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Modi hails India's strides in nuclear, wind energy

THE HINDU : 27-04-2026 : Page 12



Overfed and undernourished

THE HINDU : 27-04-2026 : Page 4



New Zealand, India to sign free trade pact; tariffs to be removed on all exports

THE HINDU 27-04-2026 : Page 1

NATIONAL Page 2



Monsoon likely to be below-average this year, but flood threat stands

THE INDIAN EXPRESS 27-04-2026



PRELIMS CORNER

Page 8



**RBI INCOME SOURCES
AGRICULTURAL TAX**

**UPSC PYQ analysis -
ECONOMY**

EDITORIALS DECODED

Page 5



Tough call

India needs to develop rapid venom detection diagnostics



Season of scarcity, rich for reform



Cover Point

NSS survey shows gaps in health insurance design

Centre to resume Ladakh Statehood

In Ladakh, Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena announced that talks between the Union Home Ministry and civil society groups will resume on May 22, reviving stalled negotiations over demands for statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This comes ahead of Home Minister Amit Shah's visit, signalling renewed central engagement. The dialogue aims to address concerns of local bodies like the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance, which seek constitutional safeguards for tribal identity, land rights, and greater autonomy following Ladakh's 2019 transition to a Union Territory without a legislature. Earlier talks had stalled after violent protests and the detention of activist Sonam Wangchuk under the National Security Act. The renewed process reflects attempts to balance democratic aspirations with strategic and security considerations in this sensitive border region.

Monsoon likely to be below-average this year, but flood threat stands

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has projected below-normal monsoon rainfall at 92% of the long-period average. However, such aggregate forecasts fail to capture intra-seasonal and regional variability, which are defining features of the Indian monsoon. Crucially, overall rainfall levels do not indicate the occurrence or intensity of extreme rainfall events, which often drive disasters.

Rising Trend of Extreme Rainfall Events

Extreme rainfall events (above 21 cm/day as per IMD classification) constitute less than 0.1% of total events but have increased significantly. Their frequency has risen from below 100 annually (pre-2016) to over 100 consistently since 2017, reaching 181 in 2024. This trend persists despite definitional changes, indicating a genuine increase, with climate change identified as a key driver.

Major rainfall-triggered disasters

Year	Event
2013	Kedarnath disaster
2014	Kashmir flooding
2015	Chennai floods
2016	Bengaluru record-breaking rains
2017	Gujarat floods
2018	Kerala floods
2019	Maharashtra floods (Kolhapur, Pune)
2020	Hyderabad floods
2021	Uttarakhand rains, landslides
2022	Assam floods
2023	Himachal Pradesh, Delhi
2024	Wayanad landslides
2025	Dharali, Uttarakhand

Increasing Intensity and Disaster Linkages

Beyond frequency, the intensity of rainfall has increased, with shorter, more concentrated spells raising disaster risks. Events like the Kedarnath tragedy, Jammu and Kashmir floods, Chennai floods, and Kerala floods highlight how extreme rainfall triggers large-scale humanitarian and economic losses. Notably, such disasters occur irrespective of overall monsoon performance.

The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events signify a structural shift in monsoon dynamics under climate change. Addressing this challenge requires integrating scientific forecasting with robust urban governance and long-term climate adaptation strategies.



Urban Flooding and Governance Challenges

Rapid urbanisation, poor land-use planning, encroachment on floodplains, and inadequate drainage systems have exacerbated flood vulnerability in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Kochi. While extreme rainfall acts as a trigger, governance failures amplify impacts, making urban flooding a major policy concern.

Scientific Constraints and Climate Uncertainty

Weather prediction remains inherently uncertain due to the chaotic nature of atmospheric systems. While improvements in modelling and data networks help, precise prediction of rainfall magnitude (e.g., 250 mm vs 500 mm) remains difficult. Climate change has further increased unpredictability, making extreme weather events more frequent and intense globally.

