

Simplified Two-Rate GST Structure

Background: GST Fundamentals

The Goods and Services Tax (GST), launched in July 2017, stands as India's most transformative tax reform.

Its primary objective was to replace the patchwork of indirect levies such as VAT, excise duty, and service tax, by creating a unified **"One Nation, One Tax"** regime.

Currently, GST operates through multiple tax brackets:

- **0%** for essential commodities like food grains.
- **5%** for items of mass consumption.
- **12%** as a mid-slab.
- **18%**, the dominant bracket covering most goods and services.
- **28%**, applicable to luxury and sin products, with an additional cess on items such as tobacco, aerated beverages, and high-end automobiles.

(Relevance: GS 3 – Taxation; GS 2 – Governance)

The Proposal for Reform

The Union Government has suggested rationalising GST by eliminating the **12% and 28% slabs**, streamlining it into a **two-rate structure (tentatively 5% and 18%)**.

The **Group of Ministers (GoM) on Rate Rationalisation**, led by Bihar's Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary, has:

- Endorsed the proposal,
- Submitted its recommendations to the GST Council.

The final authority lies with the **GST Council**, chaired by the Union Finance Minister and comprising state finance ministers.

Why a Two-Rate GST? (Logic & Rationale)

- **Simplification:** The existing five-slab design is complicated, leading to frequent disputes and classification-related litigation.
- **Ease for Businesses:** Particularly for MSMEs, multiple rates create compliance burdens; a simplified system reduces confusion.
- **Transparency:** With fewer slabs, opportunities for lobbying and rate manipulation diminish.
- **Global Practice:** Worldwide, VAT/GST systems usually follow one or two standard rates; India's tiered structure is an anomaly.

Concerns Raised

- **Revenue Concerns of States:** Removing the higher 28% bracket could cut state earnings. Kerala's Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal has cautioned that states must be compensated for potential revenue deficits.
- **Luxury & Sin Goods:** Presently taxed at 28% plus cess, merging them into 18% may reduce revenue and possibly increase demand, making such goods cheaper.
- **Equity Issues:** A flatter tax design risks eroding progressivity, taxing both rich and poor more uniformly.

Likely Implications

For Consumers:

- Small price adjustments in daily-use goods depending on reclassification.
- Luxury items may become more affordable if the 28% slab is abolished without cess retention.

For Businesses:

- Simplified invoicing and accounting.
- Fewer disputes over classification.
- Encourages MSME integration into the formal economy.

For Government:

- Simplification can improve compliance and reduce litigation.
- The challenge is balancing revenue neutrality with consumer affordability.

Larger Context of Reform

India is advancing towards **GST 2.0** because:

- The **compensation cess system** (which protected states' revenues) ended in June 2022.
- GST revenues have stabilised, averaging **₹1.6–1.7 lakh crore/month**.
- A stable economy has opened the window for reforms.

The long-term trajectory envisions moving towards a **three-rate GST**:

- **0%** for essentials,
- **Standard rate** for general consumption,
- **Higher rate** for luxury/sin goods.

Challenges Ahead

- **Political Consensus:** Requires majority state support; richer and poorer states have conflicting priorities.
- **Compensation Demands:** States such as Kerala and Punjab may demand a guaranteed formula for revenue security.
- **Inflation Risk:** If rates rise on commonly consumed items, inflationary pressure could emerge.

Way Forward

- Define a **Revenue-Neutral Rate (RNR)** to ensure no state suffers losses.
- Retain a **separate cess** for luxury and sin products.
- Employ **AI-based GSTN analytics** to enhance compliance and minimise the need for multiple slabs.
- Implement gradually: merge 12% with 18% initially, then carefully restructure the 28% bracket.

Khelo India Water Sports Festival at Dal Lake, Srinagar

Context

The **Khelo India Programme**, launched in 2018, sought to revive India's sports culture by focusing on grassroots development, infrastructure creation, and nurturing athletes. Over time, it has expanded into dedicated segments such as:

- **Khelo India Winter Games (Gulmarg, J&K)**
- **Khelo India Para Games**
- **Khelo India Water Sports Festival**

Why Water Sports?

