

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIR (7 September 2024)

TOPICS COVERED

- 1. One killed, five injured in ‘rocket attack’ on Manipur ex-CM’s house**
- 2. Centre approves new treatment regimen for multidrug-resistant TB (GS Paper-II: Health Sector)**
- 3. Zelensky seeks U.S. nod to strike deeper inside Russia**
- 4. Central team to visit flood-hit Andhra Pradesh, Telangana**
- 5. Probe ordered after Class 3 student of U.P. private school suspended over non-veg food (GS Paper-II: Article 21)**
- 6. Three women arrested on charges of resorting to ‘serial killing using cyanide’ in A.P. (GS Paper-III: Basic Science)**
- 7. Bengal Governor sends Aparajita Bill for President’s assent**
- 8. Shared ownership of protected monuments with Waqf Board causes conflict, says ASI (GS Paper-I: History)**
- 9. NTCA letter on relocation from tiger zones draws ire (GS paper-III: Environment)**
- 10. PM meets teachers, pitches for education in mother tongue**
- 11. Over 80% of IIT-Bhubaneswar faculty members belong to general category (GS Paper-II: Justice and Equality)**
- 12. Stick to fiscal deficit as the norm for fiscal prudence (GS Paper-III: Economy)**
- 13. Cow as cover for murder**
- 14. Politics before people (GS Paper-I: History)**
- 15. An unending cycle of floods and grief (GS Paper-I: Geography)**

Centre approves new treatment regimen for multidrug-resistant TB

GS Paper II: Health Sector

The new era

What does the introduction of the new treatment regimen mean for India's 75,000 drug-resistant TB patients?

① It has been proven to be safe, more effective and a quicker treatment option than the previous MDR-TB treatment procedure

② It brings down treatment time to around six months from the earlier duration of 18 to 24 months

③ It has been found to be cheaper for both health systems and patients



The regimen consists of four drugs – Bedaquiline, Pretomanid, Linezolid and Moxifloxacin

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Friday approved the introduction of a new treatment regimen for multidrug-resistant tuberculosis in India.

The BPaLM regimen has proven to be a safe, more effective and quicker treatment option than the previous multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) treatment procedure, the Ministry said.

It added that the country was working towards the elimination of TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global target for eliminating the disease under the sustainable development goals. As part of these efforts, the Ministry has introduced the BPaLM

regimen, a novel treatment for MDR-TB, under its National TB Elimination Programme.

High success rate

This regimen includes a new anti-TB drug, Pretomanid, in combination with Bedaquiline and Linezolid (with or without Moxifloxacin). Pretomanid had earlier been approved and licensed for use in India by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.

While traditional treatments can last up to 20 months with severe side effects, the BPaLM regimen can cure drug-resistant TB in just six months with a high success rate.

India's 75,000 drug-resistant TB patients will now be able to benefit from this shorter regimen.

Shared ownership of protected monuments with Waqf Board causes conflict, says ASI

GS Paper I: History

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

Quoting the examples of Fatehpur Sikri in Agra and Atala Masjid in Jaunpur, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) told a Parliamentary panel that having protected monuments which are also notified as Waqf property gives rise to conflicts and administrative issues. The ASI made this argument during its submission to a joint committee holding consultations on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Contesting this claim, Opposition members of the committee argued that no monument is arbitrarily appropriated by the Waqf Board without historical evidence supporting its ownership, noting that the ASI's own governing legislation – the Ancient Monu-



The ASI's list had 53 protected monuments, including Fatehpur Sikri, which have also been declared as Waqf property. FILE PHOTO

ments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act) – equips the organisation to deal with such cases.

The ASI shared a list of 53 protected monuments, which have also been declared as Waqf property by the Waqf Board, using the Waqf Act, 1995. Such “dual authorities” create conflict, ASI officials said. They

underlined that many of these properties have been categorised as Waqf only after they were declared as protected sites.

