

Current Affairs (22 March)

ISRO Successfully Undocks SpaDeX Satellites

Recent Developments

Two months after successfully docking two satellites in space, ISRO has now executed their undocking.

Significance of the Achievement

With this, India becomes the fourth nation—after the US, Russia, and China—to showcase space docking and undocking expertise. To achieve this milestone, ISRO launched the experimental SpaDeX mission on December 30, 2024.

Understanding Space Docking

Space docking involves maneuvering two fast-moving spacecraft into the same orbit, gradually bringing them closer, and physically connecting them. This process is highly intricate, requiring precise navigation, automated control, and real-time adjustments.

Importance of This Advancement

- **Facilitating Large-Scale Space Missions:** Weight constraints prevent launching large spacecraft in one go. Docking enables modular assembly in orbit, similar to the International Space Station (ISS).
- **Crucial for Future Human Spaceflight:** Essential for astronaut transport and supply missions to India's planned space station (targeted for 2035) and its crewed lunar missions (by 2040) under Gaganyaan.
- **Enabling Lunar Sample Return Missions:** Chandrayaan-4, India's planned mission to retrieve lunar soil and rock samples, will depend on docking technology.
- **Enhancing In-Space Servicing & Robotics:** Allows satellites to be repaired, upgraded, and refueled in orbit, reducing the need for new launches.

India's Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX)

- **Objective:** To validate in-space docking, rendezvous, and undocking capabilities.
- **Satellites Used:**
 - **SDX01 (Chaser Satellite):** Actively approached and docked with the target.
 - **SDX02 (Target Satellite):** Served as the docking module.
- **Launch Vehicle:** PSLV-C60
- **Orbit:** 470 km circular orbit
- **Developed by:** UR Rao Satellite Centre (URSC), Bengaluru, with contributions from other ISRO centers.

Applications Post-Docking

- **High-Resolution Imaging (SDX01):** Capturing Earth observation images.

- **Multi-Spectral Payload (SDX02):** Monitoring natural resources and vegetation.
- **Radiation Monitoring (SDX02):** Studying space radiation to support future human space missions.

Petition Challenging CAG Appointment Process

Current Issue

The Supreme Court is reviewing a petition questioning the exclusive authority of the Central Government, through the President, in appointing the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

Role of the CAG

The CAG is a key institution responsible for ensuring financial oversight of the Union, State governments, and Panchayati Raj institutions.

Constitutional Provisions

Article 148: The CAG is appointed by the President and can only be removed following the same process as a Supreme Court judge. Parliament determines their salary, allowances, and service conditions, which cannot be altered to their disadvantage once appointed. The CAG is also barred from holding any other office post-retirement.

Article 149: Assigns the CAG the responsibility of auditing Union and State accounts, continuing the role of the pre-independence Auditor-General of India.

Article 150: The President, based on the CAG's advice, decides the format in which Union and State accounts are maintained.

Article 151: The CAG submits audit reports on Union accounts to the President, who then presents them before Parliament. For State accounts, reports are sent to the respective Governor and tabled in the state legislature.

Article 279: The CAG certifies the "net proceeds" of taxes and duties, and this certification is considered final.

Concerns and Challenges

- Critics argue that the current executive-controlled appointment process undermines the CAG's independence, affecting its role as an impartial watchdog.
- Issues such as delays in audits, a decline in Union government audits, and alleged corruption in recruitment have raised concerns about the CAG's efficiency.
- Recent audit reports exposing financial irregularities—such as in Delhi's excise policy and Uttarakhand's Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management—have led to tensions between the CAG and the government.

Proposed Reforms

- Establishing a **separate selection committee** for appointing the CAG to reduce executive influence.
- Introducing **time limits** for submitting audit reports and revising the auditing framework to include a **multi-member body** for better accountability.
- Considering **state-level auditing bodies**, as seen in countries like the US and Australia, to enhance financial oversight.
- Recommending that the **President appoint the CAG** after consulting a non-partisan selection committee, including the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and Chief Justice of India.

Conclusion

The CAG is a vital pillar of India’s democratic structure. To uphold its effectiveness and independence, a balanced approach is needed—one that respects its constitutional role while addressing governance and transparency concerns.

Standing Stones of Mudumal, Telangana

Context

The Standing Stones of Mudumal, situated in Telangana's Narayanpet district, have recently been included in UNESCO’s tentative list of World Heritage Sites.

About the Mudumal Megalithic Menhirs

These megalithic structures, known as menhirs, are large upright stones, some towering between 10 to 14 feet. They were likely arranged by prehistoric societies in a specific pattern.

- The site is located near the Krishna River.
- Experts believe these stones served both funerary and astronomical purposes, indicating the advanced understanding of celestial phenomena by ancient communities.
- This site is an important relic of the megalithic tradition in South Asia, with an estimated age of 3500 to 4000 years.
- Archaeological studies date these megaliths to around 1000 BCE – 300 BCE, coinciding with the Iron Age cultures of South India.

