DAILY CURRENT AFFAIR (16 September 2024)

TOPICS COVERED

1. **Nipah death conformed in Malappuram; 150 contacts asked to isolate themselves** (GS Paper-III: Basic Science)
2. **Keralites shrug of Wayanad gloom, join hands to celebrate Onam with food, fun and frolic** (GS Paper-I: A&C)
3. **Two Navy officers to embark on gruelling blue-water global voyage** (PCS)
4. **New research rescues the dodo's reputation from confusion and myth** (GS Paper-III: Environment)
5. **Active noise control: destroying the din** (GS Paper-III: Basic Science)
6. **A human touch to India's mineral ecosystem** (GS Paper-III: Mining)
7. **Unrealistic outlook** (GS Paper-II: IR)
8. **Realising the rural-urban continuum** (GS Paper-I: Urbanisation)
9. **A crucial election in Sri Lanka** (GS Paper-II: India- Sri Lanka)
10. **What are AM, FM, and signal modulation?** (GS Paper-III: Basic Science)

Democratic engagement with a digital plug-in (16 September)

- During the Brexit referendum in the UK, the 'Leave.EU' campaign used social media to spread messages that played on people's fears, hopes, and concerns about identity, influencing them to vote for leaving the European Union.
- Digital platforms were used to target individuals with specific, data-driven content to shape their views.
- This highlights how technology is influencing democracy, where digital tools can empower people but also manipulate public opinion.
- In India, digital political campaigns have become crucial for both national and regional parties, as shown in studies by the Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).
- The 2023 Karnataka Assembly election showed how economic power is being translated into digital influence, with the BJP spending ₹7,800 lakh (52% of its propaganda budget) and the Congress spending ₹4,900 lakh (55%) on digital ads.
- Traditional publicity methods like flags, billboards, and rallies accounted for only a small portion of the total propaganda budget for both parties (16% for BJP and 7% for Congress).
- The BJP became the first Indian political party to spend over ₹116 crore on Google ads between January and May 2024.
- During the 2024 general election period, the BJP posted 89,000 ads on Google, costing ₹68 crore, while the Congress posted 2,900 ads, costing over ₹33 crore.
- Political parties are now using micro-targeting in digital ads to reach specific audiences, even down to the panchayat level.
- The BJP micro-targeted over 1,700 pin codes in a single ad, showing how digital platforms can precisely shape electoral messages.
- This shift in campaigning means that money directly translates to digital influence in elections, changing the democratic process.
- Besides official party ads, third-party campaigners play a significant, hidden role in elections, often with less scrutiny.
- A Lokniti-CSDS study found that 31 third-party campaigners on Meta spent over ₹2,260 lakh in the 90 days before June 29, 2024.
- These third-party entities may have undisclosed deals with political parties, working behind the scenes to support them.
- The content posted by third-party campaigners is sometimes more harmful, using Islamophobic language and offensive slurs, which official party ads on Google avoid.
- The presence of such inflammatory content distorts democratic discourse and raises ethical concerns.
- Three key issues in digital campaigning need urgent attention: regulating expenditure, monitoring content, and addressing platform-based challenges.

- Wealthier parties can dominate digital spaces due to their larger ad budgets, creating an unfair advantage over smaller parties.
- To address this, there is a need for limits on party spending, ensuring a fairer distribution of funds between digital campaigns and other methods like rallies.
- Third-party campaigners need strict rules for reporting their expenses, similar to regulations in the UK and Canada.
- An independent agency should audit their content after each election to ensure oversight without harming free speech.
- The current Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) is not effective enough for content regulation.
- Different platforms have varied approaches to political ads: Google tends to avoid problematic content, while Meta has many third-party campaigners posting inflammatory ads.
- This difference shows the need for consistent regulations across all platforms to ensure accountability.
- Reforms are needed to update rules to fit the digital age, as current regulations are outdated and leave gaps.
- Comprehensive studies in India are necessary to address the challenges of digital campaigning and create effective solutions.
- On International Day of Democracy (September 15), the focus should be on expanding the rule of law to cover the digital space, ensuring democracy is strengthened through better regulations.

A human touch to India's mineral ecosystem (16 September)

- In 2014, the higher judiciary focused on coal block allotments after a 2012 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report highlighted issues with coal block allocations from 2004-2009.
- In 2015, the Modi government amended the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, requiring auctions for mining rights.
- A new body called the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) was created, where mining companies pay a part of their royalty to support the development of local communities in mining-affected areas.
- The DMF has collected almost ₹1 lakh crore, which is used for community development projects in mining-affected districts.
- On September 16, the DMF Day celebrates ten years of the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY), which focuses on welfare projects in 645 districts across 23 states, improving the lives of people affected by mining.
- DMFs support projects aimed at sustainable livelihoods, minimizing the negative impacts of mining.
- DMFs have helped create self-help groups in states like Odisha, where women are becoming artisans and entrepreneurs.
- In Katni, Madhya Pradesh, DMFs are helping youth learn drone technology, leading to job opportunities.
- DMFs play an important role in India's new mining strategy, including the National Critical Minerals Mission, by focusing on community welfare in mining areas.
- State governments are key partners in DMFs, and the District Collector oversees fund allocation to areas in need.
- The National DMF Portal has been launched to digitize DMF management, improving transparency and efficiency in operations.
- DMFs are helping improve socio-economic conditions in mining-affected districts, complementing district administration efforts.