According to sources, the ASI complained that its staff have been restricted from carrying out “conservation” work in such monuments. They also accused the Board of carrying out “several additions and al-

terations” to the original structure of these protected monuments, hampering the “authenticity and integrity” of such structures. They listed the examples of the Atala Masjid in Jaunpur where shops were built into the enclosure, and Mecca Masjid in Ahmednagar, where fittings and fixtures were installed without the ASI's permission. They also cited the case of Fatehpur Sikri, where officials claimed that the Waqf is directly appointing tour guides, replacing the ASI-certified guides.

These ASI charges were contested by a number of Opposition members. All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) MP Asadduddin Owaisi, it is learnt, pointed out that the ASI is deliberately ignoring the very framework of laws

that it operates under. The AMASR Act, he argued, provides for balancing private property rights to protected monuments with the public purpose of preservation.

Other members countered that no property could be declared as a Waqf arbitrarily without historical evidence of “Waqf by user”. The new law, they said, is trying to do away with this very clause of “Waqf by user” which will throw open all Waqf properties for multiple claims.

ASI officials were also cornered by the ruling BJP's MPs, who asked them why the organisation had failed to act in instances listed by them where the Waqf status allegedly threatened the integrity and authenticity of the protected structures.

Mecca Masjid in Ahmednagar

- The Mecca Masjid in Ahmednagar is a prominent Islamic mosque located in the city of **Ahmednagar, Maharashtra**.

History:

- Construction:** The Mecca Masjid was built in the 16th century during the reign of the Nizam Shahi dynasty of Ahmednagar.
- Expansion:** The mosque was expanded several times over the centuries, reflecting the growing Muslim population of the city.
- British Rule:** During British rule, the Mecca Masjid was briefly converted into a Christian church. However, it was later restored to its original Islamic use.

Architectural Features:

- Indo-Islamic Style:** The mosque exhibits a distinctive Indo-Islamic architectural style, combining elements of Persian, Turkish, and Indian architecture.
- Central Courtyard:** The mosque features a large central courtyard surrounded by arcades.
- Prayer Hall:** The prayer hall is adorned with intricate carvings and decorative elements.
- Minarets:** The mosque has four tall minarets that are a prominent feature of its skyline.

Atala Masjid in Jaunpur

- The **Atala Masjid** is a magnificent mosque located in the historic city of Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, India.
- It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and one of the most iconic Islamic monuments in the country.

History and Significance

- Construction:** The mosque was built in the late **14th century by Ibrahim Shah Sharqi, the founder of the Sharqi dynasty**. It is believed to have been completed around 1375 AD.
- Architectural Style:** The Atala Masjid showcases a unique architectural style that blends elements of Persian, Turkish, and Indian architecture. Its most striking feature is the **massive dome**, one of the largest in India.



- **UNESCO World Heritage Site:** The Atala Masjid was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2010, recognizing its exceptional cultural and historical significance.

NTCA letter on relocation from tiger zones draws ire

Apex tiger conservation authority asks 19 States to 'prioritise' removal of residents from core tiger zones; senior Environment Ministry official says these letters are routine and periodic reminders

GS Paper III: Environment

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A recent letter by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) – the apex body tasked with tiger conservation – asking 19 States to “prioritise” the removal of villagers who are residents in the core tiger zones has drawn the ire of several organisations and activists, who have written to Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav protesting against these directions.

“It has been observed that 591 villages comprising 64,801 families are still residing in the core area (of the tiger zone). The progress of village relocation is very slow and it poses grave concern in the light of tiger conservation,” said the letter written by G.S. Bharadwaj, Additional DGF (Project Tiger) and Member Secretary, NTCA to Subhash Malkede, Chief Wildlife Warden, Karnataka on June 19.

Though *The Hindu* has only viewed this letter, similar letters have been



The “core zone” is a tiger reserve area where tribals cannot live, while hunting and collecting forest produce is banned. FILE PHOTO

sent to other States too. Karnataka has 81 villages in the core zone, with 1,175 families having been relocated since the inception of Project Tiger in 1973.

The “core zone” refers to the portion in a tiger reserve where tribals cannot live and activities such as hunting and collecting forest produce is banned. There is a concentric circle outside the “core zone” called the buffer zone where these restrictions are eased but regulated.

