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Centre to roll out free HPV vaccination drive

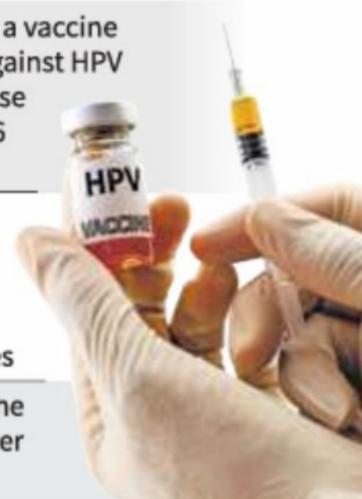
The Union Health Ministry will launch a nationwide HPV vaccination program targeting 14-year-old girls, using the quadrivalent Gardasil vaccine free of cost and voluntarily to ensure equitable access across socio-economic groups.

It protects against HPV types 16 and 18 (causing cervical cancer) and types 6 and 11. Scientific evidence confirms a single dose offers robust, durable protection at this age, before potential virus exposure, for maximum preventive benefit. Supplies are secured transparently via India's Gavi partnership, meeting stringent quality and cold chain standards for uninterrupted availability across all states and union territories. Vaccinations will occur exclusively at government health facilities like Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (PHCs), CHCs, sub-district/district hospitals, and medical colleges.

Safety shot

The Centre's nation-wide HPV vaccination programme targeting girls aged 14 will begin soon

- A single-shot of Gardasil, a vaccine that provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, and types 6 and 11 will be used
- The vaccination will be voluntary and free of cost. It will be administered exclusively at designated government health facilities
- Cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among women in India



Cervical cancer, India's second most common cancer in women with ~80,000 annual cases, is largely preventable via HPV vaccination and early screening; the program prevents infection before cancer progression

Union Cabinet nod for 'Kerala' to become 'Keralam'

The Union Cabinet approved Kerala government's proposal to rename the state from 'Kerala' to 'Keralam' (its Malayalam name), following a June 2024 Kerala Assembly resolution under Article 3.

President will refer the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026, to the Kerala state Assembly for views. Once it is approved at the assembly level, Union government will seek President's recommendation for Parliament introduction. Resolution highlights the state's name is 'Keralam' in Malayalam. The state formation was based on linguistic basis (November 1, 1956). Kerala Piravi day is also celebrated on November 1 every year. Furthermore, the call for a state of united Malayalam speakers has been active even before independence. In this regard, the current resolution is considered crucial to bring in the necessary constitutional change to make the state's name as a truly linguistically original one.



To deport foreign drug dealers fast, MHA for swift action on petty cases

The Centre directed law enforcement to expedite deportation of foreign nationals in drug cases by withdrawing prosecution where suitable. This move aims at preventing prolonged jail stays used for trafficking networks.

MHA Guidelines The Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025 is turning out to be the crucial tool to expedite deportation of foreign nationals overstaying in India. Under the new law, petty offence convicts face immediate deportation after the completion of their sentence/fine. Unpaid fines trigger blacklisting. SOP covers bail, trial, and withdrawal cases under BNSS Section 360.

Key takeaway

To prevent prolonged stays of foreign nationals due to legal delays, the Centre is learnt to have asked all law enforcement agencies to expedite the deport-ation of foreigners booked in drug cases by enabling the withdrawal of prosecution in suitable cases.

Implementation Delhi Police has instructed targeting low-quantity peddling. States are commanded to compile lists for prosecution withdrawal applications. NCB 2024 data: 660 foreign arrests—Nepalese (203), Nigerians (106) leading.

Rationale The new directives addresses the broad themes of visa approvals for litigants, court-mandated stays, and appeals. Furthermore, it also ensures tracking applications via Registration Officers (SPs/DCPs) for swift removal of nominal fine related to short-term offenders.

'No legal right': SC for rehabilitating Haldwani railway land occupants under PM Awas Yojana

Supreme Court confirmed Haldwani railway land belongs to Railways, rejecting encroachers' right to stay or dictate terms despite long occupation.

Rehabilitation Directive Uttarakhand Legal Services Authority must hold PMAY application camp on-site. District Collector to assess family-wise eligibility and report. Court emphasised safer relocation over unsafe trackside living.

Key Observations CJI Surya Kant noted ambitious projects need clear space; residents cannot control rail lines. Justice Bagchi called rehabilitation a privilege, not right—state decides land use. ASG Aishwagarh Bhati confirmed PMAY accommodation feasibility.