Megalithic Culture in India

- Associated with Neolithic and Iron Age civilizations that flourished between 1500 BCE and 500 CE, particularly in the Deccan Plateau.
- The Mudumal menhirs share similarities with other megalithic sites in South India, such as those in Karnataka and Kerala.

Other Similar Sites in India

- **Hire Benekallu, Karnataka** – Features a vast collection of menhirs, dolmens, and cave paintings, and was added to UNESCO’s Tentative List in 2021.
- **Vibhutihalli, Karnataka** – Contains a large rectangular arrangement of boulders aligned with solar events.
- **Nilgiri Dolmens, Tamil Nadu** – Comprise dolmens, stone circles, cists, and petroglyphs.

Other Global Megalithic Sites

- **Stonehenge, England, and Carnac Stones, France** – Both recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- **Grand Menhir Brisé, France** – The tallest known menhir, originally standing at 20.6 meters.

Significance of the Mudumal Menhirs

- **Astronomical Relevance** – The alignment of the stones corresponds with celestial events like solstices and equinoxes.
- **Cultural & Spiritual Importance** – One of the menhirs is revered as Goddess Yellamma, and the site is locally referred to as ‘Niluralla Thimmappa’ (Thimmappa of the Standing Stones).

Path to UNESCO Recognition

The inclusion in UNESCO’s tentative list is the first step toward full World Heritage status. The next steps include:

- **Comprehensive Research & Documentation** – Further archaeological and historical studies will strengthen the nomination.
- **Government & Public Advocacy** – The Indian government and heritage conservation organizations need to actively support the recognition process.
- **UNESCO Assessment** – Experts will evaluate the site's cultural and historical significance before making a final decision.

PEPSU Muzhara Movement

Context:

The PEPSU Muzhara Movement, commemorated on March 19, was a significant agrarian struggle in Punjab, where landless tenant farmers fought for the right to own the land they cultivated.

Overview of the PEPSU Muzhara Movement

What was the Muzhara Movement?

This was an uprising led by tenant farmers, or *muzharas*, who demanded legal ownership of the land they had been cultivating. The movement directly opposed the oppressive *biswedari* (landlord) system that was prevalent in Punjab before and after independence.

Timeframe and Geographic Spread:

- Originated in the 1930s as localized protests within the Patiala princely state.
- Reached its peak during the 1940s–1950s, spreading across 784 villages in present-day Punjab and parts of Haryana, including Patiala, Barnala, Mansa, Sangrur, Bathinda, Mohali, Fatehgarh Sahib, Faridkot, and Jind.

Reasons Behind the Movement:

- **Feudal Exploitation:** Muzharas were compelled to give one-third of their agricultural produce to landlords, leaving them impoverished.
- **Colonial Revenue System:** Landlords paid taxes to princely rulers, who in turn remitted revenue to the British, perpetuating exploitation.
- **Loss of Land Ownership:** Many small landowners were reduced to tenants, losing control over their ancestral property.
- **Post-Independence Repression:** Even after 1947, feudal landlords continued to demand a share of produce, leading to intensified resistance.

Key Leaders:

- **Jagir Singh Joga:** Played a crucial role in organizing and uniting tenant farmers for mass mobilization.
- **Buta Singh:** Advocated strongly for land redistribution and tenant rights.
- **Teja Singh Sutantar:** Introduced revolutionary ideologies and linked the movement to broader peasant struggles.
- **Sewa Singh Thikriwala:** Inspired the movement with his staunch opposition to feudal oppression.

Forms of Protest:

- **Peaceful Demonstrations:** Initially, the farmers sought land rights through non-violent means.
- **Armed Resistance:** When met with violent repression by landlords and authorities, the *muzharas* took up arms in self-defense.
- **Mass Mobilization:** Large-scale gatherings, conferences, and collective actions were organized to push back against exploitation.

Outcomes and Legacy:

- **Land Reforms:** By 1952, government-led land reforms granted ownership rights to tenant farmers.
- **Symbol of Resistance:** The movement became an enduring symbol of peasant defiance against feudal and state repression.
- **Annual Observance:** March 19 is commemorated each year to honor the sacrifices of those who fought in the movement.

The Customs Act of 1962

Context: Kannada actor Ranya Rao was caught attempting to smuggle 14.8 kg of gold at Bengaluru’s Kempegowda International Airport.

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) uncovered this significant gold smuggling case and invoked relevant provisions of the Customs Act of 1962.

About the Customs Act of 1962

Overview:

The Customs Act of 1962 governs the import and export of goods in India. It is designed to protect the economy, prevent smuggling, and ensure legal international trade.

Enforcing Authority:

The Act is implemented by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), operating under the Ministry of Finance.

Key Provisions:

- **Customs Duty:** Levies duties on imported and exported goods as per the Customs Tariff Act of 1975.
- **Import/Export Restrictions:** Grants the government authority to prohibit or regulate certain goods for reasons such as national security or public health.
- **Clearance Regulations:** Requires proper documentation, duty payments, and compliance with customs procedures before goods are cleared.
- **Warehousing Rules:** Allows storage of imported goods without immediate duty payment until they are either released for domestic use or exported.