India significantly trails in Olympic water disciplines like rowing, kayaking, and canoeing, which globally account for substantial medal tallies (e.g., 16 medals in canoeing and kayaking at the Olympics). With natural water bodies like **Dal Lake (J&K)**, **Vembanad (Kerala)**, and **Tehri Dam (Uttarakhand)**, India possesses the infrastructure potential for training.

(Relevance: Prelims – Important Events/Initiatives)

Key Highlights of the Festival

- **Venue:** Dal Lake, Srinagar, chosen for its scenic beauty and conditions comparable to European water hubs.
- **Participation:** 409 athletes from 36 States/UTs, including 202 women (~49.4%), reflecting strong gender parity.

- **Top Contingents:** Madhya Pradesh (44), Haryana (37), Odisha (34), Kerala (33).
- **Events:** 24 Olympic competitions — 14 in kayaking/canoeing, 10 in rowing.
- **Unique Feature:** First-ever open-age national championship under Khelo India, breaking away from previous age-specific restrictions.
- **Local Highlight:** Bilquis Mir, India's first Olympic jury member (2025) from J&K, underscored regional representation.

Significance

Olympic Strategy:

- India's Olympic tally remains modest (7 in Tokyo 2020, 6 in Rio 2016).
- While athletics, shooting, wrestling, and badminton receive focus, water sports represent untapped medal potential (16 medals in canoe/kayak, 14 in rowing).

Regional Development (J&K):

- Dal Lake positioned as a global sporting and tourism hub.
- Offers exposure for local athletes.
- Promotes sport-tourism, contributing to Kashmir's economy.

Gender Inclusivity:

- Almost half the participants were women, breaking stereotypes and mainstreaming female participation in water sports.

Challenges

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Limited standard training centres and reliance on imported equipment.
- **Talent Pipeline:** Grassroots scouting is essential in riverine and coastal regions like Kerala, Odisha, Bengal, and Assam.
- **International Competition:** Nations like Germany, Hungary, and Australia dominate, requiring India to invest in long-term scientific training and exposure.

Broader Impact

- **Sports Policy:** Diversifies India's sporting focus beyond traditional disciplines, supporting the vision of **Olympics 2036**.
- **Tourism & Diplomacy:** Promotes Dal Lake globally, presenting J&K as culturally rich and secure.
- **Local Empowerment:** Engages youth positively, offering alternatives to militancy and unemployment while supporting ancillary industries (boat-making, event management).

Way Forward

- Establish **National Water Sports Centres** at Dal Lake, Vembanad, Tehri, and Brahmaputra.
- Ensure continuous funding via Khelo India and CSR initiatives.
- Launch a **domestic competition circuit** with annual leagues.
- Partner with global federations for training tie-ups.
- Introduce targeted scholarships under schemes like **TOPS** for water-sports athletes.

Kerala: India's First Fully Digitally Literate State

Understanding Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to effectively operate digital devices (smartphones, laptops, tablets, computers) and use the internet for daily needs. It encompasses:

- Handling devices, typing, and using applications.
- Accessing online services such as education, healthcare, banking, and governance.
- Practicing safe online behaviour, including awareness of cyber frauds and secure internet usage.

Difference from basic literacy:

- Conventional literacy means the ability to read and write.
- Digital literacy goes further, enabling individuals to function productively in the modern digital economy and society.

(Relevance: GS 2 – Governance, Prelims Fact)

Kerala's Achievement (2025)

Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** officially declared Kerala as the first Indian state to achieve **100% digital literacy**.

This success came through the **Digi Kerala Project**, designed to eliminate the digital divide at the grassroots.

Process followed:

- A survey was conducted covering 1.5 crore residents across 83.46 lakh households.
- Out of this, 21.88 lakh individuals were identified as digitally illiterate.
- Astonishingly, 99.98% were trained and evaluated, marking the completion of Phase 1.
- As a symbolic gesture, the CM made a video call to a 104-year-old learner, showcasing inclusiveness.

Why Kerala? – Historical Legacy

Kerala already had a strong social development background:

- In 1991, it became the **first state to achieve near-total literacy** through the Kerala State Literacy Mission.
- It consistently maintained the highest human development indicators in India.
- Strong panchayati raj institutions and social mobilization ensured mass participation.

Thus, digital literacy became a natural extension: from **basic literacy** → **functional literacy** → **IT literacy** → **digital literacy**.