There are 53 tiger reserves in India across 19 States, with 848 villages comprising 89,808 families in the core zone. Since

1973, 257 of these villages comprising 25,007 families have been relocated. The Wildlife Act says that core zones are to be “inviolable” and these must be made so by coaxing residents to “voluntarily relocate” on “mutually agreed terms and conditions”.

“We are appalled at the step taken by the NTCA directing the relocation of the forest dependent communities in flagrant violation of all the relevant laws,” read the letter by the organisations dated September 5.

The letter alleges that the NTCA’s relocation orders were in “complete

violation” of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, the Forest Rights Act, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (LARR), and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

“The NTCA action put pressure on the State governments to relocate communities... forcing the State governments to commit illegalities. This would lead to massive conflicts between State authorities and the Scheduled Tribes and other forest dwelling tribes living in the tiger reserves,” the letter added.

A senior official in the Environment Ministry, who declined to be identified, told *The Hindu* that these letters were “routine” and periodic reminders to the States to make core zones inviolable. “The process of relocation is voluntary and cannot be done without settling the rights of forest dwellers. There are several success stories but it is a necessarily slow process as data will show.”

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India.
- It was established in December 2005, following the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force.
- The NTCA was constituted under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, through an amendment that added a new section, Section 38O, to the Act.

Over 80% of IIT-Bhubaneswar faculty members belong to general category

GS Paper II: Justice & Equality

Satyasundar Barik

BHUBANESWAR

Amid the ongoing debate surrounding the representation of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the job sector, it has emerged that over 80% of faculty members at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bhubaneswar are from the unreserved categories.

Responding to information sought by Gowd Kiran Kumar, president of All India OBC Students Association, under the Right to Information Act, the authorities said that there was 300 sanctioned posts of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor.

Currently, 213 positions have been filled across various departments. As per the reply, 95 posts are lying vacant. A total of 171 out of the 213 posts have been filled by candidates belonging to the general category.

Tracking representation

The All India OBC Students Association had sought a reply under the RTI Act on faculty appointments in IIT-Bhubaneswar

- It found that 171 faculty members out of 213 posts filled were from the General Category
- 28 faculty members were from the Other Backward Classes
- 12 faculty members were from the Scheduled Castes, 1 from the Scheduled Tribes and 1 from the Economically Weaker Section



Twenty-eight candidates from the OBC category, including a person with disabilities, teach in the institute. One faculty member is from a tribal community, while 12 are from the Scheduled Castes. One person is from the Economically Weaker Section.

“We began filing RTI applications in 2018 to gather information on faculty appointments in Central government institutions. To our astonishment, we discovered that at that time, only nine professors be-

longed to OBCs in across 45 Central universities nationwide,” Mr. Kiran said.

“We met Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan twice to bring this issue to his attention. He responded positively, directing all Central institutes to initiate special drives to fill vacant positions in line with the reservation policy. However, the recent data from IIT, Bhubaneswar is disheartening. The representation of marginalised communities remains alarmingly low, with

only one tribal faculty member, making up just 0.4%,” he pointed out.

Senior Congress leader Srikant Jena said, “It is mandatory for all Central institutes to adhere to the reservation policy. However, many fail to fill positions designated for reserved categories, often citing lack of suitable candidates as the reason. We will demand a thorough investigation into recruitment process followed by IIT, Bhubaneswar. If suitable candidates were not available, the institute should have made sincere efforts to scout for talents from reserved categories.”

Reservation to the SCs, STs, and OBCs in case of direct recruitment on an all-India basis by open competition is given at the rate of 15%, 7.5%, and 27%, respectively.

Despite efforts to reach out to the IIT, Bhubaneswar for comments, no one was available to clarify the institution’s position.

Stick to fiscal deficit as the norm for fiscal prudence

GS Paper III: Economy

Government expenditures exceeding revenue by a high margin can lead to a difficult situation. In the 1980s, rising fiscal deficit accompanied by rising government debt led to a difficult balance of payments situation and a high ratio of interest payment to revenue receipts. This forced the government to borrow progressively more to meet developmental expenditures.

Budget pointer

In the final 2024-25 Union Budget, the Finance Minister said, "From 2026-27 onwards, our endeavour will be to keep the fiscal deficit each year such that the Central government debt will be on a declining path as percentage of GDP." The Budget speech also says that the Centre's fiscal deficit would be reduced to 4.5% of GDP in 2025-26 from its budgeted level of 4.9% in 2024-25.