Exemptions for International Passengers:

- **General Duty-Free Allowance:** Goods worth up to ₹50,000 are allowed duty-free for international travelers.
- **Gold Allowance:**
 - **Men:** Up to 20 grams of gold (valued at ₹50,000).
 - **Women:** Up to 40 grams of gold (valued at ₹1,00,000).
 - **NRIs:** Can bring up to 10,000 grams once every six months (duty applicable beyond the exemption limit).
- **Other Allowances:**
 - One laptop per adult passenger.
 - Alcohol: Up to 2 liters.
 - Tobacco: Maximum of 100 cigarettes or equivalent.
- **Cash Carrying Limit:**
 - Passengers can carry up to ₹25,000 in Indian currency without declaration.
 - Foreign currency exceeding \$5,000 (or a total foreign exchange value of \$10,000) must be declared.

Penalties for Smuggling:

- **Imprisonment:** Offenders may face a jail term ranging from 3 to 7 years, depending on the severity of the offense.
- **Monetary Penalties:** Fines can be up to three times the value of the smuggled goods.

Betwa River

Context: The Betwa River in Madhya Pradesh is facing severe depletion due to illegal sand mining, deforestation, and excessive groundwater extraction through borewells.

About the Betwa River

Origin:

The Betwa River originates in Jhiri village, located in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh. It begins at an elevation of 470 meters in the Vindhya Range.

States and Course:

- The river flows through Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, passing through districts such as Bhopal, Vidisha, Orchha, and Hamirpur.
- It spans a total length of 590 kilometers before merging with the Yamuna River.

Tributaries:

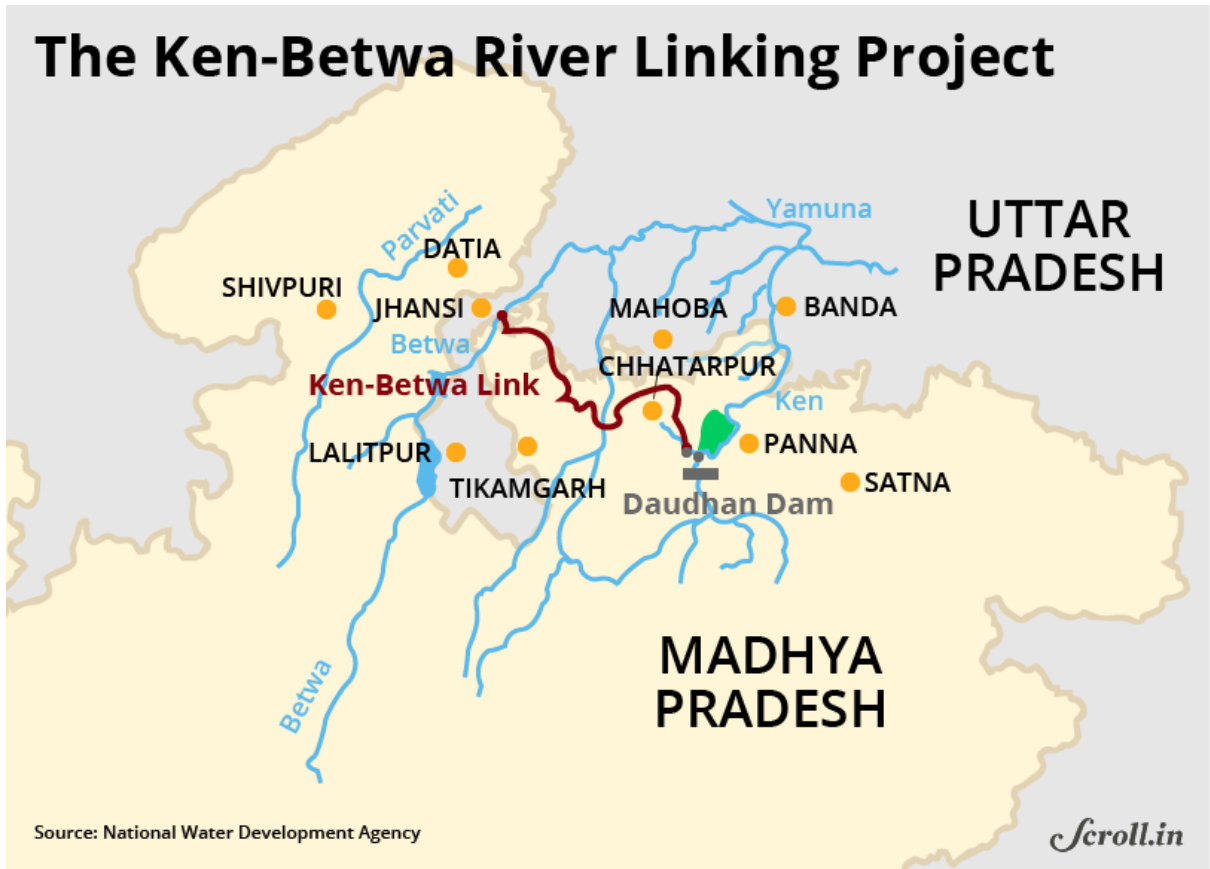
- **Major tributaries:** Halali and Dhasan rivers.
- The **Halali River**, the longest tributary, stretches 32 kilometers.
- The Betwa basin consists of 14 tributaries, with 11 located entirely in Madhya Pradesh and 3 shared with Uttar Pradesh.

