

THE PALA CIVIL TIMES

Civil Service Institute | Pala | Thiruvananthapuram | South India's Premier Civil Service Coaching Institute | [www.civilservicepala.org](http://www.civilservicepala.org)

P2. NATIONAL



**Judicial Vacations in India: Reforming Court Functioning** - Reforms  
Analyses the debate over India's colonial-era judicial vacation system and the reforms needed to improve judicial efficiency, reduce pendency, and ensure timely access to justice.

P3. NATIONAL



**India discusses agricultural collaboration with Taliban government of Afghanistan** -  
Examines the expansion of India-Afghanistan agricultural cooperation as a practical avenue for strengthening bilateral engagement.

P4. HEALTH



**West Bengal conducts filariasis drug drive, targets elimination by 2030** - explains how India is eliminating lymphatic filariasis through preventive mass drug administration while highlighting the public health, governance, and community participation challenges involved.

Editor's Note

The latest edition of Pala Civil Times brings together a diverse set of issues spanning healthcare, governance, the judiciary, international relations, and the economy. This edition explores the debate on India's judicial vacation system and the broader reforms required to improve judicial efficiency and ensure timely access to justice. It also examines India's expanding agricultural cooperation with Afghanistan, reflecting the country's pragmatic diplomatic engagement while advancing mutual developmental interests.

In the healthcare section, the focus is on lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis) and West Bengal's Mass Drug Administration campaign, explaining how preventive healthcare, community participation, and public awareness are central to eliminating neglected tropical diseases. The international affairs section analyses the renewed global support for the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award and the continuing geopolitical and legal contest over maritime claims.

The Decoded Editorials section examines two important themes shaping India's economic strategy. The first analyses the country's emergence as a global services hub through the rapid growth of Global Capability Centres while highlighting the continuing need to strengthen manufacturing for broad-based employment generation. The second explores India's evolving crude oil import strategy, balancing energy security, diversification of supply sources, and geopolitical risks amid changing global energy dynamics.

Together, they encourage readers to move beyond the headlines and develop a deeper understanding of the policy choices shaping contemporary India and the wider world.

Editorials Decoded

P7. WORLD



**U.S., U.K., and 12 other nations reaffirm 2016 ruling invalidating China's claims in South China Sea** - Explains the legal and geopolitical dimensions of the South China Sea dispute, focusing on the 2016 arbitral ruling, competing territorial claims, and the importance of a rules-based maritime order.

The Indian EXPRESS

**GCC is office success story. Now, focus on factory**



Analyses India's emergence as a global services hub through GCCs while highlighting the continuing need to strengthen manufacturing for broad-based employment and balanced economic growth.

THE HINDU

**Oil conundrum**



Examines how India balances energy security, import diversification, and geopolitical risks while adapting its crude oil sourcing strategy during global supply disruptions.

## Judicial Vacations in India: Reforming Court Functioning

The Supreme Court and High Courts continue to follow a system of extended summer vacations, a practice inherited from the colonial period when British judges suspended regular court work during the Indian summer. Although vacation benches hear urgent matters during this period, regular judicial functioning is significantly reduced, raising concerns regarding timely access to justice. In 2024, the Supreme Court renamed the summer recess as '**Partial Court Working Days**', but the total number of annual sitting days remained largely unchanged.

### Why is the Existing System Debated?

- India's judiciary faces a substantial pendency burden, with over 5.39 crore cases pending as of December 31, 2025, including 4.76 crore cases in district courts, 63.6 lakh in High Courts, and over 92,000 cases in the Supreme Court.
- Nearly three-fourths of India's prison population consists of undertrial prisoners, many of whom remain incarcerated for prolonged periods because of delays in the judicial process.
- Simultaneous court vacations reduce the effective judicial capacity at a time when courts are already functioning under significant workload pressures.
- While judicial vacations provide judges with time to write reserved judgments and manage heavy workloads, critics argue that institutional continuity should not be interrupted through collective closure.



### Structural Challenges Affecting Judicial Efficiency

- Judicial delays primarily stem from multiple structural factors, including **high case pendency, shortage of judges, procedural delays, and inadequate judicial infrastructure**, rather than vacations alone.
- A significant proportion of sanctioned judicial posts, particularly in High Courts, continues to remain vacant, limiting the disposal of pending cases.
- Since changes to the court calendar fall within the judiciary's administrative domain, reforms in scheduling can be implemented more quickly than structural reforms requiring executive action.

