastal areas	Forms over warm ocean waters
Frequency	Rare	More common
Intensity	Generally less intense	Typically more intense
Movement	Influenced by local geography	Driven by large-scale atmospheric patterns
Impact	Often localized, with significant rainfall	Extensive flooding, storm surges

Senior ICAR scientists hired laterally without reservation

Kunal Shankar
A.M. Jigesh
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

More than 2,700 scientists at India's top farm research body – accounting for an overwhelming majority of senior-level hires at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) – have been recruited through lateral entry since 2007, undermining the goals of the reservation policy, documents accessed by *The Hindu* reveal.

A July 29 resolution of the Agricultural Research Service Scientists' Forum – an association representing about 3,750 scientists at ICAR – has sought a ban on lateral entry into the research body. The resolution says that the lateral entry system "creates conflict among these two groups of scientists" and has made for a "toxic" work culture "which affects the efficiency of the system". It adds:

"Scientists who have served for more than 25 years at ICAR, those who were recruited by ARS [Agricultural Research Service] [Management Positions] and RMP [Research Management Positions] are not getting Senior Scientist or above positions as the scientists recruited through lateral entry are blocking the opportunities."

No SC/ST reservation The resolution adds that the lateral entry system in ICAR does not provide reservation for SC/ST (Scheduled Caste and Tribe) candidates, violating the Constitution and disempowering those who have joined the institution through the examination system.

The Hindu reviewed the annual assessment reports of the Agricultural Research Service Board (ASRB) since 2007. The board is ICAR's recruitment arm for India's IIS

Core problem

A resolution by an association representing about 3,750 ICAR scientists has sought a ban on lateral entry which ignores reservation norms.

- Lateral entry system is used to hire in the grade of Senior Scientist or above
- Two-thirds of scientists are hired through single-entry system, which is subject to reservation rules



Centrally-run agricultural research institutes. The reports show that RMPs – those at the grade of Senior Scientist or above – are recruited through "direct/lateral entry" or "recruitment by interview". On the other hand, there is the three-tier selection process based on qualification, a National Eligibility Test, and an interview – called the "single entry system", which is subject to reservation rules. Two-thirds of

Over 2,700 scientists were hired through interviews only, without reservation, since 2007

across its eight divisions.

Of the current 6,304 on its rolls, 4,420 hold the grade of Scientists, who are recruited through the single-entry system that adheres to reservation policies. The remaining 1,884 positions – comprising Senior Scientists, Principal Scientists, Directors, Heads of Divisions (HoD), Heads of Regional Centres (HoRC), Project Coordinators (PCs), Directors-General, Additional and Deputy Directors-General – have been filled through the direct interview, or lateral entry process, which restricts affirmative action policies to be only followed for the lowest entrant. Including past appointments,

there are more than 2,700 who have been hired using this system. An August 2023 ASRB advertisement to fill senior-level positions relies on a July 7, 1994 letter from ICAR exempting such vacancies from the reservation policy. While this does not violate existing norms, it overlooks the 1995 Constitutional amendment introducing Article 16(4A) enabling reservations to be followed in promotions for SCs and STs. A five-judge bench of the SC in 2006 in *Nagaraj Vs Union of India* upheld the amendments as constitutionally valid while leaving it to the States to decide the adequacy of reservation based on quantifiable data.

It should be noted that the recruitment of scientists to government departments such as Space, Atomic Energy, and Earth Sciences are also exempt from reservation norms.

Lateral Entry and Reservation Issues at ICAR

Since 2007, over 2,700 senior-level scientists at the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** have been recruited through lateral entry, **bypassing the reservation policies** meant for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

This method has led to conflicts and a "toxic" work environment, according to an Agricultural Research Service Scientists' Forum resolution. The forum is advocating for a ban on lateral entry due to its negative impact on career progression for those hired through the traditional examination process.