Background Uttarakhand High Court on December 2022 had ordered immediate eviction. SC stayed it earlier. In the latest hearing, SC has made it clear that the topmost priority is rehabilitation means.

UPSC FOCUS AREA : GS III - Technology, Economic Development, Bio diversity, Environment, Security and Disaster Management - Land reforms in India.

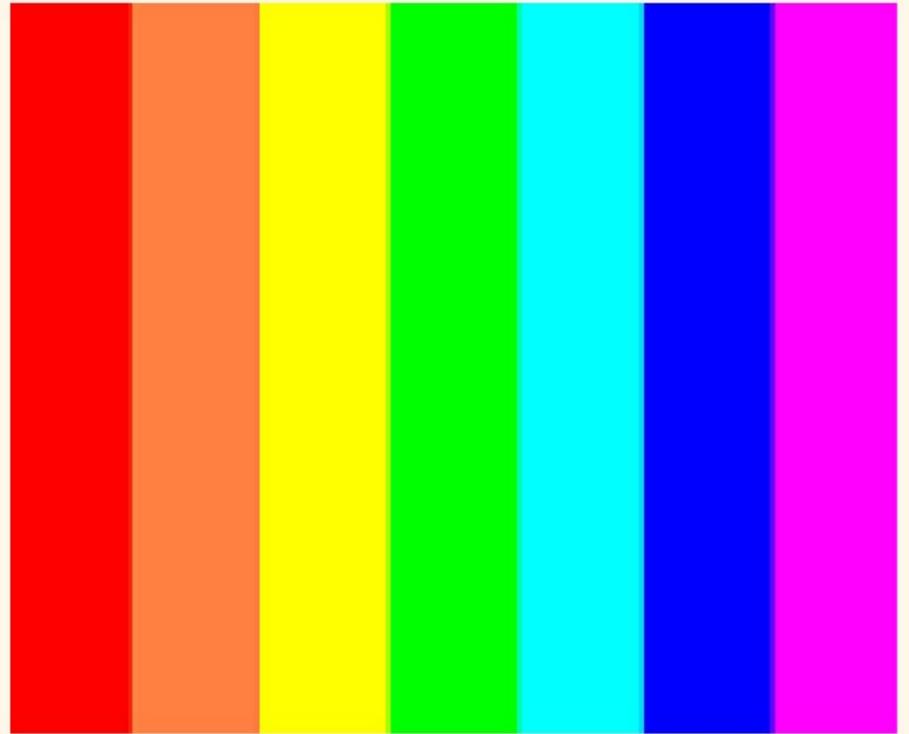


HERITAGE

The rise of blue: the colour that moved kings and the royals before poets

Newton's VIBGYOR

Isaac Newton published *Opticks* in 1704, dividing the spectrum into seven VIBGYOR colours, influenced by alchemy's symbolic '7' rather than strict science. He observed continuous hues but insisted on discrete categories, echoing musical scales and planets to match the recurrence of seven in nature. Over the decades to come, colours would be categorised and studied for their properties as matched with their wavelengths in the spectrum.



Blue in Vedic Tradition

Long before the 17th century quantitative studies of colours, the Rig Veda had rich and nuanced mentions of the colour in detail. Vedas, especially Rig Veda associates blue with Varuna, the dusk-dark (syama, krsna) god of cosmic order and surveillance. In Mahabharata and Puranic traditions, these terms mark Krishna as cosmic lord, evolving from Vedic ritual to bhakti devotion while the colour itself signify totality and command.

Global Blue History

In a stark contrast, Homer's epics omit blue, with the sea being described as "wine-dark. However, this is just another literary choice as the author prioritised brightness over hue. Even before this era, blue shade held its own in the material world. Lapis lazuli from Afghan mines linked Bronze Age trade across Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus (Mehrgarh, Bhirrana finds), and China, sustained its elite symbolism of divinity through rarity. Egypt synthesised ceruleum pigment industrially, ready to adorn ornaments and tools alike. Mesopotamia imported Indian indigo while China created barium-copper blue for terracotta warriors.



Newton's wavelength abstraction severed blue's ancient ties to rarity, divinity, and power, transforming it from a symbol of cosmic sovereignty into a subject of quantitative spectroscopy and chromatography.