Betwa River’s Confluence:

The Betwa River is a right-bank tributary of the Yamuna, joining it near Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh.

Factors Contributing to Betwa River’s Decline

- 1. **Illegal Sand Mining:** Excessive sand extraction has disrupted the river’s natural flow and harmed its ecological balance.
- 2. **Deforestation in Catchment Areas:** Large-scale tree cutting near the river’s origin has reduced groundwater recharge and soil retention.
- 3. **Over-Extraction of Groundwater:** Illegal borewells have significantly lowered the river’s water levels and obstructed surface water flow.
- 4. **Encroachment and Urbanization:** Construction of concrete structures near the river's origin has blocked natural water channels, impeding the river’s ability to sustain itself.



Trump's Renewed Emphasis on the Houthis Amid U.S. Strikes in Yemen

Key Topics:

- Trump's Approach to the Houthis – Latest Developments
- Reasons Behind U.S. Strikes on Houthis
- Trump's Goals in Targeting the Houthis
- Houthi Strength and Strategic Position
- FAQs on Trump's Houthi Strategy

Trump's Approach to the Houthis – Latest Developments

The U.S. recently conducted over 40 precision strikes on Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, including Sanaa, Sadaa, and the Port of Hodeidah, targeting Iran-backed militants.

Former President Donald Trump issued a warning to the Houthis and Iran, stating that any Houthi attacks would be treated as acts of aggression from Iran itself, implying potential consequences for Tehran. Following these developments, the Houthis escalated their rhetoric and claimed responsibility for missile strikes targeting U.S. warships in the Red Sea.

Reasons Behind U.S. Strikes on Houthis

Connection to the Gaza Conflict

The Houthis' recent actions are linked to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The situation intensified after Israel resumed military operations in Jabalia, violating a previous ceasefire agreement.

Disruptions to Red Sea Shipping

Since December 2023, Houthi attacks on maritime trade routes in the Red Sea have forced commercial vessels to take longer routes via the Cape of Good Hope. This has significantly increased shipping insurance costs and disrupted global supply chains.

U.S. Naval Response and Policy Decisions

- **Biden’s Strategy (2024):** Classified the Houthis as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGT) but did not reintroduce their designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).
- **Operation Prosperity Guardian (2023):** A U.S.-led naval initiative aimed at protecting international shipping lanes.
- **Trump’s Actions (2021 & 2025):** Originally designated the Houthis as an FTO in 2021 and reinstated the designation in 2025.

Trump’s Renewed Focus on the Houthis

In a recent Truth Social post, Trump reiterated that any attack by the Houthis should be considered an attack by Iran. His stance underscores a commitment to ensuring maritime security and safeguarding global trade routes.

Trump’s Goals in Targeting the Houthis

U.S. Military Focus Shift

- The U.S. has supported the Saudi-led **Operation Restoring Hope** against the Houthis since 2015.
- During Trump’s first term (2017–2020), U.S. military actions in Yemen mainly focused on targeting Al Qaeda and ISIS rather than the Houthis.
- However, continued Houthi attacks in the Red Sea over the past 15 months have prompted direct U.S. military intervention.

Balancing Strategy: Targeting Houthis Without Escalating Against Iran

- Trump’s military actions serve as a warning to Iran while avoiding direct conflict.
- His messaging puts additional pressure on Tehran and could be used as leverage in potential nuclear negotiations.

Official U.S. Position & Reactions from Arab Nations

- The U.S. government maintains that military actions are purely aimed at protecting Red Sea trade routes.
- Key Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, have distanced themselves from U.S. strikes, urging restraint since January 2024 and denying logistical assistance for the attacks.

Houthi Strength and Strategic Positioning

Adaptability and Military Resilience

- The Houthis have survived more than 20,000 airstrikes from the Saudi-led coalition (2015–2023).
- They employ mobile combat units and asymmetric warfare tactics, similar to Hezbollah.

Shift Toward Drone and Missile Warfare

- Before 2015, the Houthis did not use missiles but had already endured six wars (2004–2010) against Yemen’s government.
- Since 2015, they have focused on deploying drones, rockets, and missiles—adopting tactics akin to Hezbollah’s 2006 strategy against Israel.
- Despite ongoing U.S. and coalition airstrikes, they remain operational and continue to attack Red Sea shipping.

Iran’s Role: Support vs. Autonomy

- While Iran is the Houthis’ primary supporter, it does not exercise total control over them.

- Trump insists that Iran directs Houthi actions, but Tehran officially claims that Ansar Allah operates independently.

Additional International Backing: Russia & China

- **China** indirectly finances the Houthis by purchasing 90% of Iran's oil exports (2024).
- **Russia** provides intelligence and is reportedly increasing small arms and missile sales to the group.
- Many Houthi anti-ship missiles are based on older Chinese C-802 missile designs.

