



Kashi and Tamil Sangamam

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What's Next for India's Youth?

PALA CIVIL TIMES SPECIAL FEATURE

Highest annual spike saw 44,000 start-ups added last year: Modi

Nearly 44,000 start-ups were registered with the government in 2025, marking the highest annual addition since the launch of the Startup India initiative, the Prime Minister said while addressing an event to mark the scheme's 10th anniversary. The Startup India programme, launched on January 16, 2016, aims to foster innovation, promote entrepreneurship, and support investment-driven growth in the country. The Prime Minister noted that attitudes towards risk-taking have changed significantly, with entrepreneurship and risk-taking now becoming socially accepted and mainstream.

The government has invested more than ₹25,000 crore through the Fund of Funds for startups. Meanwhile, the Fund of Funds 2.0, approved in April 2025 with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore.

Core Initiatives under Startup India

- 1) Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS)**
 - ₹10,000 Cr Corpus, managed by SIDBI
 - Invests in SEBI registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), which then invest in startups
- 2) Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS)**
 - Enables collateral-free loans via National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC).
 - Guaranteed 330+ loans worth over ₹800 Cr
- 3) Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)**
 - Provides financial assistance to startups for proof of concept, prototyping, product trials, market entry, and commercialisation.
 - ₹945 Cr Corpus approved to 215+ incubators

Union govt. sets goal to formally recognise one lakh tribal healers as 'partners in health services'



The Union government has announced a plan to formally recognise one lakh tribal healers as partners in strengthening healthcare delivery in tribal areas. The initiative aims to integrate traditional healers into the formal health system, especially in regions where access to modern medical infrastructure is limited. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is also working to strengthen the skills and service delivery capacity of tribal healers with support from institutions such as AIIMS, the World Health Organization, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and the Ministries of Health and AYUSH.

In a related step, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has signed an agreement with ICMR to establish the Bharat Tribal Health Observatory, the country's first national platform dedicated to tribal health data. The observatory will focus on tribe-specific health surveillance, research, and evidence-based planning, particularly for diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and leprosy.

Kashi and Tamil Sangamam



காசி தமிழ் சங்கமம்
காशி தமில் ஸங்கமம்
KASHI TAMIL SANGAMAM

What happened : The Prime Minister reflected on the fourth edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam, which began on December 2, 2025, an initiative aimed at strengthening the civilisational and cultural links between Tamil Nadu and Kashi. The programme brought together scholars, students, artisans, and professionals and focused on promoting Tamil language learning under the theme “Tamil Karkalam” (Let Us Learn Tamil). The event also included cultural exchanges, educational activities, and facilitated travel and local participation to deepen people-to-people connections.

Why it mattered : The Prime Minister underlined that the Kashi Tamil Sangamam is not merely a cultural event but a civilisational bridge linking two major centres of Indian spiritual and intellectual tradition—Kashi and Tamil Nadu. He referred to figures such as Sage Agastya and Saint Thiruvalluvar to highlight the deep historical roots of literary and cultural exchanges between North and South India. He stressed that such platforms promote people-to-people contact, cultural understanding, and literary integration across regions. Overall, he portrayed the Sangamam as a step towards reinforcing India’s civilisational continuity, cultural harmony, and shared heritage.

Over 77% of Rajasthan’s illegal mining FIRs led in Aravalli districts

What happened : Rajasthan’s Aravalli region, which already accounts for a disproportionately high share of illegal mining cases and FIRs in the State, is facing a new controversy over illegal mining following proposed changes to the legal definition of what constitutes an “Aravalli hill”.

Why it mattered : Since nearly 560 km of the 800-km-long Aravalli range lies in Rajasthan and the State hosts most of the wildlife sanctuaries in the Aravalli landscape, it forms the ecological core of the system. If any land is declassified from the Aravallis, it will fall outside mining regulations, leading to illegal mining and serious ecological damage.