The evolving nature of trade agreements



Trump's Trade Shift There is a radical shift in the way world has experienced trade pacts between countries. This change is directly rooted in the way the current U.S. President Donald Trump conducted bilateral agreements under the shadow of intimidating tariffs. The Trump administration has signed Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs) with Malaysia, Cambodia, Argentina, Bangladesh, and announced one with India. These differ from traditional Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and reflect an "America First" policy.

Multilateral Foundation The WTO, evolving from GATT (1947) stands at the core of international trade treaties. This organisational set up has effectively continued to enforce Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) relying on the principle of non-discrimination. MFN - is a WTO rule that specifies that if a special favour is granted to one country, such as lower tariffs, then it has to be extended to all other WTO members as well. It covers goods, services, IP, and disputes with one-country-one-vote equity. This post-WWII U.S.-led system has found success in countering interwar protectionism. While WTO is criticised as the harbinger of global imperialist state, its one-country-one-vote principle provides developing countries with some agency and an opportunity to forge alliances and bargain.

Most Favoured Nation rule - *it is a WTO rule specifies that if a special favour is granted to one country, such as lower tariffs, then it has to be extended to all other WTO members as well).*

Preferential Exceptions GATT Article XXIV permits Free Trade Areas and Customs Unions(CU) covering "substantially all trade," with common external tariffs for CUs. These WTO-notified deals proliferated post-1980s. They were often "WTO-plus". In other words, these agreements went beyond the WTO terms, bringing in new conditions on labour, environment, and investment. Examples include bilateral pacts and mega-regionals like Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership(RCEP).

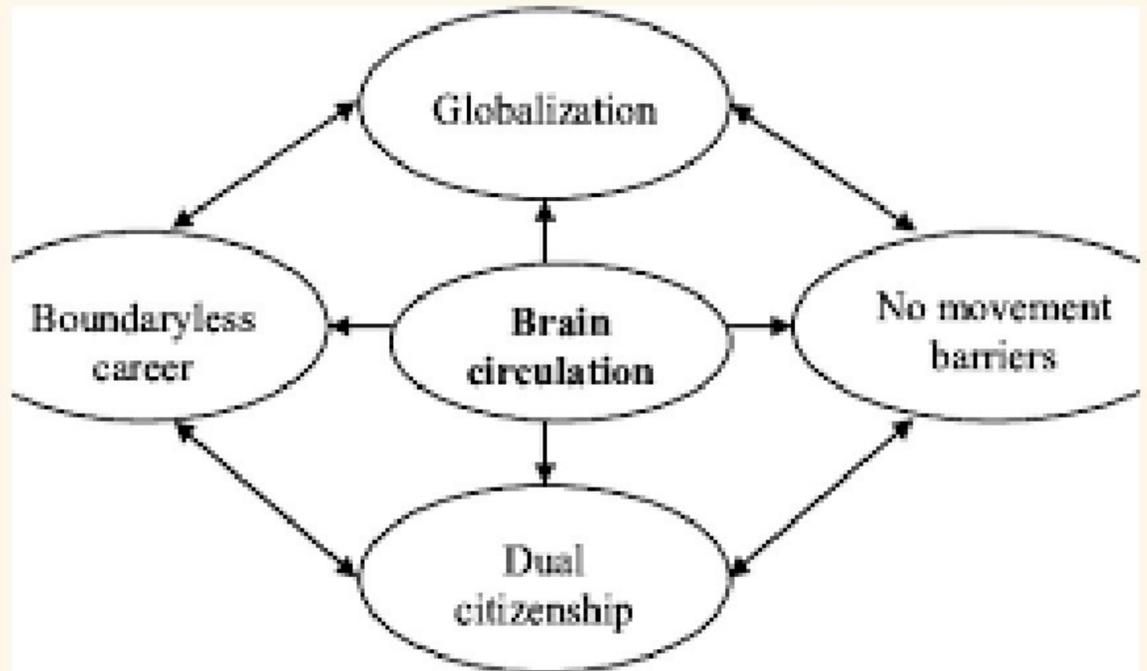
ART Concerns Unlike normal FTAs—permitted under WTO's GATT Article XXIV and requiring notification for oversight—Trump's Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs) skip WTO registration entirely, evading challenges from other nations. They impose one-sided pressure, forcing partners to slash tariffs on U.S. imports while America maintains high protective tariffs. Critics label them "imperial" because they bind weaker nations to U.S. priorities without reciprocity, eroding WTO's multilateral equality—developing countries like India must resist to safeguard balanced global trade.

