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SC slams unchecked freebies, questions 'appeasement'

The Supreme Court criticised state governments on Thursday for distributing freebies without targeting the needy. A three-judge bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant questioned if states follow an appeasement policy before elections. States ignore the public exchequer in this process. Even revenue-surplus states prioritise handouts over development.



The court asked states to focus on infrastructure like roads, hospitals, and schools. Instead, states give scooters, clothes, and food during elections. Freebies reach affluent people first, not the poor. The bench sought a tested mechanism to identify true beneficiaries. CJ Kant noted that states must help those unable to afford education or basics. This is a fundamental right. Bright students deserve support for higher studies. However, affluent sections should not get freebies. States must revisit these policies now. The case arose from a petition by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited. It challenges Rule 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Act, 2024. Senior advocates Gopal Subramaniam and P. Wilson, representing TNPDC highlighted a ₹50,000 crore annual revenue gap in Tamil Nadu. The government absorbs this loss currently. Rule 23 implementation would raise tariffs sharply. This burdens consumers and the exchequer. The court questioned why states do not charge affluent users market rates. Profits from power could fund welfare better.

India attends Trump's Gaza board meeting as observer

US President Donald Trump held the first meeting of his Board of Peace on Thursday. The focus was Gaza reconstruction and an international stabilisation force. India participated as an observer. Namgya C Khampa, Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington DC, represented India.

India chose observer status along with a dozen countries. These include Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Over 40 countries and the European Union sent officials. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif attended as a board member. Trump repeated his claim of stopping the India-Pakistan war last year. He said he threatened 200% tariffs to force a ceasefire. India denies his role. New Delhi states direct DGMO talks ended the fighting. Trump listed conflicts he helped resolve. He called Pakistan's PM Sharif and Army Chief Asim Munir positive figures. Sharif reportedly credited Trump with saving 25 million lives. Trump described using trade pressure to halt fighting. He mentioned 11 jets shot down but gave no details on sides. The board aims to manage Gaza's ceasefire and rebuilding. Trump praised progress in India-Pakistan ties. He called PM Narendra Modi a great leader. Global powers seek stability over escalation. India's observer role shows cautious engagement as it balances interests without full commitment.



In 2 months, 14 lakh served ₹5 meals: govt



Delhi's Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta inaugurated 25 new Atal Canteens on Thursday. This expansion raises the total to 71 canteens serving subsidised meals. The BJP government launched the scheme last year on December 25, marking the 101st birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The initiative costs ₹104 crore overall.

These canteens target economically weaker sections. They serve migrant workers, outstation students, rickshaw pullers, sanitation workers, domestic helpers, and daily wage labourers. Strict quality mechanisms ensure hygienic food. Each canteen can serve 1,000 meals daily. The Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board operates them. Meals cost just ₹5 after a ₹25 subsidy per plate.

Since launch, the canteens have served 14,58,301 people in 57 days. Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood shared this data. The government plans 100 canteens across the city. Chief Minister Gupta announced an 'Atal Canteen Corpus' fund. This will let individuals and organisations sponsor meals on special occasions.

Ms. Gupta said the canteens support daily wage earners. They provide affordable, nutritious food with dignity. The scheme promotes inclusion for poor workers, street vendors, and construction labourers. It goes beyond meals to build security among vulnerable groups.

Focus area : GS II : Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources; Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

Revoke DU protest ban: student outfits

According to an order issued by the Delhi University (DU) Proctor Manoj Kumar Singh, one-month ban on protests, public meetings, processions, and demonstrations was imposed on the campus since February 17. It primarily aims to maintain peace on campus. The decision followed clashes at an All India Students' Association event on February 13. (That event supported University Grants Commission's equity rules.)

Three student groups challenged the ban on Thursday. Student leaders called the ban vague and undemocratic. AIDS0's DU in-charge Adrika said it attacks education's core. She noted it stifles debate, discussion, and dialogue on campus. The groups argue the reason—peace and tranquillity—lacks clarity.