The Digi Kerala Project – Core Features

- **Objective:** No citizen should be excluded from the digital revolution.
- **Training Delivery:** Conducted at panchayat/ward level.
- **Focus:** Special attention to women, elderly, marginalized communities, and rural areas.
- **Evaluation:** Not just symbolic; participants were tested and certified.
- **Governance:** Community-driven, with local bodies playing a central role.

Outcome: A digitally empowered population capable of accessing e-services independently.

Why Digital Literacy Matters

- **Governance:** Enables smooth access to government schemes, ration cards, Aadhaar-based benefits, and e-health records.
 - **Economy:** Promotes financial inclusion through online banking, UPI payments, and e-commerce.
 - **Education:** Facilitates access to e-learning resources for students.
 - **Healthcare:** Expands telemedicine, online consultations, and insurance services.
 - **Social Empowerment:** Bridges generational and gender divides, empowering women and senior citizens.
 - **Cybersecurity:** Builds awareness against phishing, scams, and misinformation.
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Challenges Ahead

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Poor internet penetration in remote or tribal belts.
- **Generational Divide:** Senior citizens often struggle to adapt.
- **Affordability:** Devices and internet charges remain barriers for low-income families.

- **Training Quality:** Risk of superficial training without deep understanding.
 - **Cyber Safety:** First-time users remain highly vulnerable to fraud.
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Why Kerala's Model Stands Out

- **Universal Coverage:** Every household was reached.
 - **Community Involvement:** Strong participation by volunteers and local bodies.
 - **Evaluation-based:** Certification was granted only after measurable results.
 - **Inclusivity:** Marginalized groups, elderly citizens, and women included (e.g., 104-year-old trained).
 - **Sustainability:** Creates a foundation for full-fledged digital governance.
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National & Global Relevance

For India:

- Kerala's model can serve as a blueprint for other states.
- It contributes to the **Digital India Mission** by narrowing the rural–urban digital gap.
- Strengthens mechanisms like Direct Benefit Transfers, reducing leakages.

Globally:

- Kerala demonstrates how human development and digital empowerment can reinforce each other.
 - It is comparable to advanced digital literacy frameworks in Nordic nations and Estonia.
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Way Forward

- **Phase 2:** Build advanced digital skills like coding and participation in the digital economy.
- **Cybersecurity Integration:** Embed cyber hygiene in training modules.
- **Affordable Devices:** Provide subsidies and low-cost internet for weaker sections.
- **Continuous Training:** As technology evolves, retraining must occur periodically.
- **Monitoring:** Conduct independent audits every 2–3 years to ensure sustainability.

Organ Donation in India & NOTTO's Advisory on Women

What is NOTTO?

The **National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO)** is India's apex body for coordinating organ and tissue transplantation.

- It operates under the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.
- Established as part of the **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act (THOTA), 1994**.
- Responsibilities include: maintaining national waiting lists, allocating organs, setting uniform standards, and overseeing coordination between hospitals.
- All hospitals engaged in organ transplantation or retrieval must link with NOTTO.

(Relevance: GS 2 – Governance & Health)

Recent Advisory (2024–25)

NOTTO issued a **10-point guideline** for states and transplant centres.

A key gender-related directive was introduced:

- **Priority for women** – women patients, as well as relatives of deceased female donors, will receive priority in allocation.
- **Objective:** to address the systemic gender imbalance in organ donations and transplants.

Other major measures included:

- Creation of **permanent transplant coordinator posts** in all retrieval and transplant hospitals.
- Development of **retrieval facilities** in every trauma centre.
- Registration of trauma centres as official retrieval hubs.
- Training of emergency responders and ambulance personnel to identify potential deceased donors, particularly in road accident and stroke cases.

Why Prioritise Women? – The Gender Disparity

Data (NOTTO, 2019–2023):

- **63.8% of all living donors** were women.
- **69.8% of organ recipients** were men.

Absolute figures:

- Out of **56,509 organ donations**, 36,038 were by women.
- Yet only **17,041 women received transplants**, compared to 39,447 men.

Pattern: Women overwhelmingly donate organs, often for husbands, sons, or brothers, but when they require transplants themselves, they are less likely to receive them.

