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VIDHVATH IAS KAS ACADEMY & STUDY CENTRE

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION

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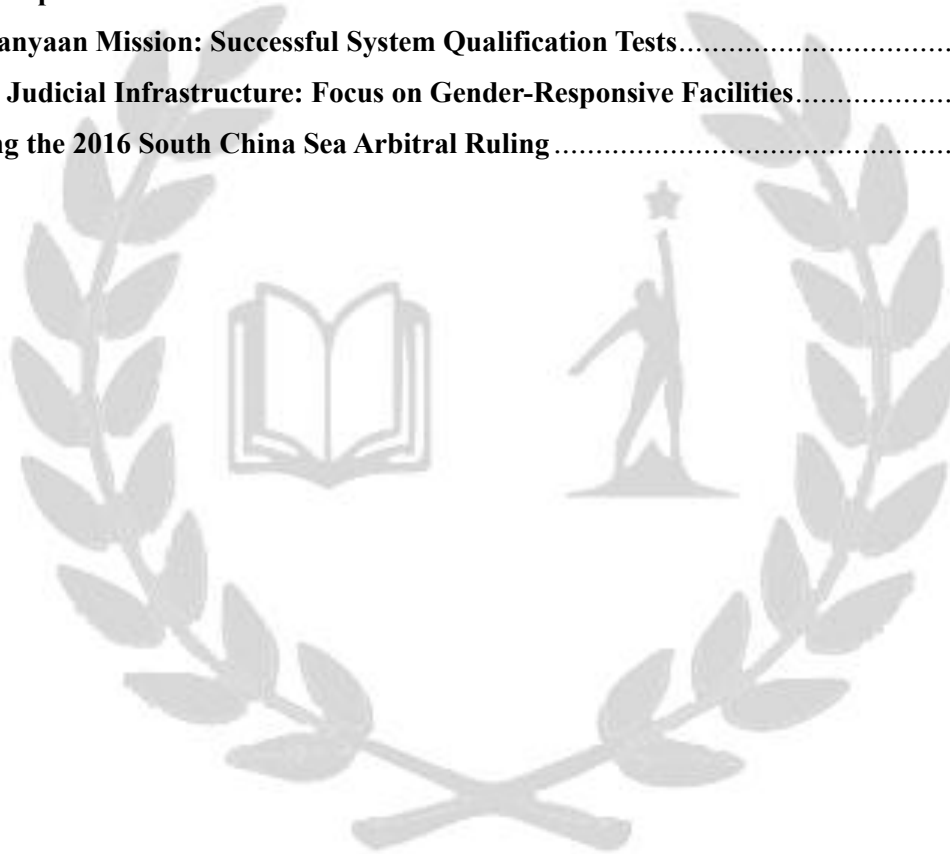
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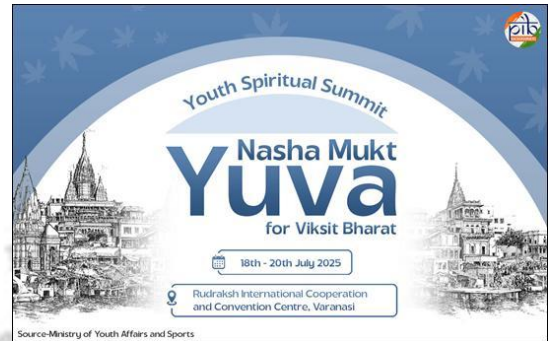
VIDHVATH IAS ACADEMY



1. Nasha Mukta Yuva for Viksit Bharat Campaign

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) has launched district-level competitions under the 'Nasha Mukta Yuva for Viksit Bharat' campaign via the Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) platform.
- This initiative aims to transform the fight against substance abuse into a 'Jan Andolan' (people's movement), aligning with the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.
- The competition follows a three-tier structure: District level (24th-27th July 2026), State level (30th July-6th August 2026), and a National Finale in New Delhi (12th-13th August 2026).
- Participants aged 15-29 years can compete in five creative categories: Dance, Music, Reel & Short Film, Nukkad Natak, and Slam Poetry.
- Submissions are accepted in Hindi, English, or any regional language to ensure inclusive, grassroots participation.
- Registrations are open from 13th July 2026 on the official MY Bharat portal, leveraging digital tools to empower youth-led social transformation.