The DU Teachers' Association also reacted a day earlier. They urged the administration to revisit the order. Such bans have never existed in DU history. They demanded exemptions for social and cultural events. This issue highlights tensions between campus discipline and free expression. Universities balance order with student rights. This episode further highlights governance challenges in higher education.



India-AI Impact Summit 2026 - Special Feature

Technology with humanity': Macron pitches for an inclusive AI future



French President Emmanuel Macron called for India and France to jointly build an AI framework amid rising geopolitical tensions. He spoke at the AI Impact Summit, highlighting that both nations aim to blend innovation with responsibility and technology with humanity. This approach promotes an inclusive digital future.

Mr. Macron highlighted a shared vision for "sovereign AI". Such AI will protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. He urged focusing on bridging divides, creating opportunities, and sharing benefits rather than taking them. He further assured that France will use its G7 Presidency to advance this goal.

Child safety and AI

France plans to ban social networks for children under 15 to counter AI and digital abuse. Mr. Macron invited India to join this effort. He praised India's readiness to protect its youth. Both countries stand committed to safeguarding young citizens. India plays a major role in the global AI domain. Mr. Macron stressed the need for rules to govern AI use. France and India share core values like science, rule of law, and global balance. They will shape AI's future together by combining innovation with ethical responsibility. This partnership marks the start of a vital journey. It aligns technology with human values for sustainable progress.

Switzerland's President announces Geneva as host of 2027 AI Impact Summit

Switzerland's President Guy Parmelin announced that Geneva will host the AI Impact Summit in 2027. He made this statement at the ongoing AI summit in India. Switzerland aims to partner with the UAE, which will host the 2028 edition. This move positions Geneva as a hub for AI innovation and research.

Mr. Parmelin met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed a wide range of themes such as AI cooperation, innovation, and trade ties. The India-European Free Trade Association Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement, signed in 2024, forms the base for the bilateral cooperation. Both sides agreed to boost joint research, share best practices, and build skills through training. Mr. Parmelin urged smaller countries to unite for AI governance. He noted that the US and China hold over 70% of the global AI market. In this regard smaller nations like Switzerland, South Korea, and France must collaborate to counter geopolitical pressures. This prevents big powers from dominating technology's future. Good governance ensures benefits reach all countries.

The 2027 summit will focus on international law and AI. Switzerland sees this as a chance to promote rules-based order. It will highlight human rights in AI development. PM Modi welcomed the plan.



Israel, Hamas committed atrocities in Gaza, says UN

A recent UN Human Rights Office report examines serious violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza by Israeli forces, Hamas, and other Palestinian armed groups. It covers events from November 2024 to October 31, 2025, and accuses both sides of atrocity crimes.

Israeli Actions Highlighted

Intensified Israeli attacks and forcible transfers of Palestinians suggest an aim for permanent demographic shifts in Gaza. The report raises concerns over possible ethnic cleansing. Israeli practices have created life conditions increasingly incompatible with Palestinians' existence as a group. Militarised aid centres run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, backed by Israel and the US, failed to deliver aid at required scales. This violated Israel's obligations under international law. Similar efforts in Gaza and the West Bank indicate accelerating annexation of Palestinian territories.

Violations by Palestinian Groups

Hamas and allies held hostages from the 2023 attack on Israel and mistreated them through torture, beatings, and food deprivation. These acts may constitute war crimes or other atrocity crimes. The report notes the killing of 12 Gaza Humanitarian Foundation staff in June, possibly via summary executions by Hamas, as potential war crimes. Palestinian groups also used civilians as human shields to deter Israeli strikes, though Hamas denies this. The Palestinian Authority employed unnecessary or disproportionate force in the West Bank.

Reactions and Broader Context

Israel's mission in Geneva rejected the findings on its actions. It stated that the UN Human Rights Office has lost credibility. Both sides' violations have deepened the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The report calls for accountability to uphold international humanitarian standards.



Tehran reenters the global geopolitical spotlight

Source - Editorial TH 20-02-2026



In 2013, the US under President Obama negotiated with Iran through the P5+1 group. This led to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The deal aimed to limit Iran's nuclear activities to civilian use.