Underlying reasons:

- **Socio-cultural roles:** Women are expected to sacrifice for family well-being.

- **Economic bias:** Male health seen as more critical for household income, leading to prioritisation of men for transplants.
 - **Financial barriers:** Families hesitate to bear the high cost of transplants for women.
 - **Medical neglect:** Women's health needs are frequently sidelined within families.
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Legal Framework for Organ Donation

- **THOA (1994):** Recognised both living and brain-dead donations. Criminalised commercial organ trade with penalties.
 - **Amendment (2011):** Expanded to include tissues such as corneas, skin, heart valves, and bones.
 - **Implementation bodies:**
 - **NOTTO** (National level)
 - **ROTTOS** (Regional level)
 - **SOTTOS** (State level)
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Status of Organ Donation in India

- **Demand–Supply Gap:**
 - Around **1.8 lakh Indians** develop end-stage kidney disease each year.
 - Only about **12,000 kidney transplants** are performed annually.
 - **Global context (WHO):** 1.3 lakh solid organ transplants are conducted worldwide yearly, meeting only 10% of actual demand.
 - **Potential impact:** A single deceased donor can save up to **8 lives** via organ transplants, and benefit many more through tissues like skin, corneas, and valves.
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Challenges in India

- **Low awareness:** Families rarely discuss organ donation openly.
 - **Cultural and religious myths:** Fear of afterlife consequences or disrespect to the body.
 - **Gender imbalance:** Women overrepresented as donors, underrepresented as recipients.
 - **Weak infrastructure:** Inadequate retrieval centres and shortage of coordinators.
 - **Mismatch in pledges vs allocation:** Public appeals create emotional pledges, but allocation still follows medical priority, causing discontent.
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Why NOTTO's Step Matters

- **Corrective justice:** Acknowledges systemic neglect of women in healthcare allocation.
- **Gender equity:** Ensures that women's health is given equal value.
- **Symbolism:** Sends a strong message to society that women deserve fair access to transplants.
- **Encouragement:** Families may feel reassured that if women donate, they will also receive due priority if needed.

Way Forward

1. **Policy Reforms:**
 - Enforce advisory uniformly across states and hospitals.
 - Collect and publish **gender-disaggregated data** annually.
2. **Infrastructure:**
 - Mandate transplant coordinators in every facility.
 - Register all trauma centres as retrieval hubs.
3. **Awareness:**
 - Campaigns to normalise organ donation discussions.
 - Address myths and taboos through targeted outreach.
4. **Ethical Allocation:**
 - Prioritisation must balance **medical urgency, fairness, and gender justice**.

Conclusion

India faces a paradox: **women contribute the majority of organ donations, but benefit the least as recipients.**

NOTTO's advisory to prioritise women marks a groundbreaking step toward **healthcare equity**. However, lasting progress depends on **infrastructure strengthening, policy enforcement, and continuous public awareness** to close the yawning gap between organ demand and availability.

India's Unregulated Cosmetology Clinics

Basics – Dermatology vs. Cosmetology

- **Dermatology:**
 - A recognised medical specialty under the National Medical Commission (NMC).
 - Deals with diagnosis and treatment of skin, hair, and nail diseases.



- Includes both **medical treatments** (eczema, psoriasis, infections) and **cosmetic interventions** (botox, fillers, transplants, chemical peels).
- **Cosmetology:**
 - Non-medical discipline focused on grooming and beauty (makeup, hairstyling, manicures).
 - Does not involve clinical or therapeutic care.
 - In India, the word “cosmetology” is often misused, misleading people into believing beauty salons are equivalent to medical clinics.

(Relevance: GS 2 – Governance & Health)

Nature of the Problem

Across India, there has been a **mushrooming of aesthetic clinics** with little or no regulatory oversight.

- Unqualified practitioners routinely perform **invasive procedures** like hair transplants, PRP (platelet-rich plasma therapy), fillers, botox, and chemical peels.
- Such clinics often lack sterilisation, infection control, or emergency backup.
- Result: Patients face **serious complications, lifelong disfigurement, and even deaths**.