In a first, Rajasthan panchayat gets certified for going fully organic

What happened : The recognition of Bamanwas Kankar in Rajasthan as the first entirely organic panchayat in the State reflects a broader move towards sustainable agriculture. The change was prompted by the community’s experience of worsening soil conditions, shrinking water tables, rising dependence on costly inputs, and health problems linked to the prolonged use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Why it mattered : Promoting organic farming is crucial for sustainable agriculture, reducing environmental pollution, conserving natural resources, and ensuring long-term food and health security.

(UPSC GS III PYQ 2018 - Sikkim is the first “organic state” in India. What are the ecological and economic benefits of organic state ?)

Kuki-Zo Council reiterates demand for Union Territory



What happened : Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) reiterates demand for a Union Territory in Manipur with legislature for Kuki-Zo tribes.

Why it mattered : A Union Territory is administered by the Central Government. The demand for a Union Territory with legislature implies a special administrative arrangement with an elected Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers, similar to Delhi or Puducherry. Such a status would mean greater administrative autonomy under the Union framework and has important implications for federalism, Centre-State relations, and governance in sensitive and conflict-affected regions.

Jal Jeevan outlay to be cut 60% this year

What happened : The Centre plans to cut the Jal Jeevan Mission's outlay for 2025–26 from ₹67,000 crore to around ₹17,000 crore in the revised estimates, even as the Cabinet approved the scheme's extension till 2028.

Why it mattered : Launched in August 2019, the Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide 55 litres per capita per day of tap water to all rural households, and so far about 15 crore households—nearly 80% of the rural population—have received connections. The scheme has been extended till 2028 to achieve full coverage.

Cyber fraud cases: MHA's new SOP allows refund below Rs 50,000 without court order

What happened : The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) approved a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Cyber Financial Crime Reporting and Management System (CFCFRMS) under the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP). The SOP allows faster relief for victims of small-value financial frauds, enabling refunds below ₹50,000 without court orders and mandating banks to lift holds within 90 days if court orders exist.