Effectiveness of U.S. Strikes

- Analysts agree that limited U.S. airstrikes may weaken but not dismantle the Houthis' military power.
- Continued financial and military support from Iran, Russia, and China ensures the Houthis' resilience in the ongoing conflict.

FAQs on Trump's Houthi Strategy

Q1. Why did the U.S. conduct airstrikes on the Houthis?

A. The U.S. launched attacks to halt Houthi strikes on Red Sea trade routes and safeguard global commerce.

Q2. What is Trump's stance on Iran in this conflict?

A. Trump considers any Houthi attack as an attack by Iran, implying possible retaliation against Tehran.

Q3. How do the Houthis maintain their resilience?

A. They use mobile warfare tactics, rely on drones and missiles, and receive strategic backing from Iran, China, and Russia.

Q4. What role do China and Russia play in this conflict?

A. China indirectly funds the Houthis through oil purchases from Iran, while Russia provides intelligence and possibly weapons.

Q5. Will U.S. airstrikes eliminate the Houthi threat?

A. Analysts believe sporadic airstrikes may weaken but will not completely neutralize the Houthis due to their ongoing external support.

India’s Position in the Global Free Speech Index: Key Takeaways

Topics Covered:

- Latest Updates on the Global Free Speech Index
- India’s Standing in the Free Speech Index
- Global Patterns in Free Speech
- Key Observations on Free Speech in India
- Challenges to Free Expression in India
- Possible Solutions
- Summary
- FAQs on Free Speech in India

Latest Updates on the Global Free Speech Index

A recent study by *The Future of Free Speech*, a U.S.-based independent think tank, ranked India 24th out of 33 nations in terms of support for free speech.

India’s Ranking in the Free Speech Index

According to the report, *Who in the World Supports Free Speech?*, global support for controversial speech is waning. However, India stands out as a country where public perception of free speech does not necessarily match actual conditions.

Global Patterns in Free Speech

The October 2024 survey found that:

- Scandinavian nations dominated the rankings, with Norway (87.9) and Denmark (87.0) securing the top spots.
- Indonesia (56.8), Malaysia (55.4), and Pakistan (57.0) showed the most improvement despite ranking lower overall.
- Hungary (85.5) and Venezuela (81.8) ranked unexpectedly high due to public belief in free speech, despite being authoritarian-leaning.
- India scored 62.6, placing it between South Africa (66.9) and Lebanon (61.8).

Key Observations on Free Speech in India

Public Support vs. Reality

- Most Indians express support for free speech without government censorship.
- However, the willingness to criticize government policies is lower than the global average.

Support for Government Restrictions on Criticism

- 37% of Indian respondents agreed that authorities should restrict criticism of government policies—the highest percentage among surveyed nations.
- In contrast, only 5% of respondents in the UK and 3% in Denmark shared this view.
- This indicates growing public support for government control over political speech.

Discrepancy Between Public Perception and Global Assessment

- Indians and South Africans felt their ability to speak freely had improved.
- However, international rankings suggest India's free speech protections are weakening, revealing a gap between perception and reality.

India's Role in Democratic Regression

- The report classifies India alongside Hungary and Venezuela as experiencing *democratic backsliding*.
- Although free speech laws exist, enforcement remains weak, and suppression of dissent is increasing.

Challenges to Free Speech in India

Legal and Political Constraints

- **Sedition Law (Section 124A of the IPC):** Frequently used to suppress political opposition.
- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA):** Criticized for being used against journalists, activists, and opposition voices.
- **IT Rules 2021:** Grants the government broad authority to regulate digital content, raising concerns about censorship.

Rise in Self-Censorship

- Fear of legal action and online harassment discourages open expression.
- Media organizations often face political and economic pressure, resulting in biased reporting or avoidance of sensitive topics.

Inconsistent Application of Free Speech Principles

- While free speech is widely endorsed, opposition arises when it conflicts with political or religious beliefs.
- Arrests of activists, journalists, and comedians illustrate the selective enforcement of free speech rights.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Legal Protections

- Repeal or amend outdated laws, such as sedition laws and restrictive UAPA provisions.
- Enhance judicial oversight to prevent misuse of laws against journalists and activists.

Promoting Open Debate

- Educational institutions and media should encourage diverse discussions.
- Political leaders must commit to respecting free speech across ideological divides.

Enhancing Digital and Media Freedom

- Implement stronger protections for journalists to shield them from political and corporate influence.
- Ensure social media regulations do not enable arbitrary censorship.

Bridging the Gap Between Perception and Reality

- Increase awareness of constitutional free speech rights.
- Encourage fact-based discussions on government policies and public discourse.

Summary

India’s position at 24th in the Free Speech Index underscores rising concerns about restricted expression. While many Indians believe free speech has improved, international assessments point to declining press freedom, increased censorship, and growing restrictions on dissent. To maintain a healthy democracy, India must reinforce legal safeguards, promote open discussions, and ensure that free speech is upheld both in law and practice.

FAQs on Free Speech in India

Q1. Where does India rank in the Global Free Speech Index?