Essential Definitions

- Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat): An autonomous body created to serve as a one-stop shop for youth development and a bridge between the Government and citizens, fostering youth-led development.
- Jan Andolan: A mass movement characterized by active public participation, where citizens take ownership of social causes to achieve national goals.
- Viksit Bharat @2047: The Government of India's vision to make India a developed nation by the 100th year of its independence.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 47: Under the Directive Principles of State Policy, the State is mandated to regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties. It specifically directs the State to endeavor to bring about prohibition of the consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health.
- Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985: The primary legislation in India that prohibits the manufacture, possession, sale, transport, and use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA): Launched in 2020, it is the flagship campaign of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment aimed at creating awareness about the ill effects of substance abuse through institutional support and community outreach.

Conclusion

The 'Nasha Mukta Yuva for Viksit Bharat' campaign represents a strategic shift in addressing substance abuse by centering the youth as primary agents of change. By integrating creative arts with social advocacy, the initiative effectively channels 'Yuva Shakti' (youth power) toward constructive national goals. This bottom-up approach is essential for achieving long-term behavioral change and realizing the broader objective of a healthy, developed, and drug-free India.



UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues relating to health and social sector/services.
- General Studies Paper III: Challenges of internal security and the role of social media/youth in societal transformation.
- Essay Topics: Role of youth in nation-building, social movements as tools for governance, and the synergy between culture and public policy.

2. Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar and Integrated Scientific Ecosystem

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Ministry of Science & Technology and Earth Sciences is spearheading the 'Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar' coastal cleanliness campaign, scheduled for 10-19 September 2026.
- Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh has called for a paradigm shift from isolated institutional functioning to an integrated scientific ecosystem to accelerate national development.
- The initiative seeks to merge technological innovation with grassroots public participation, transforming scientific environmental conservation into a 'Jan Andolan'.
- A unified communication strategy is being deployed across Science Ministries to showcase India's scientific milestones, including the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) and the National Quantum Mission.
- Collaborative frameworks involving premier bodies like CSIR, ISRO, DBT, and DST are being strengthened to enhance biomedical research, bioeconomy, and regional innovation.
- The meeting emphasized leveraging digital platforms to increase public engagement, ensuring that research outcomes reach citizens, industry, and academia effectively.



Essential Definitions

- Integrated Scientific Ecosystem: A governance model where scientific departments share resources, knowledge, and infrastructure to eliminate silos and maximize the impact of research on national priorities.
- Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar: A nationwide movement aimed at cleaning the coastline and raising awareness about ocean health, highlighting the synergy between environmental protection and public welfare.
- Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF): A premier body designed to seed, grow, and promote research and development (R&D) and foster a culture of research and innovation throughout India's universities and institutions.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 51A(g): The Constitution of India mandates it as a Fundamental Duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.



- Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification: Issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, this framework regulates human and industrial activity near the coastline to protect marine ecosystems.
- Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP): The overarching policy framework guiding India's R&D landscape, emphasizing the democratization of science and increasing the Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD).

Conclusion

The convergence of the 'Swachh Sagar, Surakshit Sagar' campaign with a broader inter-ministerial communication strategy marks a significant evolution in India's science governance. By fostering collaboration and prioritizing public outreach, the government is not only addressing environmental challenges but also building a 'scientific temper' among citizens. This integrated approach is vital to fulfilling the vision of a self-reliant and technologically advanced nation.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Role of science and technology in governance.
- General Studies Paper III: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
- Essay/Ethics: The role of scientific institutions in societal transformation and the importance of environmental stewardship in sustainable development.