In 2018, President Trump withdrew the US from JCPOA. He called it weak for American interests. In 2025, during Trump's second term, the US and Israel bombed Iran's nuclear and air defence sites. Now in 2026, Trump seeks a new diplomatic deal similar to Obama's.

Oman hosts the current talks in Muscat. Trump prefers negotiations but warns of other options if they fail. Israel's PM Netanyahu pushes hard against Iran's nuclear progress. He convinced Trump despite differing US assessments. Gulf Arab states invested billions in Trump's projects. They oppose military escalation with Iran. Global powers also prefer talks to avoid a long conflict. Iran warns of retaliation against US bases in the region.

India supported the original JCPOA for oil trade benefits. Iran was once India's top oil supplier. Sanctions ended that. India values Chabahar Port for connectivity. Iran also balances Pakistan in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Iran faces internal protests and political shifts. Moderates align with conservatives now. Talks offer a better path than rising US military presence.

India-AI Impact Summit 2026 - Special Feature

Tata Group, OpenAI announce pact after Anthropic, Infosys

The Tata Group and OpenAI announced a multi-dimensional strategic partnership on Thursday. OpenAI will become the first tenant of Tata's HyperVault data centre unit. This facility offers 100 megawatts capacity now and plans to expand to 1 gigawatt. That equals 0.2% of India's current installed power capacity.

With this development, selected Tata employees shall access OpenAI's advanced enterprise AI models from now on. Both companies will collaborate on agentic AI systems for TCS clients. Tata also plans to train youth in AI skills through this deal. This partnership follows a similar tie-up between Infosys and Anthropic, the maker of Claude AI. IT firm stocks fell after Claude's latest Opus 4.6 model launch. Investors worry AI might replace jobs. Tata aims to show AI adds value to business instead. Tata Group Chairman N. Chandrasekaran highlighted AI's potential. He called it the biggest opportunity for tech and IT sectors. IT firms excel in understanding enterprise contexts. They integrate technology into business processes, ecosystems, suppliers, and customers. AI will enhance this strength. The deal positions Tata as an AI collaborator, not competitor. It supports India's digital growth. Partnerships like this blend global AI expertise with local infrastructure.



India set to join US-led Pax Silica today on sidelines of summit



India and the US are set to sign the Pax Silica declaration on Friday. This follows US Ambassador Sergio Gor's invitation last month. The move comes during the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. US Under Secretary Jacob Helberg attends the event.

Pax Silica is a US-led initiative launched on December 12, 2025. It unites friendly nations to secure AI and technology supply chains. The goal is safe, reliable tech free from hostile control. It counters China's dominance in global manufacturing. The supply chain covers minerals, energy, semiconductors, AI infrastructure, and logistics.

Initial members included Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Netherlands, UK, Israel, UAE, and Australia. India was surprisingly absent at launch. This raised concerns over trade uncertainties. Recent diplomacy has eased tensions. Both nations agreed on an Indo-US trade framework. India's inclusion strengthens tech ties in AI and semiconductors. It protects sensitive infrastructure from undue foreign access. This includes telecom, data centres, and foundational AI models. India worries about China's role in its critical systems.

US firms commit investments to India's AI infrastructure. Top CEOs like Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman attend the summit. Their presence shows India's rising role. Pax Silica boosts India's semiconductor mission and AI growth. This pact builds trusted ecosystems. It reduces coercive dependencies. India gains in new tech frontiers.

Inside the rise of Unitree, glimpse into China's growing tech ambitions

Unitree, a Chinese robotics firm, grabbed attention in China and India recently. On February 16, 2026, its humanoid G1 robots performed martial arts on China's New Year gala. This event reached over half a billion viewers. The robots showed flexible punches and kicks, a big leap from last year's stiff motions.

Days later, controversy hit India. Galgotias University displayed a Unitree Go2 "robo dog" at the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. Some representatives called it home-grown, but it was a \$1,600 commercial model. The university shut its stall amid backlash.