Measures for Prevention: A Multi-Pronged Approach

Floods have caused nearly 17,500 deaths between 2012 and 2021 in India. Out of all disasters, they account for over 55% of disaster-related expenditure by states (2019–24). Disruptions in major urban centres also have significant economic consequences, affecting infrastructure, productivity, and livelihoods.

Policy Shift and Way Forward

Policy focus has shifted from managing rainfall deficiency to tackling excess, localised rainfall. Strengthening urban planning, enforcing land-use regulations, improving drainage infrastructure, and enhancing early warning systems are critical. Greater inter-agency coordination and climate-resilient infrastructure are essential to mitigate risks.

Overfed and undernourished

India is increasingly facing the **Double Burden of Malnutrition (DBM)**, where undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies coexist with rising obesity. Children are consuming calorie-rich but nutrient-poor diets, leading to simultaneous issues of overweight and poor health outcomes. This reflects a transition from traditional malnutrition (e.g., protein deficiency diseases) to diet-related imbalances linked to lifestyle changes.

Trends and Data on Childhood Obesity

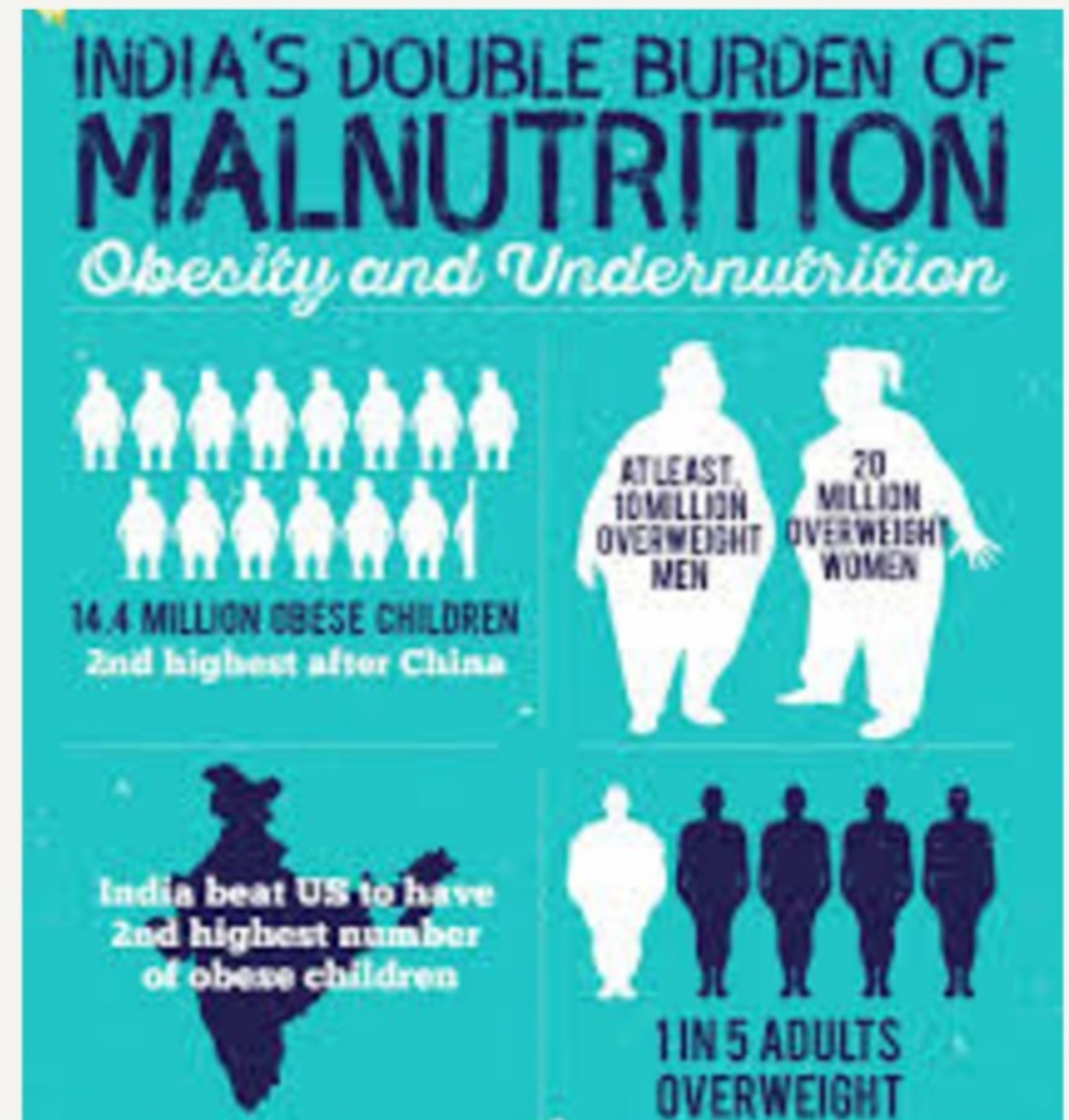
A 2025 meta-analysis published in the Indian Journal of Community Medicine found significant regional variation, with states like Arunachal Pradesh and Delhi showing high prevalence, while Manipur recorded the lowest. UNICEF estimates suggest India may have over 27 million obese children (5–19 years) by 2030. The Economic Survey 2024–25 highlights a sharp rise in ultra-processed food consumption from \$900 million (2006) to \$37.9 billion (2019).