Currently, ICAR employs about 6,304 scientists. Of these, 1,884 senior positions are filled through lateral entry, which does not adhere to affirmative action policies, unlike the **single-entry system** that **follows reservation rules**. The reservation policy's exclusion from senior-level recruitment was supported by a **1994 ICAR letter**, but recent amendments to the Constitution have introduced provisions for reservation in promotions, which remain unaddressed in ICAR's current practices.

The article highlights the discrepancies in recruitment practices at ICAR and the broader issue of reservation implementation in government research institutions.

Top court to set up five-judge Bench to hear Kerala's plea on ceiling on net borrowing

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Kerala government, represented by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, in the Supreme Court on Friday made an oral mentioning about the formation of a Constitution Bench to examine whether a State has an "enforceable right" to raise its borrowing limits over and above the cap fixed by the Union government.

The oral mentioning was made before Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud by senior advocate Kapil Sibal for Kerala.

The reference to a Constitution Bench was made by a two-judge Bench of Justices Surya Kant and J.V. Viswanathan in April this year on the basis of an original suit filed by Kerala. Chief Justice Chandrachud agreed to look into it.

The reference had raised seminal questions on whether "fiscal decentralisation" was an aspect of Indian federalism and if central regulations fixing net borrowing ceilings on States were a violation of the principles of federalism.

The court had also referred to the Constitution Bench the issue of whether financial restrictions introduced by the Centre had meted out a differential treatment to Kerala compared to other States.

'Examine restrictions'

The two-judge Bench further asked the Constitution Bench to examine if the borrowing restrictions of the Centre were in conflict with the role assigned to the Reserve Bank of India as the "public debt manager".

Finally, Justice Kant's

Bench had framed the question whether it was mandatory for the Centre to have prior consultation with States for giving effect to the recommendations of the Finance Commission.

However, the court had been skeptical about Kerala's prowess to use its funds wisely. It had refused to pass any judicial order directing the Union government to lift the net borrowing ceiling for Kerala or enable the State to borrow ₹26,226 crore on an immediate basis. The Bench had observed that the Centre had already allowed a "substantial relief" of ₹13,608 crore to the State for it to tide over the immediate crisis.

The Division Bench noted that there was a vacuum in law concerning Article 293 of the Constitution, which dealt with the financial borrowings by States.

The Kerala government, represented by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, has requested the formation of a Constitution Bench in the Supreme Court to address **whether States have an "enforceable right" to exceed the borrowing limits set by the Union government.**

This request follows a reference made by a two-judge Bench in April, which raised questions about **fiscal decentralization** and its compatibility with federalism principles.

The Constitution Bench is asked to explore **whether central borrowing restrictions violate federal principles**, and whether these restrictions have unfairly impacted Kerala compared to other States.

Additionally, the Bench will assess **if these borrowing limits conflict with the Reserve Bank of India's role as the public debt manager**, and **whether the Centre must consult States before implementing Finance Commission recommendations.**

The court, however, has expressed skepticism about Kerala's ability to use additional funds wisely and declined to immediately lift the borrowing ceiling. Kerala has already been granted some relief, and the court highlighted a legal gap regarding **Article 293** of the Constitution on State borrowings.

China reasserts its claims in regional disputes, pushes rivals' limits

Agence France Presse

China's campaign of confrontation, from remote north to southern seas, has been a maritime security challenge.

China has in recent months deployed its most advanced military assets, including its first aircraft carrier, to the South China Sea, a move seen as a far-reaching territorial claim.

Beijing in recent years has asserted its claims in the South China Sea, a move seen as a far-reaching territorial claim.

The South China Sea is a vital waterway for global trade, and its control is a major strategic goal for China.

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China is intensifying its assertive tactics across contested territories in the **South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and East China Sea**, aiming to **wear down regional rivals and expand its influence.**

Recent confrontations include blocking Philippine ships near disputed reefs and increasing military activity

around Taiwan and Japanese-controlled islands.

Analysts suggest China's strategy is to challenge rivals while taking advantage of U.S. distractions and uncertainties.