Categories of Unqualified Practitioners

1. **Dentists (BDS/MDS):**
 - Take weekend or online courses in aesthetics.
 - Begin performing advanced procedures despite lacking dermatology training.
2. **AYUSH Practitioners:**
 - Not authorised to practice allopathy, yet illegally offer cosmetic treatments.
3. **Unqualified Individuals:**
 - Operate with fake “certificates” (costing ₹1–2 lakh) or no medical training at all.
4. **Doctors from Other Fields:**
 - MBBS or specialists (like ophthalmologists, general surgeons) who enter dermatology without proper qualification.

Case Studies – The Dangers

- **Kochi Hair Transplant Case:**



- Patient developed **necrotising fasciitis** (flesh-eating bacterial infection).
- Required multiple surgeries, had skull exposed, lost savings, and lives with permanent trauma.
- **Andhra Pradesh Fake PRP Case:**
 - Patient spent ₹3.5 lakh for “PRP treatment”.
 - No blood was drawn; instead, unlabelled steroid creams were applied.
 - Patient developed **topical steroid withdrawal**, causing severe burning, scaling, and long-term damage.

These examples highlight **life-threatening risks** and the exploitation of vulnerable patients, especially women.

Scope of the Problem

- **Market Size:**
 - India’s wellness industry is valued at **\$2.5 billion (2024)**.
 - Projected to expand to **\$4 billion by 2033** (IMARC Group).
- **Growth Drivers:**
 - Expanding middle class and beauty-conscious youth.
 - Social media trends and K-beauty/global influence.
 - Misconception that cosmetic procedures are “simple and safe”.
- **Dangerous Practices:**
 - Clinics operate without tie-ups to tertiary hospitals → no emergency support.
 - Unlabelled creams, often steroid-based, prescribed without disclosure.
 - Misleading advertisements such as “**Get hair in 7 days**” or “**Skin whitening in 10 days**”.

Regulatory & Institutional Failures

- **National Medical Commission (NMC):**
 - Has guidelines restricting practice to qualified doctors, but enforcement is weak.
- **Conflict of Jurisdiction:**
 - NMC vs. Dental Council of India disputes on whether dentists can perform aesthetic procedures.
- **State Governments:**



- Example: Kerala's Clinical Establishments Act is not fully implemented, leaving many clinics unmonitored.
 - **No Dedicated Regulator:**
 - Aesthetic centres lack a separate regulatory framework.
 - Police investigations and license cancellations are rare, offering little deterrence.
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Professional & Civil Society Action

- **IADVL (Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists & Leprologists):**
 - Runs anti-quackery campaigns.
 - Karnataka chapter submitted memorandums to authorities.
 - Uses WhatsApp groups to verify suspicious prescriptions.
 - **State Medical Councils:**
 - Telangana initiated inspections under NMC Act Sections 34 & 54 (impersonation & illegal practice).
 - **Challenges:**
 - Quacks exploit loopholes, such as using another doctor's prescription.
 - Enforcement is patchy and reactive rather than proactive.
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Consequences of Unregulated Clinics

- **Medical:**
 - Severe infections, blindness from misapplied fillers, permanent scarring, steroid withdrawal.
 - **Psychological:**
 - Emotional trauma, body-image disorders, loss of self-confidence.
 - **Economic:**
 - Patients charged exorbitant rates, often 10 times more than genuine dermatologists.
 - Families driven into debt due to botched procedures.
 - **Trust Deficit:**
 - Patients struggle to distinguish between genuine dermatologists and self-styled cosmetologists.
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Solutions & Way Forward

1. Regulatory Reforms:

- Stricter licensing norms.
- Mandatory tie-ups with tertiary hospitals.
- Periodic inspections and audits.

2. Dedicated Law:

- Separate legislation for aesthetic medicine and cosmetology clinics.
- Penal provisions for impersonation, false advertising, and malpractice.

3. Professional Accountability:

- Stronger role for NMC and state medical councils.
- Fast-track grievance redressal system.

4. Consumer Awareness:

- Patients must verify practitioner qualifications.
- Advertisements should compulsorily carry the registration number of doctors.
- Public campaigns: **"If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."**

5. Curb Quackery:

- Ban short-term cosmetic certification courses.
- Crack down on fake institutes issuing misleading diplomas.