3. India-Afghanistan Agricultural Cooperation

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Taliban administration's Minister for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Ataullah Omari, visited India to discuss enhancing bilateral agricultural cooperation.
- Discussions focused on multifaceted collaboration areas including irrigation, livestock management, agricultural research, and infrastructure development.
- India committed to supporting Afghanistan's food security by sharing expertise in climate-resilient farming, bio-fortified crop varieties, and seed systems.
- The delegation engaged with key Indian institutions like NABARD, ICAR, and IARI to explore capacity building, value addition in food processing, and enhancing bilateral agri-trade.
- This high-level outreach signals a targeted effort to address food security challenges in Afghanistan through technical assistance and knowledge sharing.
- The engagement underscores India's strategic interest in regional stability and humanitarian support, focusing on non-political, development-centric cooperation.



Essential Definitions

- Bio-fortified Crops: Agricultural products that have been enhanced through breeding or biotechnology to increase their nutritional value, such as higher concentrations of vitamins and minerals.



- Climate-resilient Agriculture: A dynamic approach to managing natural resources that ensures food security under a changing climate by using crop varieties that can withstand extreme weather events.
- Capacity Building: The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 51: Under the Directive Principles of State Policy, the State shall endeavor to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations and encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.
- Foreign Policy Framework: India's engagement is governed by the principles of 'Neighborhood First' policy, which prioritizes stable, cooperative relations with immediate and extended neighbors, often utilizing development partnerships as a diplomatic tool.
- Strategic Autonomy: India maintains a policy of engaging with de facto authorities in Afghanistan to protect its regional security interests and provide humanitarian assistance without granting formal diplomatic recognition to the Taliban administration.

Conclusion

The initiation of deeper agricultural ties between India and the Taliban administration reflects a pragmatic approach to regional diplomacy. By focusing on essential sectors like food security and agricultural productivity, India aims to mitigate humanitarian crises in Afghanistan. This engagement remains carefully calibrated, prioritizing sustainable development and people-centric support over formal political recognition, thereby aligning with India's long-term interest in regional stability.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: India and its neighborhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- General Studies Paper III: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Food security.
- International Relations: India's strategic outreach in Central and South Asia, and the role of 'soft power' and technical assistance in diplomatic maneuvering.

4. S. Janaki: Legacy and State Honours

Key Highlights & Summary

- Legendary playback singer S. Janaki was laid to rest with state honours at Kaniyanahundi, near Mysuru, in a ceremony attended by family, public figures, and admirers.
- Known for her unparalleled versatility, Janaki's career spanned decades, leaving an indelible mark on Indian cinema through her emotive vocal range.
- The state government of Karnataka extended state honours as a tribute to her immense contribution to the cultural and musical heritage of India.
- Janaki, often referred to as the 'Nightingale of the South', recorded thousands of songs across multiple Indian languages, bridging cultural divides through music.





- Her passing marks the end of an era in South Indian film music, with tributes pouring in from national leaders and the film fraternity, highlighting her grace and artistic dedication.

Essential Definitions

- **State Honours:** A mark of respect conferred by the state government to individuals of eminence, typically involving ceremonial police presence and official representation during final rites.
- **Playback Singing:** A technique in cinema where songs are pre-recorded by professional singers and later lip-synched by actors on screen, a cornerstone of the Indian film industry.
- **Cultural Icon:** An individual whose work has profoundly influenced and shaped the collective identity and artistic sensibilities of a nation or region.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 51A(f):** The Constitution of India lists as a Fundamental Duty of every citizen the need to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.
- **Art and Culture Policy:** While music is a personal pursuit, state recognition of artists falls under the broader framework of cultural preservation promoted by the Ministry of Culture and State Cultural Departments to support and honor excellence in arts.
- **Protocol for State Funerals:** Guidelines governing the provision of state honours are typically determined by state-specific protocols based on the stature of the individual, often encompassing high-ranking government officials or civilians who have made extraordinary contributions to the nation.

Conclusion

The cremation of S. Janaki with state honours serves as a poignant recognition of the vital role artists play in defining the national consciousness. Her legacy transcends mere entertainment, representing a lifelong commitment to linguistic and cultural integration through the medium of music. Such gestures by the state affirm the importance of preserving and celebrating the contributions of those who have enriched India's cultural tapestry.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies Paper I:** Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature, and Architecture from ancient to modern times; Indian cultural heritage.
- **General Studies Paper II:** Government policies and interventions for the promotion of arts and culture.
- **Essay:** The role of performing arts in societal harmony and the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage in a rapidly modernizing society.