"News Highlights: Key Updates in Brief"

- The **Himachal Pradesh** passed a Bill to raise the minimum marriage age to 21.
- Three weeks before Sri Lanka's Presidential election, Indian **NSA Ajit Doval** met key candidates and leaders in Colombo. Discussions centered on economic and security collaboration, energy projects, and support for ethnic minorities. Doval also signed the **Colombo Security Conclave** charter and MoU, and India committed to energy initiatives in Sri Lanka.
- Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan informed Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin that the state must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the **PM-SHRI** scheme, which aims to develop exemplar schools.
- The **Assam Assembly** has abolished a colonial-era rule allowing Muslim members a two-hour break for Friday namaz, prioritizing legislative productivity.
- The Union government has issued an advisory allowing **LGBTQIA+ individuals** to open joint bank accounts with their partners and nominate each other as beneficiaries. This follows a Supreme Court directive for equal entitlements for LGBTQIA+ couples, despite not recognizing same-sex marriage. The advisory, effective from August 28, aligns with previous private bank practices and is part of broader efforts to define rights for queer couples.
- A global shortage of **chipsets** is disrupting the production of consumer durables, impacting availability for the upcoming festival season. Delays in component shipments and supply chain issues, exacerbated by tensions in West Asia, are affecting stock levels.
- **India's core sector** output grew by 6.1% in July, rebounding from a revised 4% growth in June. The increase was driven by a 6.6% rise in refinery products, a 5.3% increase in fertilizer output, and a 7.2% rise in steel production. However, electricity generation growth fell to 7%, natural gas production contracted by 1.3%, and coal output growth eased. Crude oil output continued to decline. Economists anticipate the core sectors' growth to average

between 5.5% and 6% this year, supported by increased public capital expenditure.

The **core sector** refers to the key industries in an economy that are crucial for its overall industrial performance and economic growth. In India, the core sector includes sectors such as **coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement, electricity, and fertilizers**. These sectors are **significant** because they have a **substantial impact on the broader industrial activity and economic health** of the country.

- Pakistan relaxed bidding rules to directly award a \$2 billion contract to China for constructing a key section of the Karakoram Highway, crucial for China-Pakistan connectivity.
- At the **Pacific Islands Forum** in **Tonga**, leaders endorsed a major regional police training initiative funded by Australia and reaffirmed Taiwan's participation despite Chinese opposition. The forum also addressed climate finance, deep-sea mining, and regional security concerns, with some members pushing back against the French handling of unrest in **New Caledonia**.



Practice Mains Question

1. "Hate speech by elected authorities targeting specific communities can exacerbate social tensions and hinder all-round development. In the context of recent events in Assam, critically examine the impact of such rhetoric on communal harmony and the challenges it poses to the secular fabric of India. Suggest measures to address this issue while upholding constitutional values." (Answer in 250 words)
2. Discuss the impact of shifting categorizations of sex and gender on governance and policy-making, social justice, and individual rights. How do these changes challenge traditional norms and what role does science and technology play in this transformation? (Answer in 250 words)
3. "India's ambition to host the 2036 Olympic Games reflects not only a desire for global recognition but also a test of the country's ability to build consensus and strengthen its sports infrastructure. Discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with hosting a mega sporting event like the Olympics in India, considering factors such as federalism, economic investment, and international diplomacy." (Answer in 250 words)
4. Analyze the key factors contributing to the recent pharmaceutical factory explosion in Atchutapuram SEZ. Discuss the shortcomings in safety protocols and regulatory oversight, and propose specific reforms to prevent such incidents. (Answer in 250 words)

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Practice Prelims Question

1. With reference to India's bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games, consider the following statements:

1. Sports is a subject under the Union List in the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
2. Tamil Nadu has the highest number of Olympic-standard sports infrastructure facilities among Indian states.
3. The selection process for hosting the Olympics now involves confidential exchanges with the Future Host Commission set up by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: b) 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1:** Incorrect. Sports is a subject under the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- **Statement 2:** Correct. Tamil Nadu leads in terms of Olympic-standard sports infrastructure facilities in India.
- **Statement 3:** Correct. The revamped Olympic host selection process involves confidential exchanges with the Future Host Commission (FHC) established by the IOC.