Conclusion

India's booming cosmetic industry is plagued by **unregulated clinics, quack practitioners, and misleading practices**, posing grave risks to public health. Tackling this requires a **strong legal framework, strict enforcement, professional accountability, and greater consumer awareness**. Only then can dermatology and aesthetic medicine be practised safely and ethically.

Planting Trees in Tropics Has the Greatest Climate Benefits

Background

Combating **climate change** relies heavily on natural carbon sequestration through trees. While all forests capture carbon dioxide, their **geographic location** significantly determines their climate effectiveness.

A recent study by the **University of California (npj Climate Action)** concludes that tropical regions deliver the **highest positive impact** when it comes to climate mitigation.

(Relevance: GS 3 – Environment & Ecology)

Key Findings of the Study

1. **Greater Carbon Absorption:**

- Tropical regions experience year-round growth and photosynthesis.
- Leads to higher biomass accumulation and more effective carbon storage.

2. **Cooling Through Evapotranspiration:**

- Trees release water vapour into the atmosphere, lowering local and regional temperatures.
- Similar to human sweating, this process provides a natural cooling effect.

3. **Solar Radiation Regulation:**

- Tree canopies reduce the sunlight reaching Earth's surface, minimising heat absorption.

4. **Fire Resistance:**

- Tropical savannas and tree ecosystems are more resilient to fires than grass-dominated landscapes.

5. **Comparative Impact:**

- Planting in **tropical zones** generates far stronger climate benefits than equivalent plantations in temperate or polar areas.

Significance for India

- India lies within the **tropical belt**, offering vast potential for nature-based climate solutions.
- Supports India's commitments under the **Paris Agreement (NDCs)**.
- Contributes to afforestation goals under schemes like:
 - **National Afforestation Programme**
 - **Green India Mission**
- Directly advances **SDG 13 (Climate Action)** and **SDG 15 (Life on Land)**.

Challenges & Limitations

- **Monoculture Risk:** Large-scale single-species plantations can harm biodiversity despite carbon gains.
- **Land Conflicts:** Afforestation sometimes competes with agricultural needs or human settlements.
- **Maintenance Issues:** Without local community involvement, plantations may degrade or fail.
- **Ecological Mismatch:** Planting non-native species can disturb ecosystems and reduce resilience.

Way Forward / Policy Recommendations

1. Prioritise Tropical Afforestation:

- Focus investments on tropical and subtropical belts.

2. Promote Native Species:

- Use indigenous trees to safeguard biodiversity and improve ecosystem resilience.

3. Link With Carbon Finance:

- Connect projects to **carbon markets** and international climate finance to scale efforts.

4. Community-Based Forest Management:

- Engage local populations to ensure protection, monitoring, and sustainable use.

Conclusion

Planting trees anywhere aids climate action, but **tropical afforestation yields the strongest results** due to higher carbon uptake, cooling effects, and resilience. For India, tropical afforestation not only strengthens climate commitments but also enhances biodiversity, livelihoods, and ecological stability when implemented with community participation.

Why Every Tiger Carcass Needs an Autopsy

Background

India is home to approximately **3,167 tigers** (All India Tiger Estimation 2022), accounting for over **70% of the world's wild tiger population**.

Tiger conservation has been a national priority since **Project Tiger (1973)**, overseen by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.

Every tiger death is a matter of concern because a carcass can provide **critical information** for conservation, anti-poaching efforts, and disease monitoring.

(Relevance: GS 3 – Environment & Ecology; GS 2 – Governance)

Why an Autopsy (Postmortem) is Crucial

- **Forensic Evidence:** Determines whether death occurred due to natural causes, poaching, poisoning, or territorial fighting.
- **Legal Accountability:** Tigers are protected under **Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**, which provides maximum protection.
- **Early Warning:** Helps identify outbreaks of diseases like **canine distemper virus** that can spread across populations.

- **Territorial Behaviour:** Infighting among tigers is common; autopsies reveal territorial patterns and rivalries.