With these levels of fiscal deficit in two consecutive years, the Centre's debt-GDP ratio is estimated at 54% in 2025-26, assuming a nominal GDP growth of 10.5% in these two years. After this, the central government aims to have only a reducing path of debt-GDP ratio without stating a debt-GDP target and specifying a path to reach that. This implies effective abandoning of the Centre's Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) 2018 debt-GDP target of 40% for the central government and 60% for the combined government for an indefinite period. It can be shown that with a nominal GDP growth in the range of 10%-11%, a falling path of the debt-GDP ratio can be ensured year after year while maintaining a fiscal deficit-GDP ratio for the Centre at 4.5%. In fact, at this level of fiscal deficit, the debt-GDP ratio would reach a level of 48% by 2048-49 while showing a falling debt-GDP ratio all along. State governments, in their respective Fiscal Responsibility Legislations (FRLs), have adopted a fiscal deficit-Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) target of 3%. They may also be tempted to abandon their targets and only show a falling path of their respective debt-GSDP ratios. If the two levels of government maintain, on average, fiscal deficit to GDP ratios of 4.5% and 3% net of intergovernmental lending, the average combined fiscal deficit would amount to 7.5% of GDP for several years.

Such a profile of debt and fiscal deficit, while consistent with a falling debt-GDP/GSDP profiles,



C. Rangarajan

Distinguished University Professor, Ahmedabad University and a former Governor, Reserve Bank of India



D.K. Srivastava

Honorary Professor, Madras School of Economics and Member, Advisory Council to the Sixteenth Finance Commission

With the current lower levels of household financial savings, having 3% of GDP as a limit to fiscal deficit should be the focus

would leave little space for the private sector to access available investible surplus unless current account deficit is increased beyond sustainable levels.

The Twelfth Finance Commission had argued that the investible surplus for the private corporate sector and the non-government public sector can be derived as the excess of household financial savings and net inflow of foreign capital over the draft of this surplus by the central and State governments through their borrowing. In this context, the Twelfth Finance Commission had observed (paragraph 4.41 of their report), "The transferable savings of the household sector of 10 per cent of GDP combined with an acceptable level of current account deficit of 1.5 per cent would be adequate to provide for a government fiscal deficit of 6 per cent, an absorption by the private corporate sector of 4 per cent, and by non-departmental public enterprises of 1.5 per cent of GDP."

The recent tendency is for household financial savings to come down. In 2022-23, it was 5.3% of GDP as against 7.6% in the previous four years excluding the COVID-19 year of 2020-21. With 5.3% of household savings and about 2% of net inflow of foreign capital, available investible surplus of 7.3% will be fully pre-empted by the fiscal deficits of the central and State governments at about 7.5% of GDP. We can look at a higher level of fiscal deficit only if household financial savings rise.

Sustainable debt and fiscal deficit

There is a simple arithmetic relationship between fiscal deficit and debt-GDP ratio. To reduce the debt-GDP ratio, one has to act on fiscal deficit-GDP ratio, which essentially means change in the debt-GDP ratio between two consecutive years. The fiscal responsibility framework, which has been built in India after 2003, with States coming on board with their respective FRLs, has considered suitable combinations of debt-GDP/GSDP levels along with fiscal deficit-GDP/GSDP levels.

In India's context, if the debt-GDP ratio remains relatively high compared to the norms given in the FRLs of the Centre and States, the ratio of interest payment to revenue receipts would also remain high, pre-empting government's revenue receipts while leaving progressively lower shares for financing

non-interest expenditures. The ratio of Centre's interest payment to revenue receipts net of tax devolution, which had fallen to 35% in 2016-17, has increased to an average of 38.4% during 2021-22 to 2023-24. This ratio averaged 51.6% if we consider the Centre's revenue receipts after taking into account all transfers including tax devolution and grants.