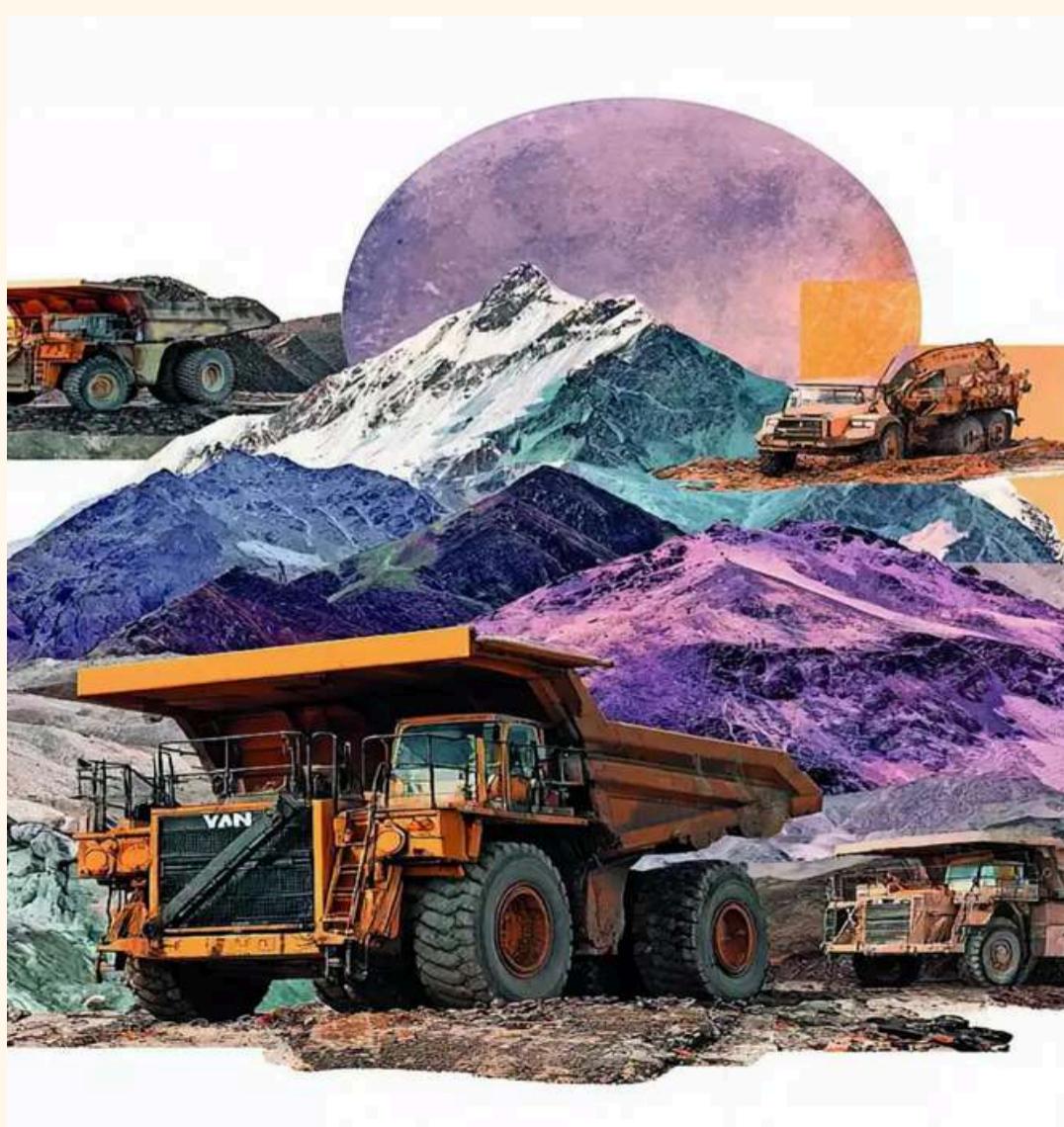
Why it mattered : It sets a uniform grievance redressal process for banks, non-banking financial companies, e-commerce platforms, stock trading apps, mutual funds, and other intermediaries. Launched in 2021, CFCFRMS has already saved over ₹7,130 crore through more than 28 lakh complaints, enabling timely reporting and recovery of cyber financial fraud. The SOP represents a significant step in strengthening India's cybercrime response and digital financial security. By streamlining grievance redressal and establishing clear timelines for refunds, it reduces delays and uncertainty for victims, thereby increasing public trust in digital payments. It also provides a uniform framework across financial intermediaries, ensuring accountability among banks, fintechs, and online platforms in fraud management.



India to be invited to join U.S.-led initiative Pax Silica, says envoy

What happened : India is set to join 'Pax Silica,' an eight-nation U.S.-led group focusing on semiconductors, critical minerals, and artificial intelligence, next month. The incoming U.S. Ambassador, Sergio Gor, said both countries also hope to make progress soon on long-pending trade talks.

Why it mattered : India's participation in 'Pax Silica' is important because semiconductors are essential for a wide range of technologies, including clean energy solutions, digital devices, and automation. As India works to meet its emission reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement, advanced technologies will be crucial for the clean energy transition. At the same time, the growing influence of artificial intelligence is transforming India's labour market, creating new opportunities and challenges for the workforce. Collaborating on semiconductors, critical minerals, and AI will help India strengthen its technology base and prepare for these shifts..



Japan Signals Possible Early Election



What happened : Japan's Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, plans to dissolve the lower house of Parliament and call a snap election soon after the next parliamentary session begins. Her ruling party announced this on Wednesday. Ms. Takaichi, who became Japan's first woman Prime Minister in October, currently enjoys strong public support, with her Cabinet's approval rating at around 70%.