Ans. India holds the 24th position out of 33 countries in the latest index.

Q2. Why is India’s ranking a cause for concern?

Ans. The ranking highlights growing government restrictions and weakening protection for dissenting opinions.

Q3. How does India compare with other countries in terms of government criticism?

Ans. 37% of Indians support limiting criticism of the government—the highest among surveyed nations.

Q4. What legal barriers threaten free speech in India?

Ans. Laws such as the sedition law, UAPA, and IT Rules 2021 are often used to restrict free expression.

Q5. What steps can improve free speech in India?

Ans. Reforms should focus on legal protections, strengthening media independence, and encouraging open political discussions.

LIC

LIC Agents Protest Against New Insurance Regulations

About LIC

The **Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)** is the largest public-sector life insurance provider and a key institutional investor in India.

- **Headquarters:** Mumbai
- **Motto:** *"Yogakshemam Vahamyaham"* (from the Bhagavad Gita) – meaning *"Your welfare is our responsibility."*

- **Established:** 1956, following the Life Insurance of India Act, which nationalized the sector by consolidating 245 private insurers and provident societies into a single entity.
- **Operations:** LIC functions through **eight zonal offices** in cities like Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Kolkata, Bhopal, and Patna.

Evolution of India's Insurance Sector

- **1818:** Oriental Life Insurance Company became the first life insurance firm in India.
- **1870:** Bombay Mutual Life Assurance Society was founded as the first Indian-owned life insurer.
- **1912:** The Indian Life Assurance Companies Act was enacted to regulate life insurance businesses.
- **1928:** The Indian Insurance Companies Act was introduced to enable the government to collect statistical data on the insurance sector.
- **1938:** The Insurance Act of 1938 was passed to safeguard policyholders' interests and regulate the industry.
- **1956:** LIC was created by merging **245 Indian and foreign insurance companies**, with an initial capital of ₹5 crore provided by the Government of India.

General Insurance in India

- **1850:** The Triton Insurance Company Ltd., India's first general insurance company, was founded in Calcutta by the British.

Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB)

- **Established:** 2022 by the Union Government
- **Purpose:** Recommends appointments for whole-time directors and non-executive chairpersons in public sector financial institutions.
- **Additional Role:** Provides guidance on personnel management policies.

- **Vision:** To promote excellence in corporate governance within public-sector financial institutions.
- **Structure:** Includes a **Secretary and four officers** overseeing operations.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)

A statutory body established under the **IRDAI Act, 1999** to oversee and regulate the insurance industry.

Key Responsibilities:

- Encourages competition to improve consumer choice and ensure fair pricing.
- Maintains financial stability in the insurance sector.
- Supervises entities governed by the **Insurance Act, 1938** (the primary legislation for the industry).

Other Relevant Laws:

- **Marine Insurance Act, 1963:** Governs marine insurance policies.
- **Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991:** Covers liability insurance policies.

LIC FAQs

Q1. What is the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)?

Ans. LIC is India's largest state-owned life insurance provider, established in 1956 following the nationalization of private insurers. It offers life insurance and investment services.

Q2. Why was LIC founded?

Ans. LIC was set up under the **Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956** to provide life insurance coverage and ensure financial security for Indian citizens.

Q3. Who regulates LIC?

Ans. LIC is overseen by the **Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)** and functions under the **Ministry of Finance, Government of India**.

Exercise Bongosagar 2025

Latest Updates on Exercise Bongosagar

The **India-Bangladesh** naval exercise, **Bongosagar 2025**, along with a **Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT)**, was recently conducted in the **Bay of Bengal** to enhance maritime security cooperation.

About Exercise Bongosagar

- A **bilateral naval exercise** between India and Bangladesh.
- Aims to **strengthen interoperability** and operational expertise through diverse maritime operations.
- **Initiated in 2019**, this marks the **fifth edition** of the exercise.
- **Participants:**
 - **India:** INS Ranvir
 - **Bangladesh:** BNS Abu Ubaidah
- The exercise focused on **joint operations, tactical drills, and communication exercises**, fostering coordination in handling maritime security threats.

Key Activities

- **Surface firing drills**
- **Tactical maneuvers**
- **Underway replenishment**
- **Visit-Board-Search-Seizure (VBSS) operations**
- **Cross-boarding exercises**
- **Communication drills**
- **Operational quizzes for teams and junior officers**
- **Steam past** (ceremonial sailing)

INS Ranvir – Key Facts

- **Class:** Rajput-Class guided missile destroyer
- **Commissioned:** 28th October 1986
- **Features:** Upgraded with modern **indigenous weapons and sensors**

Exercise Bongosagar FAQs

Q1. What is Exercise Bongosagar?

Ans. A bilateral naval exercise between India and Bangladesh.

Q2. When was Exercise Bongosagar first conducted?

Ans. In 2019.

Q3. Which Indian Navy ship participated in Bongosagar 2025?

Ans. INS Ranvir, a Rajput-Class guided missile destroyer.

Sonic Weapons

Latest Updates on Sonic Weapons

The **Serbian government** has been accused of deploying **banned sonic weapons** to disperse protesters in Belgrade.