Drivers of Rising Obesity

Urbanisation has reduced physical activity due to limited open spaces, increased screen time, and academic pressure. Dietary transitions toward ultra-processed foods high in sugar, salt, and fats have increased calorie intake. Environmental factors like pollution discourage outdoor activity and may influence metabolic health. Additionally, rising incomes, changing family structures, and aggressive food marketing have accelerated unhealthy consumption patterns.

Health and Economic Implications

Childhood obesity increases the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers. Early onset of these conditions raises long-term healthcare costs, reduces productivity, and burdens public health systems. The shift in disease patterns reflects a growing epidemiological transition in India.



Socio-economic Dimensions and Inequality

Childhood obesity is no longer confined to affluent groups but is spreading across socio-economic strata. However, disparities persist, as seen in higher obesity prevalence among private-school students compared to government-school children (as per All India Institute of Medical Sciences study). This coexistence of undernutrition among poorer sections and obesity among wealthier groups complicates targeted policy interventions.

Policy Response and Governance Challenges

Government initiatives such as the Fit India Movement, Eat Right India, and POSHAN Abhiyan aim to address nutritional issues. However, gaps remain in implementation, behavioural change, and monitoring effectiveness. School-based interventions and awareness campaigns have yet to produce substantial impact.

Way Forward

India's emerging "triple burden" of malnutrition—undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, and obesity—requires integrated policy action. Strengthening nutrition education, regulating ultra-processed food marketing, promoting physical activity, and improving urban planning are critical. A preventive, multi-sectoral approach with continuous monitoring is essential to curb childhood obesity and ensure long-term public health sustainability.

Modi hails India's strides in nuclear, wind energy

Wind and nuclear energy are in focus following India's achievement of criticality at the Kalpakkam fast breeder reactor and the crossing of 56 GW wind energy capacity. These developments highlight India's accelerating push toward clean, reliable, and self-reliant energy sources.

Recent Developments: Nuclear and Renewable Push

The achievement of "criticality" at the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) in Kalpakkam marks a major milestone in India's nuclear energy programme. Criticality signifies the start of a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction, enabling operational readiness. Alongside, India's wind energy capacity has crossed 56 GW, with an addition of about 6 GW in the past year, reinforcing its renewable energy expansion.

Nuclear Energy: Role and Strategic Significance

Nuclear energy provides reliable baseload power with low carbon emissions, crucial for energy security and climate commitments. The Kalpakkam reactor is part of India's three-stage nuclear programme, aimed at utilising vast thorium reserves. Indigenous development enhances strategic autonomy and reduces dependence on external technology, governed under the Atomic Energy Act 1962 and regulated by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board.