An international comparison

There are many countries which have a far higher level of government debt-GDP ratio as compared to India. Their interest payments to revenue receipts, however, are much lower. For example, during 2015-19, the ratio of interest payment to revenue receipts averaged only 5.5%, 6.6% and 8.5% for Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively (International Monetary Fund). In contrast, during 2015-16 to 2019-20, India's combined interest payment to revenue receipts ratio was 24% on average with the Centre's post transfer ratio averaging 49%.

While recent pronouncements talk of the debt-GDP ratio as the policy variable, they do not, however, specify what that target is for India and what the path would be to reach that target from the current levels of debt-GDP ratio. The problem in the context of macro-stabilisation is that when a major disturbance occurs, such as the COVID-19 pandemic in our recent past, it took just one year for the central debt-GDP ratio to shoot up from 50.7% in 2019-20 to 60.7% in 2020-21.

However, returning to the pre-COVID-19 level of debt-GDP ratio has taken much longer and we are still nowhere close to reaching that. The paths of adjustment of upward and downward movements of debt-GDP ratio due to a macroeconomic shock often tends to be asymmetric. Governments find it convenient to keep postponing the downward adjustment in the debt-GDP ratio while continuing to nurse high levels of interest payment relative to revenue receipts. There is no point in urging private investment to grow if the available investible surplus is limited. With the current lower levels of household financial savings, it is better for the central government to stick to 3% of GDP as a limit to fiscal deficit. We need to draw up a road map to achieve that level. Any relaxation of this rule will only lead to fiscal imprudence.

The views expressed are personal

Stick to Fiscal deficit as the norm for Fiscal prudence (7 September)

- Government spending more than its revenue can create financial issues.
- In the 1980s, high fiscal deficits and increasing government debt led to a balance of payments crisis and more borrowing for development.
- The Finance Minister in the 2024-25 Budget stated that from 2026-27, efforts will be made to reduce the fiscal deficit so that government debt decreases as a percentage of GDP.
- The fiscal deficit target for 2025-26 is set at 4.5% of GDP, down from 4.9% in 2024-25.
- With these fiscal deficit targets, the central government's debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to be 54% in 2025-26, assuming a nominal GDP growth of 10.5%.
- The government has moved away from the earlier Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) target of reducing debt to 40% of GDP for the central government.
- With a nominal GDP growth of 10%-11%, the debt-to-GDP ratio can steadily decrease while maintaining a 4.5% fiscal deficit.
- If the government keeps this level of fiscal deficit, the debt-to-GDP ratio could reduce to 48% by 2048-49.
- State governments have also set a fiscal deficit target of 3% of GSDP, but may now follow a similar path of showing a falling debt-to-GSDP ratio without specific targets.
- If both central and state governments maintain fiscal deficits of 4.5% and 3%, respectively, the combined fiscal deficit could average 7.5% of GDP.

- This high fiscal deficit would limit the funds available for private sector investment unless the current account deficit increases.
- The Twelfth Finance Commission stated that government borrowing competes with the private sector for household savings and foreign capital.
- To sustain both government and private investment needs, household financial savings need to be higher.
- In 2022-23, household savings fell to 5.3% of GDP, down from 7.6% in previous years.
- With household savings at 5.3% and foreign capital inflows at around 2%, the combined 7.3% of available surplus would be fully used by government deficits. Higher fiscal deficits would only be possible if household savings rise.

Sustainable debt and fiscal deficit

- There is a simple relationship between the fiscal deficit and the debt-to-GDP ratio. To reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio, the fiscal deficit must be reduced.
- India has a fiscal responsibility framework that sets debt-to-GDP and fiscal deficit-to-GDP targets for both the central and state governments.
- If India's debt-to-GDP ratio remains high, the government will need to spend a large portion of its revenue on interest payments, leaving less for other expenses.
- The central government's interest payments as a percentage of revenue receipts increased from 35% in 2016-17 to 38.4% on average from 2021-22 to 2023-24.
- When accounting for all transfers, this interest payment ratio increased to an average of 51.6%.
- Internationally, countries like Japan, the UK, and the US have much higher debt-to-GDP ratios, but their interest payments as a percentage of revenue are much lower (Japan: 5.5%, UK: 6.6%, US: 8.5%).
- India's combined interest payment to revenue ratio during 2015-20 averaged 24%, with the central government's post-transfer ratio averaging 49%.
- The government talks about reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio but does not specify a clear target or path to achieve it.
- After the COVID-19 pandemic, India's debt-to-GDP ratio increased from 50.7% in 2019-20 to 60.7% in 2020-21.
- Returning to the pre-COVID debt levels has been slow and difficult.
- Governments tend to delay reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio, resulting in high interest payments relative to revenue.
- High interest payments limit the availability of investible surplus for private investment.
- With low household savings, it's better for the central government to keep the fiscal deficit at 3% of GDP and stick to a clear plan to achieve this.
- Relaxing this rule may lead to poor fiscal management.