Innovation at every DMF

- Each District Mineral Foundation (DMF) is coming up with innovative ways to maximize the impact of its projects, addressing unique local challenges.
- Some DMFs include elected representatives or non-elected members from gram sabhas in their governing bodies to ensure inclusivity.
- Dedicated engineering departments and personnel from the State Public Works Department are being set up in some DMFs to ensure efficient project implementation.
- DMFs are planning long-term goals by creating three-year plans to achieve specific targets, avoiding the previous uncoordinated approach.
- The aim is to standardize the best practices across all DMFs, while still respecting local knowledge and context.
- DMFs are aligning their activities with ongoing central and state schemes, especially in aspirational districts, to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- DMFs are also supporting the livelihoods of forest dwellers through projects in plantation, medicinal herb collection, and processing.
- They are identifying and nurturing rural athletes by developing sports infrastructure and facilities.
- DMFs follow the "whole of government" approach, bringing together local, state, and national efforts for community development.
- DMFs exemplify cooperative federalism, aligning goals and resources at all levels of governance to address both national priorities and local needs.

- These efforts are transforming historically underserved regions by turning India's mineral wealth into local development opportunities.
- India is setting a global example by showing how to balance economic growth with social welfare and resource management.

For a fair probe (16 September)

Kejriwal bail order is a reminder to the CBI to dispel the perception of bias

- The Supreme Court granted bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi excise policy case, but the two judges on the bench had differing views on the legality of his arrest by the CBI.
- Justice Surya Kant and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan both agreed that Kejriwal deserved bail and did not need to return to the trial court, despite the CBI's request.
- Justice Surya Kant found no issue with the procedure of Kejriwal's arrest, stating that the CBI followed legal steps by seeking court permission to question and arrest him.
- However, Justice Bhuyan was suspicious of the timing of Kejriwal's arrest, noting that the CBI hadn't arrested him for 22 months but chose to do so just when he was about to be released on bail in a related money laundering case.
- Justice Bhuyan emphasized that just because the CBI has the power to arrest, it doesn't always mean arrest is necessary.
- Justice Bhuyan also criticized the CBI's reputation, hinting that it should work to eliminate the perception that it operates under political influence or in a biased manner.
- He reminded investigating agencies that an accused person has the right to remain silent, and that "non-cooperation" or giving "evasive answers" should not be used as excuses to keep someone in jail.
- Justice Bhuyan's judgment highlighted the need for the CBI to conduct fair investigations, while also subtly criticizing the Delhi High Court for rejecting Kejriwal's bail request by insisting he approach the trial court first.
- The delay in hearing Kejriwal's case by the High Court resulted in unnecessarily extending his time in jail, according to the judges.

Unrealistic outlook (16 September)

India's efforts at peace making between Russia, Ukraine have limited potential

- National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visited Russia, and his meetings had significant bilateral and geopolitical implications.
- Doval attended a BRICS security officials meeting and had one-on-one meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.
- The BRICS meeting was ahead of the upcoming BRICS summit in October, where leaders from BRICS countries and newly added members like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and others will meet for the first time.
- Doval's meeting with Wang Yi was important due to the ongoing India-China talks about resolving the military standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which has been ongoing for four years.
- India and China agreed to speed up their efforts to disengage troops at the LAC, aiming for progress before a potential meeting between Indian PM Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the BRICS summit.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that 75% of the disengagement has been completed, showing India's intent to ease tensions with China, although the situation may not fully return to the pre-2020 state.
- Doval's meeting with Putin was a rare exception in protocol, as Doval personally briefed Putin on PM Modi's visit to Ukraine, signaling India's potential role as a mediator in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- If India wants to take a mediatory role, it will require significant effort, including goodwill, time, and patience.
- Other countries like Türkiye, Indonesia, and Hungary have been engaging with both sides since the 2022 invasion, and various peace proposals exist, including those from Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, Russia, and other countries like Brazil and China.
- The Russia-Ukraine conflict remains unstable, with signs of escalation, including Ukraine's attack on Kursk and Russia's missile strikes.
- PM Modi's upcoming visits to the U.S. for UN meetings, the Quad Summit, and possibly a meeting with Zelenskyy, followed by the BRICS summit in Russia, will add significant responsibilities for India.
- India's efforts at mediating peace should not be burdened with unrealistic expectations.