Renewable Energy Expansion: Wind Sector Growth

India ranks fourth globally in wind energy capacity, after major economies. States like Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan are leading installations. Renewable energy growth aligns with India's climate commitments, including the 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity target under the Panchamrit goals, while also generating employment and regional development.

India's simultaneous push in nuclear and renewable energy reflects a diversified strategy to ensure energy security and meet climate goals. Strengthening infrastructure, addressing technological constraints, and improving governance mechanisms will be key to sustaining this transition while supporting long-term economic growth.



Challenges in Energy Transition

Despite progress, nuclear energy faces issues such as high capital costs, long gestation periods, radioactive waste management, and safety concerns. Wind energy expansion is constrained by intermittency, land acquisition challenges, and transmission bottlenecks. Balancing reliability, affordability, and sustainability remains a key policy challenge.

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Governance and Technological Dimensions

India's focus on indigenous nuclear technology reflects the need for technological self-reliance. However, scaling nuclear capacity requires regulatory clarity, enhanced safety frameworks, and public acceptance. In renewables, grid integration and storage solutions are essential for optimal utilisation of installed capacity.

The Indian EXPRESS

Season of scarcity, rich for reform

A below-normal southwest monsoon forecast by the India Meteorological Department, combined with a possible El Niño event, signals risks to both kharif and subsequent rabi crops, though improved irrigation has partly reduced rainfall vulnerability. A more pressing concern is an unprecedented fertiliser supply shock triggered by disruptions in West Asia, affecting not just finished fertilisers like urea and DAP but also key inputs such as natural gas, ammonia and sulphur. The disruption of trade routes, particularly the Strait of Hormuz, along with export restrictions by major suppliers, has constrained global availability. Given India's heavy import dependence for fertiliser inputs, shortages could intensify, raising input costs and threatening agricultural output. This situation underscores the limits of price-based subsidies when supply itself is uncertain. It points to the need for structural reforms, including improving nutrient availability, exploring alternatives, and shifting from product-based subsidies to direct income support for farmers to ensure both efficiency and resilience in the agricultural sector.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

"India's agricultural resilience is increasingly challenged not just by climatic variability but by input supply vulnerabilities." Examine the limitations of the existing fertiliser subsidy regime and discuss the need for structural reforms in India's agricultural input policy.



Tough call

Kerala is witnessing continued snakebite fatalities despite the availability of anti-snake venom (ASV), driven by ecological and systemic factors. A hotter summer and pre-monsoon breeding season have increased snake-human interactions, while dense vegetation and habitat overlap heighten exposure risks. Although nearly 70% of bites are from non-venomous snakes and many others are "dry bites," the absence of reliable diagnostic tools forces reliance on symptomatic assessment, a limitation flagged by the Indian Council of Medical Research. This creates a clinical dilemma, as unnecessary ASV administration risks fatal anaphylaxis, while delays in treatment can lead to irreversible damage. Infrastructure gaps—including limited ICU beds, ventilators, trained personnel, and lab support—further weaken outcomes. While initiatives like Kerala's SARPA programme and making snakebite a notifiable disease improve prevention and awareness, the persistence of deaths highlights the need to strengthen treatment capacity, develop rapid diagnostic kits, and enhance clinical decision-making at the primary care level.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Snakebite envenomation in India reflects a complex interplay of ecological exposure and health system limitations. Discuss the challenges in effective management of snakebite cases in India, with particular reference to diagnostic constraints and healthcare infrastructure. Suggest measures to improve outcomes.