5. Judicial Oversight vs. Temple Autonomy: The Sabarimala Debate

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Kerala Devaswom Minister has criticized the Kerala High Court for "excessive interference" in the administrative and ritualistic affairs of the Sabarimala and other state temples.
- The government contends that judicial directives—extending to minute details such as temple rituals—undermine the autonomy of Devaswom Boards and the rights of believers.



- Concerns were raised regarding the potential for “contempt of court” when administrative concerns are voiced outside legislative forums, hindering democratic discussion.
- There is growing frustration over the slow progress of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) report concerning the gold theft case at the Sabarimala temple.
- The ongoing friction highlights the tension between the State’s role in temple governance and the preservation of traditional religious practices.
- The Minister has called for a critical dialogue on the appropriate limits of judicial intervention in the management of religious institutions.

Essential Definitions

- Devaswom Boards: Statutory bodies in Kerala responsible for the administration and management of Hindu temples, ensuring the maintenance of property and regulation of worship.
- Judicial Overreach: A phenomenon where the judiciary allegedly exceeds its constitutional mandate by encroaching upon the executive or legislative domain, often by micro-managing administrative or ritualistic tasks.
- Contempt of Court: A legal provision where individuals can be penalized for conduct that defies, disrespects, or insults the authority, justice, or dignity of the court.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 25 & 26: Guarantee the right to freedom of religion. Article 26 specifically allows religious denominations to manage their own affairs in matters of religion, subject to public order, morality, and health.
- Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Test: A judicial doctrine used by courts to distinguish between practices that are integral to a religion (protected) and those that are secular or administrative (subject to state regulation).
- Separation of Powers: A foundational principle of the Indian Constitution (Basic Structure) that delineates the functions of the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary to ensure checks and balances.

Conclusion

The impasse regarding the Kerala High Court’s involvement in temple affairs reflects the broader, complex challenge of balancing secular administration with religious freedom. While judicial oversight is necessary to prevent mismanagement and corruption, it must be carefully calibrated to avoid infringing upon the autonomy of religious institutions. A collaborative framework, rather than one defined by judicial micro-management, is essential to uphold both constitutional morality and the sanctity of faith.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Separation of powers between various organs; Dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions; Government policies and interventions for development in social sectors.
- General Studies Paper IV (Ethics): The conflict between constitutional morality and traditional practices; Integrity in public administration of religious trusts.
- Essay: The role of the Judiciary in a democracy; Secularism and the state’s engagement with religious institutions in India.



6. Inter-State Transfer of Captive Elephants: Policy and Concerns

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Karnataka Chief Minister has requested the Kerala government to facilitate the donation of a female elephant for the Kollur Mookambika Temple to perform religious rituals.
- This request highlights the complexities of inter-state transfer of captive elephants, which are strictly regulated under national wildlife laws.
- Kerala, home to approximately 368 captive elephants, has previously declined similar requests from other states, such as Telangana, citing conservation and regulatory constraints.
- Transfers are legally restricted to animals with ownership certificates issued before February 24, 2024, ensuring that only legally acquired animals are moved.
- Mandatory compliance requires the genetic profiling of elephants to be registered in the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) monitoring application.
- The request underscores the ongoing tension between cultural traditions involving temple elephants and the evolving legal framework aimed at improving animal welfare.



Essential Definitions

- **Captive Elephant:** An elephant held in captivity for various purposes, including religious ceremonies, tourism, or forestry operations, regulated under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- **Ownership Certificate:** A legal document issued by the Chief Wildlife Warden under the Wildlife (Protection) Act that grants an individual or institution the right to possess a wild animal or its trophy/derivative.
- **Genetic Profiling:** The process of determining an individual elephant's unique DNA profile to ensure scientific monitoring, prevent illegal trade, and track movement across state boundaries.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** The primary legislation governing the protection of wild animals. Section 43 strictly prohibits the sale or transfer of wild animals for commercial purposes, though it provides specific, narrow windows for non-commercial transfers under strict oversight.
- **Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024:** These recent guidelines by the MoEFCC have tightened the criteria for inter-state transfers, mandating genetic profiling and limiting transfers to ensure the welfare of the animals.
- **Article 48A:** The Constitution directs the State to endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.