Why it mattered : Japan's Parliament, known as the National Diet, is a bicameral legislature with a more powerful Lower House, the House of Representatives, which can be dissolved before completing its full term. This makes snap elections an important political tool, as dissolving the Lower House immediately sends the country into a general election and allows the government to seek a fresh mandate. Since the House of Representatives has greater authority than the Upper House in key matters, a new election can significantly reshape the balance of power in Japan's political system and strengthen or weaken the government's ability to govern. This is similar to India's parliamentary system, where the Lok Sabha is more powerful than the Rajya Sabha and its dissolution leads to fresh elections.

Violence against Tamils during Sri Lanka conflict unaddressed: UN

What happened : A UN report said that sexual violence by Sri Lankan security forces against Tamil civilians during the civil war remains unaddressed 17 years after the fighting ended. It urges the government to ensure accountability, acknowledge past abuses, support survivors, and implement reforms to end impunity and provide justice.

Why it mattered : The UN report focuses on cases of sexual violence committed by Sri Lankan security forces against Tamil civilians during the civil war, which ended 17 years ago. It finds that many of these abuses have still not been properly addressed. The report calls on Sri Lanka to ensure accountability for past crimes and to officially acknowledge the suffering of the victims. It also asks the government to provide support to survivors and to carry out reforms to end impunity and deliver justice. The report underlines that a stable and just global order depends on ensuring justice for the oppressed and the victims of abuse.

Syrian Army tells Kurdish forces to withdraw from area east of Aleppo



What happened : Syria's army asked Kurdish forces to withdraw from areas east of Aleppo after recent deadly clashes in the city. The government declared a large region east of Aleppo a "closed military zone" and ordered all armed groups to move east of the Euphrates. Syria also accused the US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) of sending reinforcements to the area, a claim the SDF denied. Protests against the violence took place in Qamishli, the main Kurdish city in northeast Syria.

Why it mattered : The incident highlights growing tensions between Syria's Islamist-led government and the Kurdish forces, who control large parts of northern and northeastern Syria. It raises concerns about renewed conflict at a time when Damascus is trying to reassert authority across the country and integrate the Kurds' de facto autonomous administration into the central state. Since the SDF controls oil-rich regions captured during the civil war, any escalation could affect Syria's territorial stability, post-war political settlement, and regional security dynamics involving external actors like the US.

ECONOMICS - REVIEW

ILO : Employment and Social Trends 2026 report

What happened : The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has released the Employment and Social Trends 2026 report on the global labour market. The report notes that while overall employment levels remain stable, progress in job quality has slowed and inequalities are widening across the world.

Why it mattered : The report notes that between 2015 and 2025, the share of workers living in extreme poverty declined by only 3.1 percentage points, much slower than the 15 percentage point decline in the previous decade. As a result, about 284 million workers are still living in extreme poverty, defined as less than \$3 per day. The report highlights that inequalities persist in both access to work and job quality. Women make up only two-fifths of global employment and are 24.2% less likely than men to participate in the labour force, reflecting enduring gendered barriers. Young people face severe challenges: global youth unemployment is 12.4%, and about 20% of youth—around 260 million—are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). These disadvantages could have long-term effects on their lifetime employment prospects.



Climate change presses on ; Munich Re report on natural disaster losses in 2025



What happened : Natural disasters caused significant losses globally in 2025, amounting to about US\$ 224 billion, of which around US\$ 108 billion were insured. Weather-related disasters accounted for 92% of total losses and 97% of insured losses. Around 17,200 people died, higher than the previous year's 11,000 but below the 10-year average of 17,800 and the 30-year average of 41,900.

Tropical Cyclone Ditwah was Asia-Pacific's third costliest disaster, severely affecting Sri Lanka and India. Formed in the northern Indian Ocean in late November, it caused total losses of around US\$ 4 billion, of which less than US\$ 0.5 billion were insured. While the winds were relatively mild, heavy rainfall triggered extreme flooding and landslides in Sri Lanka, claiming about 650 lives.