Procedure After a Carcass is Found

1. **Immediate Reporting:** Field staff must notify the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Range Officer, and NTCA.
2. **Securing the Site:** Area cordoned off, photographs and videos taken, GPS location recorded, and visible evidence collected (wounds, bite marks).
3. **Conducting Postmortem:** Wildlife veterinarian performs autopsy in the presence of forest officials, NTCA representatives, and often NGOs.
4. **Sample Collection:** Tissues, organs, and viscera are preserved for laboratory analysis.
5. **If Onsite Autopsy Not Feasible:** Carcass preserved and shifted for detailed examination.
6. **Disposal:** After examination, carcass is cremated; bones are burnt to prevent illegal trade.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Delayed Reporting:** Carcasses may decompose, weakening evidence.
- **Skill Shortages:** Limited number of trained wildlife vets and forensic labs.
- **Cover-Ups:** Local staff may attempt to conceal negligence or poaching incidents.
- **Buffer Zone Weakness:** Monitoring outside core protected areas is often inadequate.

Significance for Conservation

- Maintains **transparency and accountability** in tiger conservation.
- Helps combat **illegal wildlife trade**, where tiger parts are highly valued in black markets.
- Reinforces India's global reputation as a leader in big cat conservation.
- Ensures **responsibility of forest staff** in reporting and monitoring tiger deaths.

Way Forward

1. **Strengthen NTCA Protocols:** Faster reporting systems, GPS tagging, and digital platforms for real-time updates.
2. **Expand Wildlife Forensic Capacity:** Establish regional forensic labs and train more wildlife vets.

3. **Staff Training:** Forest staff must be trained in wildlife crime scene handling.
4. **Community Vigilance:** Involve local communities in monitoring around reserves.
5. **Use of Technology:** Drones and camera traps to detect carcasses quickly and monitor suspicious activity.

Conclusion

Each tiger carcass is not just a dead animal—it is **vital evidence** for safeguarding the species. Conducting mandatory autopsies ensures scientific monitoring, strengthens conservation strategies, and helps India uphold its commitment to protecting its national animal.

Why Environmentalists Have Criticised Haryana Govt's Definition of 'Forest'

Why the Definition of 'Forest' Matters

India's forest governance rests on **constitutional, legal, and judicial foundations**:

- **Article 48A (Directive Principles):** Directs the State to safeguard the environment, forests, and wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duty):** Obligates citizens to protect natural resources.
- **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 (FCA):** Prohibits diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes without central clearance.
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 & Environment Protection Act, 1986:** Strengthen conservation measures.

⚠ **Key Issue:** India has **no single, statutory definition of "forest"**.

Traditionally, forests were classified under the **Indian Forest Act, 1927** as Reserved, Protected, or Unclassified forests.

However, many ecologically significant lands—scrublands, wetlands, community forests—remained outside this framework.

(Relevance: GS 3 – Environment & Ecology)

Supreme Court's Landmark Intervention

T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India (1996 onwards):

- SC ruled that the term "forest" should not be confined to official records alone.
- Any land meeting the **dictionary definition of forest**, irrespective of ownership (private or state), falls under FCA protection.
- This interpretation froze diversion of large areas of forest land unless approved by the Centre.
- Judiciary, through the **Centrally Empowered Committee (CEC)**, monitored deforestation across India.

Impact:

- Vast tracts of ecologically vital land gained legal protection.
- States were directed to identify and map forests comprehensively.

Haryana Government's 2025 Notification

The state's Environment & Forests Department issued a new definition:

- **A patch of land is "forest" if:**
 - Minimum area is **1 hectare**,
 - It is **contiguous with government-notified forests**,
 - It has a **canopy density of at least 40%**.

Exclusions:

- Lands below 1 hectare.
- Open forests (<40% canopy cover).
- Scrublands, wetlands, and fragmented patches of greenery.

State's Justification:

- Brings "clarity" and avoids confusion in development approvals.
- Establishes measurable parameters (area + canopy density).

Criticism by Environmentalists & Experts

1. Contradiction of Supreme Court Orders:

- Godavarman explicitly avoided rigid thresholds.
- Haryana's definition narrows scope, effectively disregarding SC's broad interpretation.
- May amount to **prima facie contempt of court**.

2. Ecological Concerns:

- **Biodiversity Loss:** Excludes scrublands, grasslands, wetlands—habitats for species like sarus crane, leopard, nilgai, and reptiles.
- **Habitat Fragmentation:** Smaller patches often serve as corridors connecting larger forests, especially in the **Aravallis**. Their exclusion disrupts ecological connectivity.
- **Climate Impact:** Haryana already has one of India's lowest forest covers (~3.6%). Further dilution worsens carbon sequestration, rainfall regulation, and groundwater recharge.