Conclusion

The request for the transfer of a captive elephant from Kerala to Karnataka serves as a case study for the rigorous application of modern wildlife conservation laws. As India moves toward a more stringent regulatory environment, traditional practices involving captive animals are increasingly scrutinized against the benchmarks of animal rights and legal compliance. Balancing spiritual heritage with the mandates of the Wildlife (Protection) Act is essential to ensure that such practices remain ethical and sustainable.



UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Government policies and interventions for development in social sectors; Federal relations and inter-state cooperation.
- General Studies Paper III: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment; Animal welfare laws.
- Ethics: The intersection of traditional cultural practices with modern animal welfare standards and the responsibility of the state in balancing competing public interests.

7. Judicial Vacations and the Pendency Crisis

Key Highlights & Summary

- India faces a massive judicial backlog with over 5.39 crore pending cases, a crisis exacerbated by the colonial-era practice of mass court vacations.
- The judiciary continues to follow a calendar that allows for simultaneous long breaks in summer and winter, which critics argue disrupts the continuity of justice.
- Reforms such as the staggering of judicial leave—rotating judges to ensure courts remain fully functional throughout the year—have been recommended by the Malimath Committee and Parliamentary Standing Committees.
- Although vacancies in the judiciary are a primary cause of pendency, the current practice of reducing the Bench strength during vacations is criticized as an inefficient use of limited human resources.
- Beyond internal reforms, the report emphasizes the potential of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms like Lok Adalats, mediation, and arbitration to reduce the burden on formal courts.
- Experts suggest engaging retired judges in targeted roles to clear specific case backlogs, turning experienced expertise into a practical solution for judicial efficiency.



Essential Definitions

- Undertrials: Individuals who are currently in custody awaiting trial or whose trial is ongoing; they are presumed innocent until proven guilty and often comprise the majority of the prison population.
- Pendency: The state of legal cases that have been filed but have not yet been disposed of by the court, often leading to significant delays in the delivery of justice.
- Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): Methods such as mediation, arbitration, and Lok Adalats that aim to resolve conflicts outside the formal courtroom setting to save time and resources.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 21: The Right to Life and Liberty includes the right to a speedy trial. Prolonged incarceration of undertrials without timely court intervention is often cited as a violation of this fundamental right.
- Mediation Act, 2023: A legislative effort to institutionalize mediation as a mandatory first step for certain civil and commercial disputes, thereby reducing litigation before courts.



- Basic Structure Doctrine: While court administration is internal, the judiciary's duty to ensure accessible justice is derived from its constitutional mandate, making structural inefficiency a matter of public interest.

Conclusion

The debate over judicial vacations highlights a fundamental tension between the necessity of rest for an overworked judiciary and the constitutional imperative of continuous access to justice. Moving toward a staggered leave system and expanding the use of ADR mechanisms are not merely administrative adjustments but essential steps toward ensuring that the judicial system serves as a responsive public institution. True reform requires the judiciary to align its operational calendar with the urgent needs of the millions of citizens awaiting justice.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Issues relating to the delay in disposal of cases.
- General Studies Paper IV (Ethics): The conflict between institutional traditions and the ethical demand for efficient public service delivery.
- Essay: The crisis of judicial pendency; Administrative reforms in public institutions; The balance between institutional welfare and citizen rights.

8. Helium Export Ban: Strategic Implications and Supply Chain Dynamics

Key Highlights & Summary

- China has imposed an immediate temporary ban on helium exports, raising concerns about global supply stability for this critical inert gas.
- Although China produces only 1.6% of the world's helium and imports over 80% of its needs, the move is viewed as a strategic preemptive measure to secure domestic supply for its semiconductor and medical sectors.
- The global helium market is already strained by geopolitical tensions in West Asia—where one-third of production is routed through the Strait of Hormuz—and restrictive export policies from Russia.
- Helium is a non-renewable resource extracted as a byproduct of natural gas processing, making its supply finite and highly dependent on natural gas market fluctuations.
- The commodity is indispensable for high-tech industries, serving as a vital coolant for MRI magnets, silicon wafer manufacturing, quantum computers, and rocket fuel tank pressurization.
- The helium supply chain is highly capital-intensive, involving specialized purification, expensive vacuum-jacketed stainless steel transport vessels, and cryogenic storage facilities.