Why it mattered : Studies indicate that climate change increases the frequency and severity of weather disasters. With 2025 being one of the warmest years on record, the risk of extreme weather events continues to rise, signaling potential worsening under ongoing climate trends.

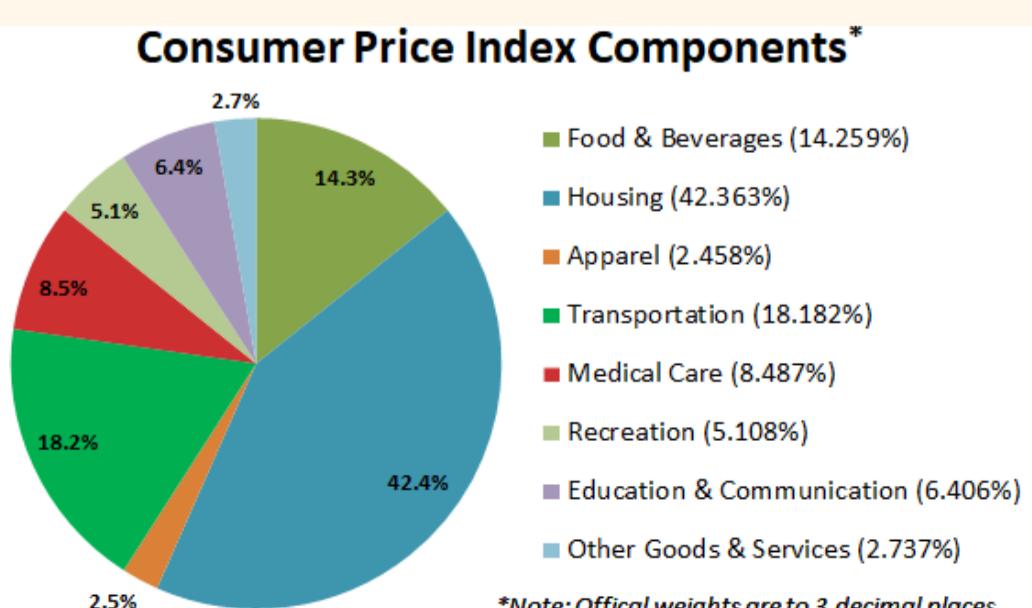
ECONOMICS - REVIEW

Why India Is Updating the CPI Base Year

What happened : India is updating its Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year from 2012 to 2024, incorporating new weightages based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24, to better reflect current consumption patterns and inflation.

Why it mattered : Outdated CPI fails to capture real inflation experienced by people, impacting policy decisions. India's current Consumer Price Index (CPI) uses 2012 as its base year, and the December 2025 data will be the final release under this series. A new CPI series with 2024 as the base year will be launched on February 12, starting with the inflation data for January. The update is being made because the consumption weights based on 2012 no longer reflect present-day spending patterns. There is also a large gap between official inflation figures and what people feel on the ground, with inflation at 1.33% in December 2025 while households reported a much higher perception of 6.6% in an RBI survey. The new CPI weights will be based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24.

(UPSC GS III PYQ 2021 - Explain the difference between computing methodology of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) before the year 2015 and after the year 2015.)



India-EU FTA termed "mother of all deals" by Commerce Min Piyush Goyal.



What happened : The proposed India-EU Free Trade Agreement has been described as the "mother of all deals" by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal. The India-EU agreement is being planned not just as a conventional trade deal, but as a broader economic partnership that reflects present-day global economic realities.

Why it mattered : Since 2014, India has signed seven free trade agreements with developed countries, including the UK, UAE, EFTA, Oman, and Australia. The European Union is currently India's largest trading partner and a major source of investment, with bilateral trade in goods receiving a strong boost in the 2024-25 financial year.

For India, a key objective of the agreement is to ensure that the benefits reach ordinary people through more jobs and higher exports. India is seeking zero-duty access to the European market for labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, apparel, gems and jewellery, and handicrafts. These sectors employ large numbers of workers, and easier access to the EU market could help boost manufacturing, exports, and employment. If concluded, the agreement could significantly deepen India's economic ties with Europe and strengthen its position in global trade.

NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK - SPECIAL FEATURE

What's Next for India's Youth?

“Yuva Shakti se Jan Bhagidari”

positions young citizens as active partners in nation-building and the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

With over 65 per cent of its population below the age of 35, India's youthful demographic dividend carries immense potential.

FOCUS AREAS

**civic participation
skill development
entrepreneurship
national service
health and fitness**

Initiatives

**Mera Yuva Bharat
Viksit Bharat Young Leaders' Dialogue
PM-SETU
Agnipath
Skill India Mission
Jan Sikhshan Sansthan**

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to inflation in India, which of the following statements is correct? (2015)

- a) Controlling the inflation in India is the responsibility of the Government of India only
- b) The Reserve Bank of India has no role in controlling the inflation
- c) Decreased money circulation helps in controlling the inflation
- d) Increased money circulation helps in controlling the inflation

2) Which of the following is/are unique characteristics of equatorial forests? (2013)

- 1. Presence of tall, closely set trees with crowns forming a continuous canopy
- 2. Coexistence of a large number of species
- 3. Presence of numerous varieties of epiphytes.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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



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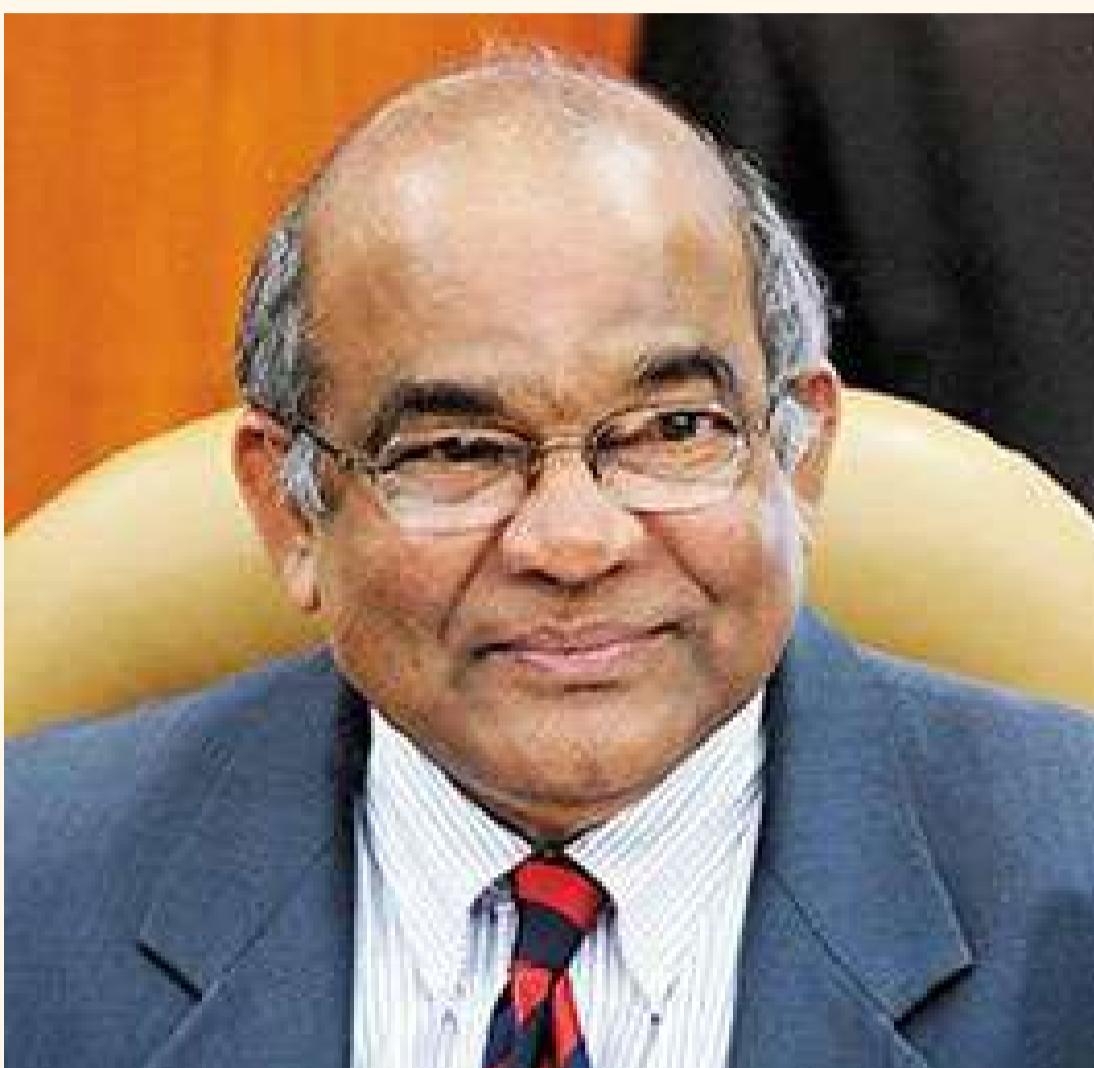
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UPSC ESSENTIAL