Looking ahead

Unitree plans to sell 20,000 humanoid robots in 2026, up four-fold from 2025. Founder Wang Xingxing built his first prototype a decade ago at university for low cost. It won grants during China's "Made in China 2025" push. China leads globally with 40% robotics market share. Its domestic market may grow from \$47 billion in 2024 to \$108 billion by 2028. Over 740,000 firms compete, led by Unitree and AgiBot. Rapid growth raises survival concerns, like in EVs.

The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) prioritizes robotics. It seeks tech breakthroughs, R&D, and industrial clusters. This fuels innovation but sparks fierce rivalry, including bids over \$10 million for TV spots.



Sleep deprivation and the toll it takes on your brain, body



Sleep deprivation causes fatigue, brain fog, irritability, headaches, and palpitations. A study in *Nature Neuroscience* explains this process. Doctors see these symptoms often in young professionals. According to the study, these people stay up past midnight for work and home duties. Long shifts make restorative sleep hard. Over time, lack of rest changes the brain and body. Sleep loss alters brain activity, pupil size, blood flow, and cerebrospinal fluid flow. These shifts happen when attention slips. Focus does not fade just from tiredness.

Importance of Deep Sleep

Sleep provides more than rest. Deep non-REM sleep, or slow-wave sleep, restores the body most. It occurs mainly in the night's first half. During this stage, the glymphatic system clears brain waste. It removes beta-amyloid, excess neurotransmitters, and proteins. When sleep disrupts, toxins build up. This causes glial inflammation and raises risks of brain diseases.

Impacts on Brain and Hormones

Chronic sleep loss harms frontal brain areas for attention and decisions. People face micro-sleeps or brief unawareness. This creates mental haze and memory lapses. Hormones also suffer. Ghrelin rises to increase hunger, while leptin falls to reduce fullness signals. Cortisol stays high, boosting anxiety. Growth hormone and testosterone drop, slowing repair. Insulin sensitivity falls, raising diabetes risk.

Heart and Long-term Risks

High cortisol strains the heart. This leads to hypertension, attacks, and strokes. Sleep loss affects reproductive health and libido too. It heightens anxiety and burnout.

Limits of Catch-up Sleep

Weekend long sleep helps fatigue and cortisol briefly. It cannot fix hormone or metabolic harm fully. Adults need seven to eight hours nightly for health. Experts recommend sleep hygiene. This includes fixed sleep times, less evening screens, no late caffeine, and priority on rest.

PRELIMS CORNER :

Q) In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, in which of the following was/were the factory/factories of the English East India Company located? (2021)

1. Broach
2. Chicacole
3. Trichinopoly

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Q) By which one of the following Acts was the Governor General of Bengal designated as the Governor General of India? (2023)

- (a) The Regulating Act
- (b) The Pitt's India Act
- (c) The Charter Act of 1793
- (d) The Charter Act of 1833

HERITAGE

Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran



Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan Thampuran (1868–1914), revered as Kerala Vyasa, achieved a monumental feat by single-handedly translating the entire Mahabharata into Malayalam as Bhasha Bharatam within an astonishing 874 days, matching it word-for-word and metre-by-metre to the Sanskrit original. This extraordinary accomplishment not only democratized access to the epic for Malayalam speakers but also sparked two pioneering literary movements in the language. He championed Pachcha Malayalam (Pure Malayalam), which deliberately minimized excessive Sanskrit influence to revive native linguistic purity, and Puranetihasa Vivartanam, a systematic effort to render Itihasas and Puranas into accessible Malayalam translations. Among his notable works are Pachamalayalam, Puranithihasa Vivarthanam, Kavi Bharatam, and Ambopadesham, which continue to influence Kerala's literary renaissance. Other Famous Literary Giants and Their Titles

- Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panicker: Known as Sarasa Kavi for his lyrical poetry blending aesthetics and social reform.
- Kumaran Ashan: Honored as Maha Kavi for profound works on humanism and caste critique, like Veena Poovu.
- Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran: Revered as Kerala Kalidasan for Sanskrit-inspired romantic poetry.