thehindu **businessline.**

TUESDAY - MARCH 31, 2026

Cover Point

Data from the 80th round of the National Sample Survey (2025) indicate improved access to healthcare and a sharp rise in health insurance coverage in India, aided by schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, with coverage rising to about 47.4% in rural and 44.3% in urban areas from much lower levels in 2017-18. Reported ailments have increased from 7.5% to 13.1%, driven largely by higher detection of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions, which implies rising long-term treatment costs. Institutional births have significantly increased to over 95% across rural and urban areas, though a growing preference for costlier private hospitals suggests persistent trust deficits in public healthcare. Hospitalisation rates remain highest among infants and the elderly, while insurance coverage is skewed towards the working-age population, limiting its effectiveness. Despite expanded coverage, out-of-pocket expenditure remains high, with significantly greater spending in private facilities, indicating gaps in financial protection. These trends highlight the need to strengthen public healthcare delivery and redesign insurance frameworks to ensure affordability, inclusiveness, and effective risk coverage.

Editorial to Exam - Most probable question from this editorial

Despite improvements in health insurance coverage and institutional healthcare access in India, out-of-pocket expenditure remains persistently high. Examine the underlying structural issues and suggest measures to enhance financial equity in health outcomes.

New Zealand, India to sign FTA; tariffs to be removed on all exports

India and New Zealand are set to sign a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), marking a significant step in bilateral economic relations. The agreement eliminates tariffs on 100% of Indian exports to New Zealand and reduces or removes tariffs on about 95% of New Zealand's exports to India. Negotiated within a short span (March–December 2025), it reflects India's increasing engagement in trade liberalisation.

Key Trade Provisions and Market Access

New Zealand will provide duty-free access to all Indian tariff lines, reducing its average tariff (around 2.2% in 2025) to zero. Indian exports such as textiles, leather, carpets, and auto components stand to benefit. India, in turn, offers market access on about 70% of tariff lines, with phased tariff reductions. Bilateral trade has already shown growth, with India's exports rising to \$711.1 million and imports to \$587.1 million in 2024–25.

Protection of Sensitive Sectors

India has excluded key sectors such as dairy, certain agricultural products (onions, pulses, corn), sugar, and metals like aluminium and copper. This reflects a calibrated FTA strategy aimed at safeguarding domestic farmers and industries, particularly against competition from New Zealand's highly efficient dairy sector.

Investment and Mobility Provisions

The agreement includes a commitment by New Zealand to invest \$20 billion in India over 15 years, enhancing capital inflows and economic cooperation. It also facilitates mobility of professionals and students, allowing Indian students to work part-time and access extended post-study work visas, thereby strengthening people-to-people ties.

India's FTA strategy with leading economies has evolved toward pragmatic, balanced agreements that prioritise services, investments, and supply-chain resilience while safeguarding sensitive sectors such as agriculture. Recent engagements with partners like United Kingdom, European Union, Oman, Australia, European Free Trade Association, and New Zealand reflect this calibrated shift aimed at deeper integration into global value chains and reducing overdependence on China. Within this broader framework, the India–New Zealand FTA exemplifies a careful blend of trade liberalisation and domestic protection.



Conceptual Background: FTAs and India's Approach

FTAs are trade agreements aimed at reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers to promote bilateral trade. India has increasingly adopted a balanced approach—liberalising trade while protecting sensitive sectors. This reflects lessons from past agreements and aligns with the broader strategy of integrating into global value chains without compromising domestic interests.

Economic and Strategic Implications

The FTA is expected to boost exports, improve competitiveness, and deepen economic ties in the Indo-Pacific region. However, challenges remain in addressing non-tariff barriers, meeting quality standards, and improving logistics. Strategically, the pact strengthens India's trade diversification and reduces overdependence on select markets.

CSIP SCHOLARSHIP GUIDE

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4 Days to go - 4 model questions

- 1.The term ‘Loss and Damage Fund’ is associated with which global issue?
- 2.The ‘Gini Coefficient’ is used to measure what aspect of an economy?
- 3.‘Red Sanders’, frequently seen in news, is primarily associated with which ecological region in India?
- 4.‘Blue Flag Certification’ is awarded for what specific purpose?