HERITAGE

Dr. Yaga Venugopal Reddy



Dr. Y.V. Reddy, a 1964-batch IAS officer and former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, demonstrated outstanding objectivity, integrity, and compassion during his tenure as the Collector of Hyderabad. While implementing the Land Ceiling Act. Instead of focusing on small farmers who were only marginally above the legal landholding limit, he made a conscious and courageous decision to act against powerful landlords with very large landholdings who had escaped action for years due to their political influence. Many of these landlords happened to belong to his own community. Yet, he did not allow personal or social considerations to influence his decisions and enforced the law strictly and impartially.

Dr. Reddy's actions illustrate the essence of ethical governance — compassion for the weak, objectivity in judgment, and complete non-partisanship in public administration.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option C

Inflation : Inflation is the general increase in the prices of goods and services over a period of time. It occurs when the demand for goods and services outpaces their supply. The Government of India also contributes by implementing fiscal policies (taxation, subsidies, and public expenditure) to control inflation. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also plays a crucial role in controlling inflation through monetary policies, such as adjusting the repo rate, cash reserve ratio (CRR), and open market operations. These tools are used to manage the money supply and credit availability in the economy. So statement 1 and 2 are incorrect. The RBI is the primary authority for implementing monetary policies aimed at inflation control.

Role of Money Circulation in Inflation Control: Money circulation refers to the amount of money available in the economy for spending. When there is excess money circulation, demand for goods and services increases, leading to a rise in prices (demand-pull inflation). Conversely, when money circulation decreases, it reduces the aggregate demand, which helps in controlling inflation. Therefore, decreased money circulation helps in controlling the inflation. Statement 3 is correct. Reducing money supply reduces demand and, consequently, inflation.

On the other hand, Increased money circulation typically leads to higher demand, exacerbating inflation.

2) Answer is option d

Equatorial forests, also known as tropical rainforests, are characterized by the following unique features:

1) **Presence of tall, closely set trees with crowns forming a continuous canopy:** statement 1 is correct. Equatorial forests have tall trees with dense foliage, and their crowns form a continuous, multi-layered canopy. This canopy prevents sunlight from reaching the forest floor, resulting in a unique ecosystem.

2) **Coexistence of a large number of species:** statement 2 is correct. Equatorial forests are biodiversity hotspots, hosting a vast variety of plant, animal, and microorganism species. This high level of biodiversity is a hallmark of these forests.

3) **Presence of numerous varieties of epiphytes:** statement 3 is Correct. Epiphytes, such as orchids, mosses, and ferns, grow on the surface of other plants