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Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option a

During the first quarter of the 17th century, the English East India Company was establishing its foothold in India by setting up factories (trading posts) at strategically important locations. Here's an analysis of the given locations:

1. Broach (present-day Bharuch, Gujarat). This is Correct. Broach, a prominent port city in Gujarat, was one of the earliest locations where the English East India Company established a factory. It was chosen for its importance in trade, especially in cotton, indigo, and other goods. The factory at Broach was established after the Surat factory (1612), making it a significant center for trade in the early 17th century.

2. Chicacole (present-day Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh): This is incorrect. Chicacole was not an important trade or administrative center for the English East India Company in the early 17th century. The Company primarily focused on western and southern coastal areas (Surat, Masulipatnam, etc.) during this period.

3. Trichinopoly (present-day Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu): This is Incorrect. Trichinopoly was not a location where the English East India Company had established a factory in the early 17th century. • It became significant later, during the Carnatic Wars in the mid-18th century.

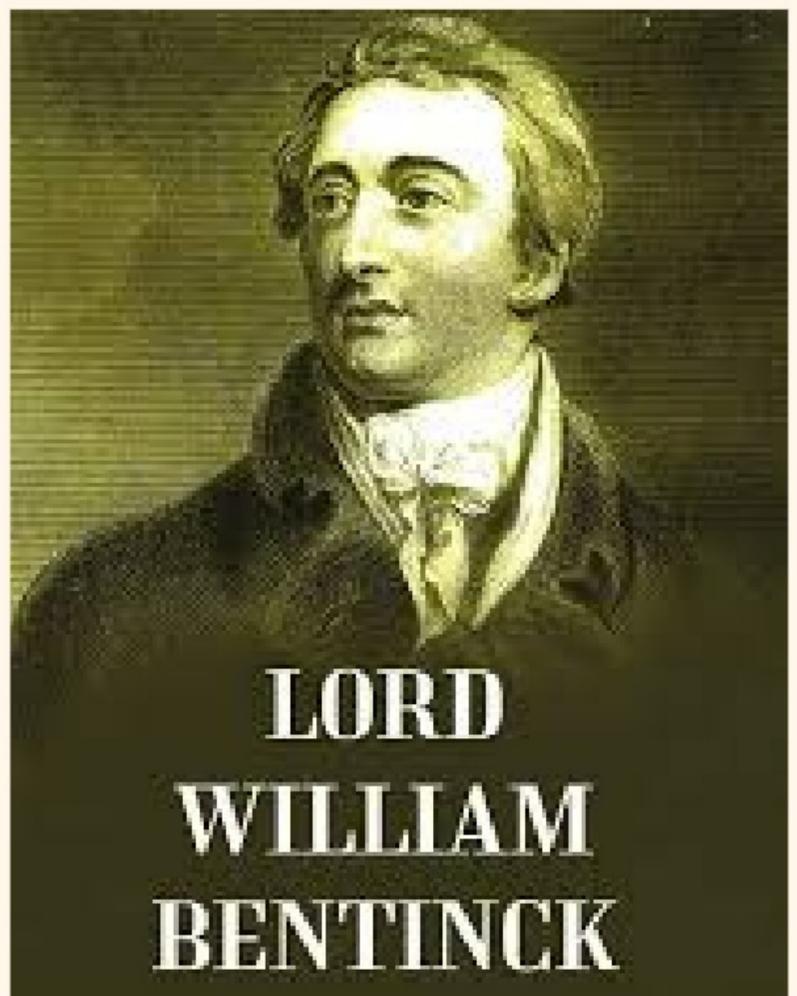
2) Answer is option d

Evolution of Governor-General Post

The Charter Act of 1833 established the Governor-General of India, centralizing British control.

1. Regulating Act, 1773: Created Governor-General of Bengal (Warren Hastings first) with limited supervisory powers over Madras and Bombay presidencies.
2. Pitt's India Act, 1784: Strengthened Crown oversight of East India Company but retained Bengal title.
3. Charter Act, 1793: Extended Company charter; no title or power changes.
4. Charter Act, 1833: Redesignated Governor-General of Bengal as Governor-General of India (Lord William Bentinck first). Centralized legislative authority across all British India provinces under his council.

Significance: This marked transition from regional (Bengal-centric) to centralized all-India governance, paving way for Viceroy post (1858).



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