2. Consider the following statements regarding the PM-SHRI scheme:

1. The PM-SHRI scheme was launched to develop over 14,500 schools as exemplar institutions.
2. The scheme requires each State and Union Territory to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education.
3. The scheme focuses on integrating vocational training into the curriculum of the selected schools.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

Explanation:

1. **Statement 1: The PM-SHRI scheme was launched to develop over 14,500 schools as exemplar institutions.**
 - **Correct.** The PM-SHRI scheme aims to develop over 14,500 selected schools as exemplar institutions that can provide leadership and showcase the initiatives of the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020.
2. **Statement 2: The scheme requires each State and Union Territory to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education.**
 - **Correct.** States and Union Territories are required to sign an MoU with the Ministry of Education to participate in the PM-SHRI scheme.
3. **Statement 3: The scheme focuses on integrating vocational training into the curriculum of the selected schools.**
 - **Incorrect.** The PM-SHRI scheme focuses on developing schools as exemplar institutions showcasing NEP-2020 initiatives but does not specifically focus on integrating vocational training into the curriculum.

Thus, statements 1 and 2 are correct.

3. In the context of recent developments in the Paralympics, which of the following statements about Avani Lekhara are correct?

1. Avani Lekhara made history by becoming the first Indian woman to win two Paralympic gold medals.
2. She successfully defended her title in the women's 10m air rifle event at the Paris 2024 Paralympics.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 1 only
- C. 2 only
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: A. 1 and 2

Explanation:

Avani Lekhara made history as the first Indian woman to win two Paralympic gold medals and successfully defended her title in the women's 10m air rifle event at the Paris 2024 Paralympics.

4. Consider the following statements regarding recent cyclonic activities:

1. Cyclone Asna, a rare land-originating cyclone, has formed over the Kutch coast in Gujarat and parts of Pakistan.
2. Cyclone Asna is the first cyclonic storm in August in the Arabian Sea since 1976.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: C. Both 1 and 2

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is correct: Cyclone Asna has formed over the Kutch coast in Gujarat and parts of Pakistan.
- Statement 2 is correct: Cyclone Asna is the first cyclonic storm in August in the Arabian Sea since 1976.

5. Recently, the Himachal Pradesh Assembly passed a Bill related to marriage age. What is the new minimum marriage age set by this Bill?

- A. 18 years
- B. 19 years
- C. 20 years
- D. 21 years

Answer: D. 21 years

6. The Assam Assembly has abolished a colonial-era rule related to which practice?

- A. Allowing extra leave for religious observances
- B. Providing a two-hour break for Friday namaz

- C. Mandating bilingual education in schools
- D. Establishing quotas for minority communities

Answer: B. Providing a two-hour break for Friday namaz

7. The Union government recently issued an advisory for LGBTQIA+ individuals concerning which financial facility?

- A. Access to pension funds
- B. Joint bank accounts and nominations
- C. Tax rebates for same-sex couples
- D. Insurance policies

Answer: B. Joint bank accounts and nominations

8. The core sector in India includes which of the following industries?

- A. Textile and electronics
- B. Coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement, electricity, fertilizers
- C. Agriculture and livestock
- D. Information technology and telecommunications

Answer: B. Coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement, electricity, fertilizers

9. At the Pacific Islands Forum in Tonga, leaders endorsed a regional police training initiative funded by which country?

- A. United States
- B. Australia
- C. Japan
- D. China

Answer: B. Australia

10. Pakistan's recent relaxation of bidding rules involved awarding a \$2 billion contract to China for which infrastructure project?

- A. Gwadar Port Expansion
- B. Thakot-Raikot section of the Karakoram Highway
- C. Diamer-Basha Dam
- D. Islamabad Metro

Answer: B. Thakot-Raikot section of the Karakoram Highway

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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