### RELEVANCE

GS II : Indian Polity - Judiciary

### Suggested Reforms

- Judicial vacations may be staggered instead of being observed simultaneously, allowing courts to function at full institutional capacity throughout the year while ensuring adequate leave for judges.
- Filling judicial vacancies should remain a priority to improve the judge-to-population ratio and increase case disposal rates.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as Lok Adalats, mediation, and arbitration to reduce the burden on conventional courts.
- The Mediation Act, 2023 should be effectively implemented to encourage pre-litigation settlement of disputes wherever feasible.
- The expertise of retired judges may be better utilised for judicial administration, case management, tribunal work, and pendency reduction initiatives.
- Technology-enabled case management, procedural simplification, and periodic monitoring of disposal targets can further improve judicial efficiency.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Discuss the evolution of the collegium system in India. Critically examine the advantages and disadvantages of the system of appointment of the Judges of the Supreme Court of India and that of the USA. (GS II – 2025)

Q. Explain and distinguish between Lok Adalats and Arbitration Tribunals. Do they entertain civil as well as criminal cases? (GS II – 2024)

## India discusses agricultural collaboration with Taliban government of Afghanistan

The Taliban administration of Afghanistan has expressed its interest in expanding agricultural cooperation with India during the six-day (July 7–12, 2026) visit of Afghanistan's Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Abdullah Omari.

### Latest Discussions

Discussions covered cooperation in agriculture, irrigation, livestock, agricultural research, education, capacity building, food processing, and agri-trade, with particular emphasis on **food security, improved seed systems, climate-resilient and bio-fortified crop varieties**, and enhancing crop productivity. The two sides also explored extending the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Afghan National Agricultural Science and Technology University** beyond 2026. The Afghan delegation held consultations with key Indian institutions, including NABARD, ICAR, IARI, FICCI, and the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, reflecting a broader focus on strengthening agricultural research, institutional partnerships, and value addition in the agricultural sector. India reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Afghanistan's agricultural development through technical cooperation, research collaboration, and capacity building.

The visit also reflects the gradual expansion of India–Taliban engagement since the Taliban regained power in August 2021. While India has not formally recognised the Taliban administration, it has adopted a pragmatic approach by maintaining diplomatic contacts, upgrading its diplomatic presence in Kabul to the level of Chargé d'Affaires, and continuing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Against the backdrop of evolving regional dynamics and Afghanistan's efforts to diversify its international partnerships, cooperation in sectors such as agriculture has emerged as a practical avenue for sustaining bilateral engagement while advancing mutual developmental interests.

### RELEVANCE

**GS III : Indian Economy - Agriculture; GS II : Indian Polity - Judiciary**

## Judicial Infrastructure and Access to Justice

- While inaugurating the Tower of Justice, a new judicial complex for the Gurugram District and Sessions Court, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) emphasised that access to justice extends beyond judicial decisions and depends significantly on the quality of judicial infrastructure.
- The CJI observed that providing an environment that inspires confidence among socially and economically disadvantaged litigants is a shared constitutional responsibility of the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary.

### Why is the Existing System Debated?

- The CJI stated that courts should provide basic facilities such as adequate seating, safe drinking water, and hygienic washrooms, comparing these amenities to the "first aid" that hospitals provide to patients.
- He highlighted that citizen-centric infrastructure improves the accessibility and inclusiveness of the justice delivery system, particularly for vulnerable sections of society.
- The CJI noted that many judicial complexes continue to lack adequate facilities for women advocates.
- He emphasised that modern court complexes should mandatorily provide gender-responsive infrastructure, including dedicated facilities for women members of the Bar.
- The CJI also recommended establishing childcare rooms adjacent to women advocates' rooms, recognising that supportive workplace infrastructure is essential for improving women's participation and retention in the legal profession.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. "Though women in post-Independent India have excelled in various fields, the social attitude towards women and feminist movement has been patriarchal." Apart from women education and women empowerment schemes, what interventions can help change this milieu? (GS II – Social Justice – 2021)

# HEALTH

## West Bengal conducts filariasis drug drive, targets elimination by 2030

The West Bengal Health Department has launched a **Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaign** against **lymphatic filariasis** with the objective of eliminating the disease from the State by **2030**. The campaign follows the National Programme for Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis and aligns with India's broader commitment to eliminate neglected tropical diseases.