What Are Sonic Weapons?

- Also known as **acoustic weapons**, they use high-intensity **sound waves** to **disrupt, disorient, or incapacitate** targets.
- They can emit **audible or inaudible** frequencies for military and crowd-control purposes.
- Initially developed for **defense and riot control**, they were first used in **Iraq (2004) by the U.S. military**.

How Do Sonic Weapons Work?

- Consist of **multiple transducers** that convert energy into **directed sound waves**.
- Authorities control the **frequency, volume, and duration** to maximize effectiveness.
- Can cause **severe discomfort, disorientation, pain, and even hearing damage**.

Types of Sonic Weapons

1. Long-Range Acoustic Device (LRAD)

- Used by **military and law enforcement**.
- Projects sound up to **8,900 meters** at **160 decibels (dB)**.
- Effects: **Hearing pain, nausea, dizziness, and potential ear damage**.

2. Mosquito Device

- Emits high-pitched sounds **only audible to people under 30 years old**.
- Used to **deter loitering** in public areas.
- Effects: **Irritation and discomfort in younger individuals**.

3. Infrasonic Weapons

- Emit **low-frequency sound waves** that humans **cannot hear**.
- Still under research but capable of causing **headaches, nausea, vertigo, and internal organ damage**.

Sonic Weapons FAQs

Q1. What are sonic weapons?

Ans. Acoustic weapons that use sound waves to **disrupt, disorient, or incapacitate** individuals.

Q2. How do sonic weapons function?

Ans. They emit **high-intensity sound waves** to **cause nausea, hearing impairment, and disorientation**.

Q3. Are sonic weapons lethal?

Ans. Primarily non-lethal, but **prolonged exposure** can cause **permanent hearing loss or internal injuries**.

Q4. Who uses sonic weapons?

Ans. **Military, law enforcement, and security forces** in countries like the **U.S., China, and Russia** for riot control and area denial.

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)

Latest Updates on NTDs

India is making progress in combating **Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)** through **government initiatives, community engagement, and regional partnerships**.

What Are NTDs?

- A group of diseases caused by **viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi, or toxins**.
- Primarily affect **impoverished populations** in tropical regions.
- Linked to **poor sanitation, unsafe drinking water, and inadequate healthcare access**.
- Classified as “**neglected**” due to **low prioritization in global health policies**.

NTDs in India

- India is home to **12 major NTDs**, including:
 - **Guinea worm disease**
 - **Chikungunya**
 - **Dengue**
 - **Kala Azar (Visceral Leishmaniasis)**

- **Elephantiasis (Lymphatic Filariasis)**
- These diseases affect over **1 billion people globally**, with **1.5 billion requiring treatment or preventive measures**.

Challenges in NTD Eradication

- **Complex epidemiology** – Many have **animal or human reservoirs** and involve **vector-borne transmission**.
- **Inconsistent healthcare infrastructure** – Poor access to **diagnosis and treatment**.
- **Lack of awareness and funding** – Limited international efforts compared to diseases like malaria or HIV.

Global Commitment to NTDs

- The world observes **World NTDs Day on 30th January** every year to **renew global efforts in eliminating these diseases**.

NTDs FAQs

Q1. How many NTDs exist in India?

Ans. Around **12 Neglected Tropical Diseases** are prevalent in India.

Q2. What is Kala Azar?

Ans. A severe form of **leishmaniasis** caused by the parasite **Leishmania donovani**.

Q3. What is Chikungunya?

Ans. A **mosquito-borne viral disease** caused by the **Chikungunya virus**, leading to fever and joint pain.

QUAD

Date: March 20, 2025

Time: 1:20 PM

Category: Prelims – Current Affairs & Events

Latest Developments on QUAD

Senior military officials from QUAD nations have voiced concerns regarding China’s increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific at a panel discussion titled *"Deepwater Perils: Securing Trade."*

Understanding QUAD

The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)** is a strategic alliance comprising **India, the United States, Japan, and Australia**. It primarily focuses on **maritime security and economic collaboration** in the Indo-Pacific region.

- **Nature of QUAD:** It is not a military alliance but a diplomatic initiative to uphold a **free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific**.
- **Operational Structure:** QUAD functions through **annual summits, foreign ministers’ meetings, and six working groups** covering:
 - **Health**
 - **Climate**
 - **Critical & Emerging Technologies**
 - **Space**
 - **Infrastructure**
 - **Cybersecurity**

Evolution of QUAD

- **2007:** Japan’s PM **Shinzo Abe** proposed QUAD at an ASEAN meeting.

- **2012:** The concept of the "**Democratic Security Diamond**" was introduced.
- **2017:** QUAD was revived amid concerns over China's regional influence; its first official meeting was held in Manila.
- **2020:** Australia joined the **Malabar naval exercises**, marking the first joint military drills involving all four QUAD nations.
- **2021:** QUAD leaders met virtually, releasing the joint statement "**The Spirit of the Quad.**"

How QUAD Functions

- **Not a formal alliance** like NATO but a **strategic partnership**.
- Engagement through **summits, intelligence sharing, and military exercises**.