3. High Threshold Problem:



- By setting 1 hectare + 40% canopy as minimum, ecologically important degraded or semi-open areas are left unprotected.
- Contradicts **National Forest Policy (1988)**, which emphasises regenerating degraded lands.

4. Political-Economic Angle:

- Critics allege the move benefits **real estate, mining, and infrastructure lobbies**, particularly in the fragile Aravalli Hills.
- Redefinition could open up land for commercial exploitation under the guise of “not forest”.

Reactions

- **Retired IFS Officers:** Warned the step undermines SC rulings and India’s international obligations (CBD, UNFCCC).
- **Environmental NGOs:** Filed objections; likely to challenge in Supreme Court and NGT.
- **Judicial Trends:** NGT has struck down similar dilutions by states like Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka in the past.

Wider Implications

- **Legal Precedent Risk:** If Haryana’s move stands, other states may replicate it, diluting three decades of judicially established forest protections.
- **Impact on Climate Commitments:** Narrower definitions jeopardise India’s **Paris Agreement pledge** to create additional carbon sinks of 2.5–3 billion tonnes CO₂ equivalent by 2030.
- **Centre–State Conflict:** Forests fall under the **Concurrent List**. States must comply with the FCA and SC rulings. Haryana’s unilateral action risks legal confrontation with the Centre.

Conclusion

Haryana’s restrictive definition of “forest” undermines both the **spirit of the Supreme Court’s Godavarman judgment** and India’s ecological security. By excluding wetlands, scrublands, and smaller patches, the move threatens biodiversity, forest connectivity, and climate resilience. Unless corrected, it could set a dangerous precedent for other states, weakening decades of judicially mandated conservation efforts.

23rd August 2025: Daily MCQs

Q1. The **Digital India** programme, designed to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, was formally launched in which year?

- (a) 2012
- (b) 2014
- (c) 2015
- (d) 2016

Answer: (c) 2015

Explanation:

- Officially launched on **1 July 2015** by the Government of India.
- It focuses on strengthening digital infrastructure, delivering e-governance, and enhancing digital literacy.

Q2. The **three vision pillars** of the Digital India initiative include:

1. Digital Infrastructure as a Core Utility to Every Citizen
2. Governance and Services on Demand
3. Digital Literacy for Rural Population
4. Digital Payments and e-commerce Development

Which of the above are correct?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 1 and 4 only
- (d) All four

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- The program's vision is based on **three pillars**:
 - Digital infrastructure (internet access, Aadhaar, mobile connectivity).
 - Governance and services delivered digitally.
 - Digital literacy, particularly in rural and marginalised sections.
- Digital payments and e-commerce are important, but they are **outcomes**, not vision pillars.

Q3. Under **Digital India**, which flagship project seeks to connect all **gram panchayats** with high-speed broadband?

- (a) BharatNet
- (b) Digital Saksharta Abhiyan
- (c) e-Kranti
- (d) Common Service Centres

Answer: (a) BharatNet

Explanation:

- BharatNet is an optical fibre broadband project aimed at connecting **2.5 lakh gram panchayats**.

- It ensures affordable internet in rural areas, enabling service delivery and digital inclusion.

Q4. Which scheme under **Digital India** is specifically aimed at enhancing **digital literacy among rural households**?

- (a) Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)
- (b) e-Kranti
- (c) DigiLocker
- (d) UMANG

Answer: (a) PMGDISHA

Explanation:

- Seeks to train **one person per rural household** in basic digital skills.
- Targets **6 crore rural households**.
- Helps bridge the rural-urban digital divide through a multiplier effect.

Q5. In the context of Digital India, what does **DigiLocker** provide?

- (a) A digital wallet for online payments
- (b) A cloud-based facility for secure storage and access of official documents
- (c) An online training platform for e-governance
- (d) A biometric-based authentication system

Answer: (b)

Explanation:

- DigiLocker is a **secure, cloud-based repository** for documents like Aadhaar, PAN, driving licences, certificates, etc.
- Reduces dependence on physical copies and speeds up verification.
- Linked with **DigiSign** for digital signatures → key tool for paperless governance.