Essential Definitions

- Inert Gas: A gas that does not undergo chemical reactions under a set of given conditions, making it ideal for cooling and controlled atmospheres.
- Force Majeure: A contractual clause that excuses a party from fulfilling its obligations due to unforeseen and unavoidable catastrophes or events beyond their control.



- Cryogenic Liquid: A substance that remains liquid only at extremely low temperatures (below -150°C), requiring specialized insulated infrastructure for storage and transport.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Export Control Laws: Nations increasingly use export bans under national security or strategic autonomy clauses to prevent the drain of critical resources necessary for domestic industrial advancement, particularly in high-tech manufacturing.
- Trade Distortions: Such unilateral actions by major market players can trigger 'tit-for-tat' trade measures, potentially violating World Trade Organization (WTO) principles regarding non-discrimination and the reduction of trade barriers.
- Strategic Resource Management: Governments are shifting toward viewing elements like helium as 'critical minerals/gases', leading to policies that prioritize domestic stockpiling and sovereign supply security over global market freedom.

Conclusion

The Chinese export ban reflects the intensifying 'geopolitics of elements', where rare or critical resources become pawns in broader technological and trade competition. As demand grows for quantum computing and advanced aerospace technology, the vulnerability of the helium supply chain poses a risk to global scientific and industrial progress. Ensuring long-term supply will require international cooperation and investments in alternative extraction technologies or more efficient conservation methods.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- General Studies Paper III: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.; Science and Technology-developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.
- Mains Topic: Supply chain resilience, strategic autonomy in critical minerals/gases, and the role of international trade agreements in resource security.

9. District Development Councils and Local Governance in J&K

Key Highlights & Summary

- Established in 2021 as a mechanism for direct local democracy, District Development Councils (DDCs) in Jammu and Kashmir completed their five-year term in early 2026 amid questions regarding their future relevance.
- The DDC model is a subject of intense debate, with supporters viewing it as a move toward grassroots governance and critics labeling it a structure that fosters centralized bureaucratic control.
- Unlike the District Planning Committees (DPCs) mandated by the 73rd and 74th Amendments, which aggregate local development plans from the bottom up, DDCs operate as parallel executive authorities.
- Critics point to significant structural flaws, including unequal seat allocation that ignores population variations, such as the parity between Srinagar and Kishtwar districts.
- The DDC framework is often compared to 'special purpose vehicles' that bypass established local urban and rural bodies, effectively acting as a governance substitute.



- True decentralization, according to observers, requires transitioning back to the constitutionally envisaged DPC model to ensure financial empowerment and genuine accountability to the electorate.



Essential Definitions

- Democratic Decentralisation: The process of transferring power, authority, and resources from the central or state government to elected local bodies, ensuring citizens have a direct say in local planning.
- Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV): A legal entity created for a specific task or project, often criticized in governance for bypassing established democratic institutions to exert centralized control.
- Per Capita Representation: The principle that the political weight of a representative should be proportional to the population they serve; the DDC model is accused of violating this by using uniform seat allocations.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts: These acts provided a constitutional basis for rural and urban local bodies, mandating regular elections and the creation of District Planning Committees (DPCs) under Article 243ZD.
- Article 243ZD: Mandates the creation of a DPC to consolidate plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities, serving as the bridge between local mandates and district-level planning.
- Basic Structure Doctrine: While the state holds administrative power, the constitutional mandate for "local self-government" is seen as a key component of democratic federalism that the DDC model is accused of undermining.