CONTOURS

Attracting talent positioned abroad

Source : THE HINDU opinion 25/02/2026

Washington imposed a one-time \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas in 2025. This policy shift compels skilled Indian professionals to reassess U.S. opportunities. Companies now rethink global talent sourcing as costs rise sharply. This is all pointing towards a new migratory pathway for the skilled young demographic.



India's Talent Return Push

India actively urges its global diaspora, especially skilled professionals facing U.S. H-1B visa uncertainties, to return and fuel economic growth through human capital reinvestment. In this regard, GATI (Global Access to Talent from India) connects overseas experts with domestic opportunities while eMigrate V2.0 streamlines emigration documentation and return processes. VAJRA Faculty Scheme enables diaspora scientists to collaborate with Indian institutions and Know India Programme familiarises younger NRIs with homeland opportunities. Government is actively promoting a modern Swadeshi vision, encouraging reinvestment amid persistent weak private sector investment trends over the past decade. This strategic push aims to reverse brain drain into brain circulation leveraging 1.66 million Global Capability Centre jobs.

State-Level Challenges India faces significant state-level challenges in retaining returning H-1B professionals despite their high skills. Maharashtra hosts the nation's largest startup ecosystem and boasts a 2025 Startup Policy. However, it lacks housing subsidies, guaranteed school seats, and spousal employment support. This keeps household entry costs high in congested cities. Delhi draws returnees through institutional labs, policy networks, and ministries. Yet it favors those with established connections due to housing costs and elite university recruitment. Karnataka's Beyond Bengaluru and Skill Development Policy (2025-32) targets Global Capability Centres in Mysuru and Mangaluru. But inadequate global-standard research infrastructure, healthcare, and education constrain family readiness. Indians secured 71% of 399,395 H-1B approvals in FY2024. Master's degree holders now dominate at 57% of beneficiaries. Fee exemptions help F-1 to H-1B transitions for U.S.-educated graduates. However, new overseas applicants face the full \$100,000 burden. Returnee interest from U.S. roles has surged 30%.

Path Forward India's 0.64% GDP R&D spend should be re-evaluated to match the changing times. As a tech-driven growing economy, India's Global Capability Centres employ 1.66 million. Strengthening infrastructure could turn brain drain into circulation through incentives and family support.

Focus area : General Studies-III: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Committee to probe repeated failures of PSLV, says ISRO

India's space agency ISRO faces serious challenges after two major failures of its trusted Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). A high-level committee led by K. Vijay Raghavan, former Principal Scientific Adviser to the government, and S. Somanath, former ISRO Chairman, has been formed to investigate. Unlike routine technical probes, this team will examine deeper systemic and organisational issues that may have contributed to the problems. The recent disasters include PSLV-C62 on January 12, 2026, which crashed into the sea after its third stage failed to ignite, destroying 16 satellites. Just months earlier, on May 18, 2025, PSLV-C61 suffered the same third-stage failure, wiping out the strategic EOS-09 earth observation satellite critical for national security.

External experts on the committee will scrutinise ISRO's manufacturing processes, procurement systems, component assembly, and accountability mechanisms—especially important now that private companies play a bigger role in India's growing space ecosystem. Their comprehensive report is due to current ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan before April 2026.

Meanwhile, a separate technical ISRO committee will submit its PSLV-C62 failure analysis this week. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visited the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre soon after the C62 mishap. The C61 Failure Analysis report reached the Prime Minister's Office but remains confidential. Union Minister Jitendra Singh confirmed an independent third-party appraisal is underway. These steps show India's determination to fix PSLV issues and strengthen its space programme.

Fossils of a new species of huge dinosaur Spinosaurus unearthed in Niger

Scientists unearthed *Spinosaurus mirabilis* fossils in Niger's remote Sahara desert. This second species of the semiaquatic predator, dated to 95 million years ago, featured a 20-inch scimitar-like cranial crest, sail-back, and crocodile snout.

Hunting Adaptations The 40-foot, 5-7 ton dinosaur waded rivers like a "hell heron" to catch large fish such as coelacanths. Its rear nostrils allowed submersion while breathing. Interlocking conical teeth formed a "fish trap" for slippery prey.

Inland Predator Unlike coastal *S. aegyptiacus*, *mirabilis* lived 300-600 miles inland in forested waterways. Longer hind limbs and spread teeth distinguished it. The fragile crest likely served display for mating or territory, possibly colorful with keratin.