A tourism policy ill-suited for Jammu and Kashmir (7 September)

- Kashmir was once known for its pristine environment, but urbanization and commercialization have damaged it.
- Climate change is also affecting the region, making environmental issues worse.
- The Jammu and Kashmir government's new tourism policy has brought in over 4 crore tourists since 2020, including 1.2 million in the first half of 2024.
- The rise in tourism is disturbing the Valley's delicate ecological balance.
- Poor waste management is increasing pollution, especially in water bodies.
- Pilgrimage tourism, particularly in Pahalgam and around the Mata Vaishno Devi temple, is straining the ecosystem, leading to deforestation, waste buildup, and unregulated construction.
- Experts say unchecked tourism was a major factor behind the devastating floods in 2014.
- Increased infrastructure development for tourism (hotels, roads, etc.) is encroaching on natural habitats, disrupting wildlife and causing deforestation and soil erosion.
- The growing demand for water and electricity is putting pressure on local resources.
- Over-extraction of groundwater is depleting aquifers, and hydroelectric projects are damaging local aquatic ecosystems.
- Many areas in Kashmir are facing a shortage of drinking water.
- Climate change is causing glaciers to melt faster, leading to water shortages and an agricultural drought.
- Less rainfall and unpredictable weather are reducing water levels in rivers and streams, affecting irrigation.
- This threatens crop production, which could cause economic hardship for farmers and possible food shortages.
- Climate change poses a long-term threat to Kashmir's agriculture and food security.

A fragile region

- Jammu and Kashmir is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, and avalanches.
- The region lies in a seismically active zone, increasing the risk of such disasters.
- The 2014 floods caused severe damage, affecting around 5 million people, submerging large parts of the Kashmir Valley, and causing an economic loss of ₹5,400 crore-₹5,700 crore.
- In 2022, flash floods caused by a cloudburst near Amarnath led to 16 deaths and 40 missing people.

- Road construction to boost tourism in new areas often disrupts fragile ecosystems, worsening the environmental impact.
- The landslide in Wayanad, Kerala, which took over 200 lives, highlights the dangers of unchecked commercial development in ecologically sensitive regions, like Kashmir.
- Tourism is important for Kashmir's economy, but uncontrolled development of hotels and resorts could lead to environmental disasters.
- A sustainable tourism model is needed that minimizes environmental harm by reducing waste, conserving water, and protecting biodiversity.
- Local communities should be involved in tourism planning to make it more inclusive and beneficial for everyone.
- Infrastructure should be built to withstand extreme weather, tourism should be diversified beyond peak seasons, and policies should protect both tourists and locals.
- Adopting sustainable tourism will help preserve Kashmir's natural beauty, support local livelihoods, and ensure long-term economic benefits while protecting the environment.

Fresh openings (7 September)

Election in J&K could throw up new opportunities for the region

- Jammu and Kashmir is having its first Assembly election in 10 years, creating excitement among people and political parties.
- In 2019, J&K lost its statehood and special status under Article 370, which is a central issue in the election campaign.
- Regional parties are promising to fight for the restoration of Article 370, while the BJP opposes this, calling them supporters of separatism.
- The Congress is avoiding direct comments on Article 370 but promises to restore statehood.
- A large number of 529 candidates are contesting for 50 Assembly seats in the first two phases of the election.
- The Jamaat-e-Islami, previously boycotting elections and linked with separatist groups, is now participating by fielding candidates.
- Some separatists are also entering electoral politics, which could potentially lead to peace and stability in the region.
- Regional parties like the J&K National Conference (NC) and Peoples Democratic Party are promising to reverse post-2019 changes and revoke the Public Safety Act (PSA).
- The Congress is concerned about "outsiders" being given land and jobs and the powers of the Lieutenant Governor.
- The BJP has grown its voter base beyond Jammu, especially among Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, including the Pahari community, who recently got ST status.
- The BJP has fielded 11 Muslim candidates and is targeting the dominance of regional parties and Congress.
- Counting of votes is scheduled for October 8, and the election could bring new political changes in J&K.