Conclusion

The DDC experience in Jammu and Kashmir underscores the tension between administrative efficiency and authentic democratic participation. While the government sought to integrate the region into the national constitutional framework, the creation of parallel structures like the DDCs risks weakening the very grassroots institutions the 73rd and 74th amendments aimed to empower. For local democracy to flourish in J&K, governance must shift from top-down bureaucratic management to a system that empowers elected representatives at the village and district levels in line with national constitutional norms.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Structure, organization, and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States; Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels.
- Essay: The necessity of grassroots democracy; The conflict between administrative convenience and political accountability; Reimagining federalism in India.

10. ISRO Gaganyaan Mission: Successful System Qualification Tests

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully concluded three critical qualification tests for the Gaganyaan crew module, ensuring the safety and structural integrity of the mission.



- The Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS) was tested to ensure the module remains in an upright position after splashdown, a vital requirement for the safe recovery of astronauts.
- A clean separation test of the 'umbilical mechanism' (CSU-2) was conducted, validating the physical disconnection between the crew module and the service module during earth re-entry.
- The structural integrity of the crew module was validated during the apex cover separation event, which is necessary for the successful deployment of parachutes.
- These tests are part of a rigorous qualification process to ensure that all subsystems function flawlessly under the extreme conditions of atmospheric re-entry and sea landing.
- By perfecting these systems, ISRO moves closer to its goal of demonstrating indigenous capability for Human Space Flight (HSF), reinforcing India's stature in global space exploration.



Essential Definitions

- Crew Module (CM): The pressurized habitat where astronauts reside during the mission, designed to withstand the harsh environment of space and the intense heat of atmospheric re-entry.
- Service Module (SM): The part of the spacecraft that provides essential support, including propulsion, power, and environmental control systems, before separating from the CM.
- Apex Cover: A protective shield atop the crew module that safeguards the parachute systems until they are needed for deceleration during the descent phase.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- Article 51A(h): The Constitution mandates that it is a Fundamental Duty of every citizen to develop the scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- Space Policy 2023: This policy framework provides the roadmap for India's space sector, encouraging technological self-reliance, private sector participation, and the development of HSF capabilities.
- International Space Law: The Gaganyaan mission adheres to the Outer Space Treaty, 1967, which emphasizes that space exploration should be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries.

Conclusion

The successful testing of the Gaganyaan systems marks a significant milestone in India's journey toward becoming a spacefaring nation with independent human spaceflight capabilities. These technical validations are crucial for mitigating risks associated with re-entry and recovery, underscoring ISRO's meticulous approach to crew safety. As India prepares for the mission, these developments signify a robust blend of engineering precision and technological innovation.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper III: Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Space missions and their applications in socio-economic development.



- Mains Topic: India's strategic autonomy in space, the importance of Human Space Flight (HSF) for national prestige, and the role of scientific R&D in fostering national pride.

11. Enhancing Judicial Infrastructure: Focus on Gender-Responsive Facilities

Key Highlights & Summary

- The Chief Justice of India, Surya Kant, has emphasized that robust judicial infrastructure is a fundamental necessity rather than a luxury for ensuring equitable access to justice.
- A core directive has been issued to make mandatory facilities for women advocates—such as separate Bar rooms and childcare centers—a prerequisite in all new court construction projects.
- The inauguration of the new Gurugram District and Sessions Court complex highlights the need to address the rising volume of legal disputes in industrial and urban hubs.
- CJI Kant underscored the responsibility of all three organs of the State to provide a welcoming environment that builds confidence among socially and financially vulnerable litigants.
- Data from the Supreme Court Bar Association survey indicates a systemic deficit in basic amenities for women legal professionals across various states, necessitating urgent policy intervention.
- The modern judicial complex model is envisioned to integrate citizen-centric services like mediation centers, banking, and postal facilities to streamline the litigation process.