### What is Lymphatic filariasis?

- Lymphatic filariasis, commonly known as elephantiasis, is a mosquito-borne parasitic disease that damages the lymphatic system.
- It is caused by filarial roundworms, primarily ***Wuchereria bancrofti***, which are transmitted to humans through the bites of infected mosquitoes such as ***Culex, Anopheles, and Aedes*** species.
- The parasites remain in the human lymphatic system for several years, during which infected individuals often show no symptoms despite being capable of transmitting the infection to mosquitoes.
- Chronic infection damages the lymphatic vessels and may result in lymphoedema, elephantiasis of the limbs, hydrocele, and permanent disability, often accompanied by social stigma and loss of livelihood.
- Due to the asymptomatic nature of the disease, routine diagnosis is difficult.

### Government Response and Policy Framework

- The World Health Organization recommends **Mass Drug Administration** as the primary strategy for eliminating lymphatic filariasis because treating the entire at-risk population interrupts the transmission cycle even when infected individuals cannot be easily identified.
- Under India's MDA programme, eligible individuals receive **Diethylcarbamazine (DEC) and Albendazole** free of cost through annual campaigns.
- The programme excludes children below two years of age, pregnant women, and critically ill individuals while aiming to achieve at least **85% treatment coverage** to effectively interrupt transmission.
- Alongside preventive chemotherapy, long-term disease management includes hydrocele surgeries, lymphoedema care, disability management, and rehabilitation services for affected individuals.

### RELEVANCE

**GS II : Healthcare**

### Implementation Challenges and Policy Significance

- The asymptomatic nature discourages healthy-looking individuals from consuming preventive medicines, making behavioural change one of the greatest implementation challenges.
- Social stigma associated with the disease further reduces community participation and delays treatment, thereby sustaining transmission within endemic regions.
- Achieving uniformly high drug coverage across geographically diverse and vulnerable populations requires strong coordination among the Central Government, State Governments, frontline health workers, and local communities.
- The programme highlights the importance of preventive healthcare because eliminating transmission is considerably more effective and economical than managing irreversible disabilities after infection.
- The campaign also demonstrates how successful public health interventions depend not only on medicines but equally on awareness generation, trust-building, surveillance, and sustained administrative capacity.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Consider the following statements:

Statement-I: India's public sector health care system largely focuses on curative care with limited preventive, promotive and rehabilitative care.

Statement-II: Under India's decentralized approach to health care delivery, the States are primarily responsible for organizing health services. Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
- Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I
- Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
- Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct

## GCC is office success story. Now, focus on factory (Indian Express : 13-07-2026)

India has emerged as a global hub for Global Capability Centres (GCCs), which provide technology, engineering, research, finance, and business support services to multinational corporations. According to the Finance Minister, India hosts over 2,100 GCCs established by more than 500 companies from the Forbes Global 2000 list. These GCCs employ around 23 lakh professionals, generate nearly US\$100 billion in annual revenue, and have evolved from cost-saving back offices into strategic centres for engineering research, enterprise platforms, artificial intelligence, and clinical research.

### India's Comparative Advantage in Services

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India has largely flowed into the services sector, unlike China where FDI primarily supported manufacturing, contributing to its emergence as the "world's factory."
- India's strong services ecosystem has positioned it as the "world's office", supported by its large pool of skilled professionals and expanding digital economy.
- During 2025-26, India's **services exports reached US\$421.3 billion**, nearly matching **merchandise exports of US\$446.1 billion**.
- While India recorded a merchandise trade deficit of US\$337.3 billion, it achieved a services trade surplus of US\$216.6 billion.
- India currently hosts around half of all GCCs worldwide and continues to add approximately one new GCC every day, showing growth in high-value services.

### Challenges and the Need for Balanced Growth

- Most GCCs and IT companies remain concentrated in Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai, and Pune, where advanced infrastructure and a large skilled workforce support their operations.
- Expanding GCCs to tier-2 and tier-3 cities, such as Varanasi, Visakhapatnam, Mysuru, and Tiruchirappalli, requires significant improvements in physical infrastructure, digital connectivity, and the availability of skilled human resources.
- Unlike service industries, manufacturing activities can be more easily established in semi-urban and rural areas where lower land and labour costs offer competitive advantages.
- Labour-intensive manufacturing sectors such as textiles, leather, agro-processing, and gems and jewellery remain essential for creating large-scale employment opportunities for India's less-skilled workforce.