Undoing the undoing (7 September)

The withdrawal of the new curriculum by the NMC is welcome

- Education is essential for progress, but not all educational content is beneficial.
- The government withdrew the Competency-Based Medical Education Curriculum guidelines published by the National Medical Commission (NMC).
- The withdrawn curriculum, published on August 31, labeled sodomy and lesbianism as "unnatural sexual offenses" under the category of sexual offenses.
- It also categorized transvestism or cross-dressing as "sexual perversion."
- The curriculum removed the mandatory seven hours of disability competencies from the foundation course for medical students.
- By doing so, the NMC violated at least two laws: the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
- Labeling sodomy, lesbianism, and transvestism as offenses or perversions is against the Transgender Persons Act, 2019.
- In October 2021, following directives from the Madras and Kerala High Courts, the NMC had instructed medical universities not to approve unscientific and discriminatory information about the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Removing disability competencies violated the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which mandates including disability rights in educational curricula for medical professionals.
- The NMC had originally introduced these disability competencies in 2019 after years of advocacy.
- These competencies help students adopt a rights-based approach to healthcare, ensuring equal access for all.
- Transgender and disability rights groups strongly protested the revised curriculum.
- They threatened to appeal to the World Federation for Medical Education to suspend the NMC's recognition if the errors were not corrected immediately.
- Although the guidelines have been withdrawn, the incident has damaged public trust and affected marginalized groups' faith in the government's commitment to their rights.

- Progress in changing societal perceptions and overcoming prejudices is achieved slowly and with great effort.
- It's disappointing when a government body undermines these hard-won advancements.
- The withdrawal of the flawed curriculum is a significant relief.

Santhal Rebellion (1855-1856)

- **Background:** The Santhals, an indigenous tribe primarily residing in present-day Jharkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal, faced severe exploitation under British rule. They were subjected to oppressive taxes, forced labor, and exploitation by landlords (zamindars), moneylenders, and traders.
- **Rebellion:** Led by the four Murmu brothers—Sidhu, Kanhu, Chand, and Bhairav—the Santhals declared an open rebellion against the British authorities and the oppressive agents. The movement began in the Rajmahal Hills of Jharkhand.
- **Outcome:** The rebellion spread rapidly, with thousands of Santhals taking up arms against the British. However, the British, with superior military power, brutally suppressed the uprising. The rebellion, though unsuccessful in its immediate objectives, highlighted the plight of tribal communities and the severe injustices they faced.
- **Impact:** The rebellion led to the creation of a separate administrative division called the **Santhal Parganas** in 1856 to govern the region where the Santhals lived, as a response to their grievances.

Munda Rebellion (1899-1900)

- **Background:** The Munda tribe, mainly residing in the Chotanagpur plateau region (present-day Jharkhand), also suffered under the oppressive British system. The Mundas faced exploitation through the **beth begari** (forced labor) system, and their traditional land rights were eroded by the British policies that favored landlords.
- **Rebellion:** The Munda Rebellion, also known as the **Ulgulan (The Great Tumult)**, was led by Birsa Munda, a charismatic tribal leader. He mobilized the Mundas to fight against the British and reclaim their ancestral lands. Birsa advocated for the revival of traditional Munda culture and sought to establish Munda Raj (self-rule).
- **Outcome:** The rebellion was marked by violent clashes between the Mundas and the British forces. Despite their courage, the Mundas were eventually defeated, and Birsa Munda was captured and died in British custody in 1900.
- **Impact:** The Munda Rebellion led to some reforms in the administration of tribal areas, particularly regarding land rights. Birsa Munda became a legendary figure, and his legacy continues to inspire tribal movements in India.