Essential Definitions

- **Judicial Infrastructure:** The physical assets, including courtrooms, waiting areas, washrooms, and professional spaces for Bar members, essential for the efficient functioning of the justice delivery system.
- **Gender-Responsive Governance:** An approach to infrastructure and policy development that proactively addresses the specific needs, safety, and professional requirements of women to ensure inclusive participation.
- **Citizen-Centric Amenities:** Facilities integrated into public institutions intended to reduce the hardships of common people, such as accessible seating, drinking water, and functional information centers.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **Article 39A:** The Constitution directs the State to ensure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunity, ensuring that opportunities for securing justice are not denied by reason of economic or other disabilities.
- **Article 15(3):** Empowers the State to make special provisions for women, providing a constitutional basis for targeted infrastructure enhancements to facilitate women's professional integration in the judiciary.
- **National Policy on Judicial Infrastructure:** While the primary responsibility for district court infrastructure rests with State Governments, the Supreme Court provides guidelines to ensure uniformity and modernization in legal service delivery.



Conclusion

The Chief Justice's call for gender-inclusive judicial infrastructure represents a crucial step toward decolonizing and modernizing India's court system. By institutionalizing facilities for women advocates and prioritizing the comfort of litigants, the judiciary is evolving to reflect contemporary social requirements. Such structural reforms are vital to moving beyond the mere presence of law, ensuring that the environment itself supports the constitutional promise of dignity, equality, and accessible justice for all stakeholders.

UPSC Relevance

- General Studies Paper II: Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Issues relating to access to justice; Governance and public service delivery.
- General Studies Paper IV (Ethics): Gender equality as an ethical imperative; The role of public servants and institutional leaders in creating inclusive and dignified professional environments.
- Essay: The architecture of justice; Challenges in judicial administration; Women in public life and institutional barriers.

12. Reaffirming the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Ruling

Key Highlights & Summary

- A coalition of 14 nations, including the US, Japan, Australia, and members of the European Union, has reaffirmed the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling, marking the 10th anniversary of the landmark decision.
- The 2016 tribunal, established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), ruled that China's expansive "nine-dash line" maritime claims lack a legal basis under international law.
- The joint statement explicitly rejects "destabilizing" and unilateral actions, such as the use of military or militia vessels to obstruct lawful maritime operations in the region.
- China continues to reject the ruling, labeling it "null and void" and maintaining that it holds no binding force, thereby refusing to accept any third-party dispute settlement mechanisms.
- The reaffirmation underscores the commitment of the signatory nations to a "rules-based" international order, freedom of navigation, and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes.
- The South China Sea remains a critical global trade artery, and the ruling continues to serve as a pivotal legal reference point for balancing sovereign rights and international maritime obligations.



Essential Definitions

- Nine-Dash Line: A historical demarcation used by China to delineate its expansive claims over nearly 90% of the South China Sea, which the 2016 tribunal found inconsistent with UNCLOS.
- UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea): Often called the "Constitution of the Oceans," this 1982 treaty establishes a comprehensive legal framework for the use of the world's seas and oceans, defining maritime zones like the Territorial Sea and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).



- **Arbitration:** A form of dispute resolution where parties submit their disagreement to a neutral tribunal—in this case, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)—whose decision is binding under the agreed legal framework.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **UNCLOS Article 287/Annex VII:** Provides for a compulsory and binding dispute settlement mechanism, allowing a state to initiate arbitration when diplomatic efforts fail to resolve interpretations of the convention.
- **Customary International Law:** While UNCLOS governs maritime entitlements, territorial sovereignty disputes (who owns the land/islands) are governed by customary international law, which remains a source of complexity in the South China Sea.
- **Freedom of Navigation:** A principle of international law under which vessels of all states are permitted to navigate on the high seas and through exclusive economic zones without interference, a key focus of the joint statement.

Conclusion

The reaffirmation of the 2016 ruling by a broad international coalition highlights the ongoing tension between a rules-based maritime order and unilateral territorial claims. While the ruling remains the definitive legal interpretation of maritime entitlements in the region, China's continued non-compliance creates a persistent challenge for regional security. The international insistence on adherence to the award reinforces the necessity of diplomatic dialogue and the application of international law to prevent the escalation of maritime disputes into active conflict.

UPSC Relevance

- **General Studies Paper II:** Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements; Important international institutions, agencies, and fora; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.
- **General Studies Paper III:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; India's maritime interests in the Indo-Pacific.
- **International Relations:** The role of international law in state conduct, the significance of UNCLOS, and the geopolitical dynamics of the South China Sea.

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