### Policy Significance

- India's growing strength in GCCs demonstrates its comparative advantage in knowledge-intensive services and reinforces the country's position in global value chains.
- At the same time, sustained economic growth requires a balanced development strategy that strengthens both high-value services and employment-intensive manufacturing.
- Expanding manufacturing alongside services can improve employment generation, promote regional industrial development, diversify exports, and enhance long-term economic resilience.
- The broader policy objective is therefore not to choose between manufacturing and services, but to develop both factories and offices as complementary drivers of India's economic transformation.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Faster economic growth requires increased share of the manufacturing sector in GDP, particularly of MSMEs. Comment on the present policies of the Government in this regard (GS III – Indian Economy – 2023)

### RELEVANCE

GS III : Indian Economy

## Oil conundrum (The Hindu : 13-07-2026)

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI), Russia accounted for over 40% of India's crude oil imports in May 2026, returning to pre-sanction levels and marking its highest share in nearly two years. The increase followed disruptions in crude supplies after the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz in late February 2026, which affected a major global energy trade route. The development has renewed the debate on balancing energy security, import diversification, geopolitical risks, and strategic autonomy in India's crude oil procurement strategy.

### Why Has India Increased Crude Imports from Russia?

- The Government stated that higher Russian crude imports were part of its strategy to ensure uninterrupted energy supplies after the disruption of shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.
- According to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, 45–50% of India's crude oil imports normally pass through the Strait of Hormuz, making its disruption a major energy security challenge.
- To reduce dependence on this maritime chokepoint, India increased the share of non-Hormuz crude imports from 55% to 70% within a few weeks.
- By June 2026, Russian crude imports had risen to around 2.6 million barrels per day, accounting for more than half of India's total crude imports.
- India also strengthened energy diplomacy with Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to secure alternative crude oil and LPG supplies during the crisis.



### Government's Response

- The Government rejected the argument that India is becoming overly dependent on a few suppliers, stating that the country's crude oil sourcing network has expanded from 27 countries a decade ago to more than 41 countries by 2026.
- Since the onset of the West Asia crisis, India has initiated or expanded crude oil imports from Iran, Chad, Algeria, Togo, Egypt, Venezuela, Brazil, Angola, Oman, Gabon, and South Sudan, alongside increased imports from Russia.
- The Government argued that Russian crude compensated for the temporary disruption of West Asian supplies and ensured that energy security was not compromised during the crisis.
- To minimise disruptions from sanctions and maritime chokepoints, India also utilised ship-to-ship transfer operations in international waters through the Red Sea route via Yanbu and Fujairah.
- The Government maintained that its engagement with countries such as Venezuela was part of a long-term diversification strategy rather than a sudden policy shift triggered by the crisis.

### Concerns Associated with the Current Import Pattern

- Higher dependence on a single supplier may reduce India's bargaining power, increase supply risks, and limit flexibility in responding to future geopolitical disruptions.
- Payments for Russian crude in Chinese yuan may indirectly support the internationalisation of the Chinese currency.
- According to MCI data, Russian crude carried a premium of US\$46 per tonne, resulting in an 83% increase in import value despite a 2% decline in import volume, potentially reducing refining margins for Indian refiners.
- Continued dependence on Russian crude also exposes India to evolving sanctions regimes.

### RELEVANCE

GS III : Infrastructure - Energy

#### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India's foreign policy, and is linked with India's overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries." How would you integrate energy security with India's foreign policy trajectories in the coming years? (GS II – International Relations – 2025)

## U.S., U.K., and 12 other nations reaffirm 2016 ruling invalidating China's claims in South China Sea

On 12 July 2026, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, Italy, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia jointly reaffirmed the 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award, describing it as final, legally binding and definitive under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

### Nature of the South China Sea Dispute

- The South China Sea is one of the world's most strategically important maritime regions and serves as a major international trade route.
- China claims sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea and continues to defend its claims despite the 2016 arbitral ruling.
- These claims overlap with those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan, making the region one of Asia's most significant geopolitical flashpoints.
- Territorial confrontations have become more frequent in recent years, particularly between Chinese and Philippine forces and fishing fleets.
- According to the joint statement, Chinese coast guard ships and support vessels have employed water cannons, military-grade lasers, and dangerous blocking manoeuvres, resulting in repeated maritime confrontations and increasing risks to regional peace and security.

### 2016 Arbitral Award under UNCLOS

- The arbitration proceedings were initiated by the Philippines in 2013 under the dispute settlement provisions of UNCLOS, following tensions with China over disputed maritime features.
- In its 12 July 2016 award, the Arbitral Tribunal held that there is no legal basis under UNCLOS for China's claim of historic rights over resources within the South China Sea beyond the maritime entitlements recognised under the Convention.
- The Tribunal ruled largely in favour of the Philippines and clarified that China's expansive maritime claims are not supported by international law.
- China refused to participate in the arbitration proceedings and has consistently rejected the award, describing it as "illegal, null and void", while continuing to assert its maritime claims.