Key Meetings:

- **March 2021:** First virtual summit
- **September 2021:** First in-person summit
- Continuous meetings focus on **security and economic initiatives**.

The Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific encompasses the **Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean**, serving as a vital global trade route handling **60% of maritime trade**.

FAQs on QUAD

- **Q1. What is QUAD?**
 - A **strategic partnership** between India, the US, Japan, and Australia for **regional security and economic collaboration**.
- **Q2. When was QUAD formed?**
 - Initially **conceptualized in 2007**, with renewed engagement in 2017.

- **Q3. Is QUAD a military alliance?**
 - No, it is not a military pact like NATO, but it does conduct **joint military drills**, including the **Malabar Exercise**.

Sagareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

Latest Updates on Sagareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

Located in **Sangli district, Maharashtra**, **Sagareshwar Wildlife Sanctuary** is home to **536 sambars** and **295 cheetals (spotted deer)**, making it one of the densest deer habitats among manmade wildlife reserves.

About the Sanctuary

- **Location:** Sangli district, Maharashtra
- **Significance:** India's first manmade wildlife sanctuary
- **Characteristics:**
 - Artificially cultivated forest **without a natural water source**
 - Most wildlife species were **introduced artificially**
 - Covers **10.87 sq. km.**
- **Name Origin:** Derived from the **ancient Sagareshwar temple**, which is dedicated to **Lord Shiva**.

Ecosystem and Biodiversity

- **Vegetation Type:**
 - **Southern dry mixed deciduous forest**
 - **Southern thorn forest**
- **Flora:**
 - Predominantly features **Tamarind, Neem, Eucalyptus, Acacia, Agave, and Khair trees**.

- **Fauna:**
 - **Large Mammals:** Sambar deer, Blackbucks, Muntjac, Chital, Wild boars, Peacocks
 - **Small Carnivores:** Hyena, Fox, Porcupine

FAQs on Sagarshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

- **Q1. Where is it located?**
 - **Maharashtra.**
- **Q2. Why is it unique?**
 - It is **India's first manmade wildlife sanctuary.**
- **Q3. What type of vegetation is found here?**
 - **Southern dry mixed deciduous and southern thorn forests.**

Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) ID

Latest Updates on APAAR ID

The **Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) ID** is a **digital identification system** introduced in India for students.

What is APAAR ID?

- Part of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, designed to **streamline student records**.
- Works on the principle of "**One Nation, One Student ID.**"
- **Linked to Aadhaar** and stored in **DigiLocker** for easy access.
- Generated through the **Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+)**.

Objectives of APAAR

- Centralized storage of **students' academic records**.

- Enables **seamless institutional transfers**.
- Facilitates **digital verification of certificates**.
- Supports **educational policy development**.

Is APAAR Mandatory?

- Officially **voluntary**, but some **states (e.g., Uttar Pradesh)** and **CBSE** are pushing for full enrollment.
- The **Parliament clarified in December 2024** that it is **not legally mandated**.

Relation to Other Digital Initiatives

- **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC)**: Digital system for credit transfer, integrated with **APAAR ID**.
- **DigiLocker**: Secure **cloud-based storage** for academic certificates, legally recognized under **IT Rules, 2016**.

FAQs on APAAR ID

- **Q1. What is APAAR ID?**
 - A **unique student ID** for tracking academic progress.
- **Q2. Who can apply?**
 - All students **from school to higher education institutions** in India.
- **Q3. How to apply?**
 - Through **schools, colleges, or universities** (linked to DigiLocker).
- **Q4. Is APAAR mandatory?**
 - No, but recommended for maintaining **digital academic records**.
- **Q5. Can parents opt out?**
 - Yes, by submitting a **written request**. **SFLC** provides an opt-out template.

Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)

Latest Developments

India's **Trade Ministry** has proposed a **12% duty on steel imports** due to concerns about **trade diversion**.

About DGTR

- **Established:** May 17, 2018 (previously **Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties**).
- **Ministry:** Under the **Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry**.
- **Role:** India's **anti-dumping watchdog**, ensuring fair competition by investigating unfair trade practices.

Functions of DGTR

- Conducts **anti-dumping and countervailing duty (CVD) investigations**.
- Evaluates **safeguard measures** to protect local industries.
- Handles **trade-related litigation** in **CESTAT, High Courts, and the Supreme Court**.
- Represents India in **WTO trade negotiations**.

Reasons for Proposed 12% Steel Duty

- **US trade barriers:** A **25% tariff on steel imports** (effective **March 12, 2025**) has led to a **global surplus**.
- **Overcapacity in China, Japan, and South Korea** threatens Indian producers.

FAQs on DGTR

- **Q1. What is DGTR?**
 - India's **trade remedy authority** ensuring fair trade.
- **Q2. How long do anti-dumping duties last?**
 - Usually **five years**, with periodic reviews.
- **Q3. Does DGTR resolve trade disputes?**
 - Works with **WTO & Ministry of Commerce** on disputes.