This refutes fully aquatic theories, confirming shallow-water hunting. Among largest meat-eaters with *T. rex*, it gained fame via Jurassic Park. Fossils from 2022 expedition highlight *Spinosaurus*' rising spotlight.



PRELIMS CORNER :

Q) Which one of the following foreign travellers elaborately discussed diamonds and diamond mines of India? (2018)

- (a) Francois Bernier
- (b) Jean-Baptiste Tavernier
- (c) Jean de Thevenot
- (d) Abbe Barthelemy Carre

Q) With reference to Indian history, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2021)

1. The Nizamat of Arcot emerged out of Hyderabad state.
2. The Mysore kingdom emerged out of Vijayanagara Empire.
3. Rohilkhand kingdom was formed out of the territories occupied by Ahmad Shah Durrani.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

HERITAGE

Kathakali



Kathakali, meaning "story-play" in Malayalam, emerged in 17th-century Kerala from temple art forms like Krishnanattam and Ramanattam, influenced by Koodiyattam Sanskrit theatre, folk rituals, and martial arts such as Kalaripayattu. This synthesis created a powerful sacred theatre blending devotion, drama, dance, music, elaborate costumes, and striking makeup to depict the eternal struggle between good and evil drawn from Hindu epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas.

Performances feature highly stylized mudras (hand gestures), expressive facial abhinaya (emotions via eye movements and lower eyelids), rhythmic footwork, and dynamic athletic poses symbolising sky/ether. All-male troupes historically enacted roles, with characters colour-coded: green for noble heroes, red for evil kings, black for demons, and white/yellow for women/gods. Stories unfold silently through gestures to intense percussive music from chenda drums, maddalam, and elathalam cymbals, plus vocalist narration.

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Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option b

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) was a French jeweler and traveler who extensively visited India in the 17th century. He is best known for his detailed accounts of his travels, particularly his observations of the diamond mines of India. Tavernier visited India multiple times and his writings, especially his book "Travels in India", provided a wealth of information about Indian diamonds, including the famous Golconda mines (which were known for producing some of the finest diamonds in the world, including the Koh-i-Noor). He detailed the methods of mining and the trade of diamonds in India, which were highly valued at the time. His descriptions of the diamond mines and the trade in precious stones in India were among the most comprehensive available to Europeans during his time.

- Francois Bernier - a French physician and traveler who visited India in the mid-17th century (1658–1668). He is known for his accounts of Mughal India, particularly under the reign of Aurangzeb.
- Jean de Thevenot - a French traveler and scholar who traveled to India in the 17th century, specifically between 1665 and 1668. Thevenot's accounts, "Travels in India", focus on the geography, customs, and cultural practices of the regions he visited.
- Abbe Barthelemy Carre was a French missionary and traveler who visited India during the 17th century. Carre's writings focus more on religious matters and the spread of Christianity in India. His accounts are not known for discussing the economic or commercial aspects of India, such as the diamond trade.

2) Answer is option b

Statement 1: The Nizamat of Arcot emerged out of Hyderabad state.: Incorrect. The Nizamat of Arcot was a separate political entity that did not directly emerge out of Hyderabad. While both Hyderabad and Arcot were part of the Mughal Empire, the Nizamat of Arcot was established as a semi-independent state after the decline of Mughal authority. Arcot was primarily a Mughal suba(province) before becoming more independent under the control of local rulers like the Nawabs of Arcot.

Statement 2: The Mysore kingdom emerged out of Vijayanagara Empire.: Correct. The Mysore Kingdom indeed emerged out of the Vijayanagara Empire. After the fall of Vijayanagara in 1565, the region became politically fragmented, and over time, the Mysore Kingdom rose from the remnants of the Vijayanagara Empire. Initially, Mysore was a small principality under the Wodeyar dynasty but later grew to become a powerful kingdom under rulers like Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. The fall of Vijayanagara left a power vacuum in southern India, and Mysore capitalized on this by expanding its territory and influence.

Statement 3: Rohilkhand kingdom was formed out of the territories occupied by Ahmad Shah Durrani.: Incorrect. The Rohilkhand Kingdom was not directly formed from territories occupied by Ahmad Shah Durrani(also known as Ahmad Shah Abdali). While Durrani's invasions in the mid-18th century (especially his raids between 1748–1761) weakened Mughal power in the region, the Rohillas, who were Afghan immigrants, established the Rohilkhand region through their own efforts. The Rohillas settled in the region and gradually formed their own independent state, but this was not a direct result of Ahmad Shah Durrani's military campaigns.



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