### RELEVANCE

GS II : International Relations



### Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

- The joint statement reflects continued international support for a rules-based maritime order and reinforces the importance of resolving maritime disputes through international law rather than unilateral actions.
- The participating countries reiterated their opposition to the use of coercion, maritime militia, coast guard vessels, and military assets to obstruct lawful activities at sea or in the air.
- The United States has repeatedly affirmed that its Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines applies to armed attacks against Philippine forces, vessels, or aircraft operating in the disputed waters, adding a broader strategic dimension to the dispute.
- The South China Sea continues to remain central to the strategic competition between China and the United States and has significant implications for regional stability and Indo-Pacific security.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.

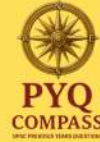


Q. Which one of the following statements best reflects the issue with Senkaku Islands, sometimes mentioned in the news? (2022)

- It is generally believed that they are artificial islands made by a country around the South China Sea.
- China and Japan engage in maritime disputes over these islands in the East China Sea.
- A permanent American military base has been set up there to help Taiwan to increase its defense capabilities.
- Though the International Court of Justice declared them as no man's land, some South-East Asian countries claim them.

### PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



. Consider the following statements: (2023)

Statement-I: India's public sector health care system largely focuses on curative care with limited preventive, promotive and rehabilitative care.

Statement-II: Under India's decentralized approach to health care delivery, the States are primarily responsible for organizing health services. Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

- Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
- Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I
- Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
- Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct

**Ans : Option (b) is correct**

Statement-I is true. Health care (specifically public health, sanitation, hospitals, and dispensaries) falls under the State List in the Constitution of India. India's public health care system has historically placed a strong emphasis on hospitals and specialised medical care, with a greater emphasis on curative care.

Statement-II is true. The States are principally in charge of planning health services under India's decentralised system for providing medical care. The federal government offers direction, regulatory frameworks, financial support to the states, but it is up to the states to plan, administer, and deliver healthcare services in accordance with local priorities and needs.

Despite the fact that both statements are true, Statement-II does not adequately explain Statement-I.

Q. Which one of the following statements best reflects the issue with Senkaku Islands, sometimes mentioned in the news? (2022)

- It is generally believed that they are artificial islands made by a country around the South China Sea.
- China and Japan engage in maritime disputes over these islands in the East China Sea.
- A permanent American military base has been set up there to help Taiwan to increase its defense capabilities.
- Though the International Court of Justice declared them as no man's land, some South-East Asian countries claim them.

**Ans : b**

The Senkaku Islands, located in the East China Sea, are the subject of territorial disputes between China and Japan. These uninhabited islands are controlled by Japan but claimed by China (referred to as Diaoyu) and Taiwan. The issue arises from their strategic location and the potential for natural resource reserves, making them a flashpoint in East Asia.



## Practice Questions and answers

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Lymphatic Filariasis:

1. The disease is transmitted through mosquitoes carrying filarial parasites.
2. Individuals infected with the parasite may remain asymptomatic for several years while continuing to transmit the infection.
3. Mass Drug Administration (MDA) aims to treat only laboratory-confirmed patients.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

**Ans : a) 1 and 2 only**

Statement 1: Correct. Lymphatic filariasis is a mosquito-borne parasitic disease caused by filarial worms.

Statement 2: Correct. Infected individuals may remain asymptomatic for 6–8 years while continuing to transmit the parasite.

Statement 3: Incorrect. Mass Drug Administration (MDA) targets the entire eligible at-risk population, not only laboratory-confirmed cases, to interrupt disease transmission.

Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The 2016 arbitral award was delivered under UNCLOS.
2. China accepted and implemented the arbitral award.
3. The award held that China's historic rights claims lacked legal basis under UNCLOS.

Which statements are correct?

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

**Ans : b) 1 and 3 only**

Statement 1: Correct. The 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award was delivered under the dispute settlement provisions of UNCLOS.

Statement 2: Incorrect. China rejected the ruling and continues to assert its maritime claims.

Statement 3: Correct. The Tribunal ruled that China's expansive claims based on historic rights have no legal basis under UNCLOS.

Q. Which one of the following best explains the policy lesson emerging from India's GCC-led growth?

- (a) Manufacturing has become irrelevant.
- (b) Services alone can solve India's employment challenge.
- (c) India should prioritise only high-technology sectors.
- (d) India must strengthen both its globally competitive services sector and employment-intensive manufacturing sector.

**Ans : d**

While services drive exports and high-value growth, manufacturing remains essential for large-scale employment generation, particularly for less-skilled workers.