Red Sanders

Answers to the Previous Day's Questions

- 1.Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala
- 2.European Union
- 3.Kessler Syndrome – space debris collision cascade
- 4.BBNJ Agreement – conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the high seas
- 5.Quantum Key Distribution – secure communication using quantum principles
6. Stagflation – low growth with high inflation

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) Which of the following are the sources of income for the Reserve Bank of India?

- I. Buying and selling Government bonds
- II. Buying and selling foreign currency
- III. Pension fund management
- IV. Lending to private companies
- V. Printing and distributing currency notes

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) I and II only
- (b) II, III and IV
- (c) I, III, IV and V
- (d) I, II and V

2) Consider the following statements:

Statement I: In India, income from allied agricultural activities like poultry farming and wool rearing in rural areas is exempted from any tax.

Statement II: In India, rural agricultural land is not considered a capital asset under the provisions of the Income-tax Act, 1961.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- (a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement explains Statement I
- (b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct but Statement II does not explain Statement I
- (c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is not correct
- (d) Statement I is not correct but Statement II is correct

WONDERS OF INDIA

Discover the diverse cultural heritage of India, one tradition at a time.



The Khajuraho Group of Monuments, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, stands as a remarkable testament to the artistic brilliance of the Chandela dynasty. Built between the 10th and 11th centuries (c. 950–1050 CE), this temple complex once comprised around 85 temples spread across a vast landscape, though only about 20–25 survive today. These temples, designed in the elegant Nagara style of architecture, are celebrated for their intricate carvings that vividly portray gods, goddesses, celestial beings, and scenes from everyday life.

Beyond their architectural grandeur, Khajuraho's sculptures offer a deeper glimpse into medieval Indian thought, depicting themes of spirituality, devotion, human relationships, and artistic expression. The graceful figures of nayikas and finely detailed motifs reflect both aesthetic sophistication and symbolic meaning, making Khajuraho not just a historical site, but a living narrative of India's rich cultural and philosophical heritage.



Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) The correct answer is (d) I, II and V.

The core mandate of the Reserve Bank of India is to ensure macroeconomic stability and the smooth functioning of India's financial system by controlling inflation, managing the value of the rupee, and ensuring efficient payment and settlement systems. However, these functions also generate sizeable income for the central bank.

I. Buying and selling Government bonds :

This is Correct. It is part of RBI's open market operations (OMO). While the goal is monetary control, RBI does earn interest and trading gains from these securities.

II. Buying and selling foreign currency :

This is Correct. RBI actively manages forex reserves, investing them and earning returns (interest/capital gains). Currency operations can also generate income.

III. Pension fund management : This is Incorrect. RBI does not operate as a pension fund manager. That role is handled by institutions like PFRDA/NPS frameworks, not RBI.

IV. Lending to private companies : This is incorrect. RBI does not lend directly to private firms. It lends to banks and financial institutions, not companies.

V. Printing and distributing currency notes: This is Correct. This generates seigniorage income.

2) Answer is option D

Under the Income Tax Act, agricultural income includes rent or income from an agricultural land, earnings from agricultural activities, and income from buildings essential for carrying out agriculture. Agricultural income is exempted under the Income Tax Act.

As per the provisions of the Income-tax Act, agricultural land includes revenue from agricultural land and building, and income from agricultural activities. This can be broadly classified into 3 categories:

1. Rent or revenue earned from agricultural land situated in India.
2. Income from agricultural land arising from primary agricultural activities and the sale of agricultural produce.
3. Income from building required for agricultural operations.

Examples of non-agricultural income:

- Income from poultry farming.
- Income from agricultural land held as stock-in-trade
- Any dividend paid from an organization's agriculture income.
- Income from dairy farming.
- Income from bee hiving.
- Income from fisheries.
- Income from cutting and selling timber trees.
- Income from butter and cheese making.
- Receipts from TV serial shooting in the farmhouse.

In this manner, statement I is incorrect and statement II is correct.

