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## Mains Topics

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### India- Ethiopia Relations

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#### Context

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently conferred with 'Great Honor Nishan of Ethiopia' country's highest honour during Addis Ababa visit.

#### Key Outcomes of the Recent Visit

- Bilateral relations were elevated to a **Strategic Partnership**, marking a new phase of long-term cooperation.
- An **MoU on Debt Restructuring** for Ethiopia was signed under the **G20 Common Framework**, reflecting India's support for global debt relief efforts.
- An agreement on **Cooperation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters** was concluded to enhance trade facilitation and compliance.
- An **MoU for establishing a Data Centre** at Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was signed to strengthen digital governance and data management.
- An **Implementing Arrangement for cooperation in UN Peacekeeping Operations training** was agreed upon, deepening defence and security collaboration.
- **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships for Ethiopian students were doubled**, expanding educational and cultural exchanges.
- **Specialised short-term courses in Artificial Intelligence** were offered to Ethiopian students and professionals under the **ITEC programme**, supporting capacity building.
- India committed to **augmenting the capacity of Mahatma Gandhi Hospital in Addis Ababa**, particularly in maternal healthcare and neonatal care.

#### Background of India- Ethiopia Relations

- India–Ethiopia ties date back over 2,000 years to the Axumite Empire (1st century AD), when both regions were integrated into Indian Ocean trade networks.
- Indian merchants traded silk and spices in exchange for Ethiopian gold and ivory via the ancient Red Sea port of Adulis, especially during the 6th century AD.
- In the 16th century, Indian soldiers and artisans from Goa accompanied the Portuguese forces to support the Ethiopian king against foreign invasions.
- During Italy's occupation of Ethiopia (1936–1941), British-led forces included a substantial number of Indian soldiers.

#### Developments Over the Years

- India and Ethiopia maintain strong ties through regular high-level engagements, including meetings between Prime Ministers on the sidelines of G20, BRICS, and Global South Summits.
- **Bilateral trade stood at USD 550.19 million in 2024–25**, with a significant trade surplus in India's favour.

- India is among the **top three foreign investors in Ethiopia**, with over 675 Indian companies investing more than USD 6.5 billion.
- **Around 2,500 Indians currently reside in Ethiopia**, including educators, professionals, and workers supporting Indian and Ethiopian enterprises.

### Key Opportunities for India

- **Strategic & Geopolitical:** Ethiopia's role as the **Horn of Africa's anchor state** and host of the **African Union** enhances India's diplomatic footprint in Africa.
  - Ethiopia's **BRICS membership** opens new avenues for coordination in South-South and multilateral platforms.
- **Economic & Investment:** Large **domestic market (109 million+)** and manufacturing base position Ethiopia as a gateway to East Africa and AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) markets.
  - Significant scope in **mining (gold, critical minerals, rare earths)** vital for India's renewable energy, battery and semiconductor sectors.
  - Strong potential in **pharmaceuticals, agro-processing, textiles, light manufacturing**, and export-oriented industries.
- **Education & Capacity Building:** Deep goodwill from India's historical role in Ethiopian education.
  - High Ethiopian student inflow to India, including Africa's **largest cohort of PhD scholars**.
  - Scope to expand **digital education, skilling, vocational training, AI and STEM cooperation**.
- **Defence & Security:** Long-standing defence cooperation, including training and institutional linkages.
  - Opportunity for India to supply **cost-effective, battle-tested defence platforms** and expand training under new defence MoUs.
- **Energy & Infrastructure:** Ethiopia's vast **hydropower and renewable energy potential** offers scope for Indian technology, financing, and EPC participation.

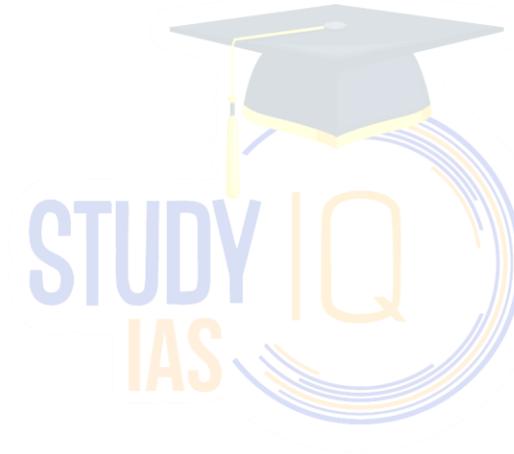
### Key Challenges in India-Ethiopia Relations

- **Political & Internal Stability:** Legacy of civil conflict and ongoing efforts at national reconciliation create political uncertainty.
- **Economic & Regulatory:** **Foreign exchange shortages**, taxation issues, and regulatory unpredictability deter investors.
  - Infrastructure and logistics constraints, compounded by **landlocked geography**.
- **Mining-Specific Constraints:** Underdeveloped mining ecosystem, regulatory gaps, environmental safeguards, and transport bottlenecks.
- **Defence & Financing:** IMF conditionalities limit Ethiopia's fiscal space for large defence or infrastructure purchases.
- **Operational Challenges for Indian Businesses:** Delays in approvals, policy inconsistency, and difficulty in profit repatriation highlighted by Indian diaspora and investors.

### Way Forward

- **Institutionalise the Strategic Partnership** through regular leadership-level dialogue and outcome-oriented sectoral working groups.
- **Modernise the DTAA and Bilateral Investment Treaty** while addressing foreign exchange and regulatory bottlenecks to attract Indian investors.
- **Deepen cooperation in mining, renewables and manufacturing** to secure critical mineral supply chains and promote export-oriented growth.
- **Expand defence cooperation through training, capacity building and calibrated defence lines of credit** within IMF-compatible frameworks.
- **Scale up education, skilling and digital capacity-building partnerships** to anchor long-term people-to-people and knowledge-based ties.

Source: [The Hindu](#)



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## India - Oman Relations

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### Context

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oman has reaffirmed Oman's role as a key partner in India's **Indian Ocean and West Asia strategy**.

### Glimpse Of India- Oman Ties

- **Diplomatic Relations:** India and Oman established formal diplomatic ties in **1955**, which were elevated to a **Strategic Partnership in 2008**.
- **Trade Relations:** Oman was India's **28th largest trading partner in FY 2023–24**, with bilateral trade expanding from **USD 6.70 billion (2017–18)** to **USD 10.61 billion (2024–25)**.
- **Trade Diversification:** India is **Oman's fourth-largest source of non-oil imports** and **third-largest destination for non-oil exports**, reflecting diversification beyond hydrocarbons.
- **Investment Ties:** Over **6,000 India–Oman joint ventures** operate in Oman, accounting for around **USD 7.5 billion** in cumulative capital.
- **FDI Flows:** Oman's cumulative **FDI equity inflows into India** between **2000 and 2025** stood at **USD 605.57 million**.
- **Fintech Cooperation:** RuPay launched in Oman in the year 2022.
- **Defence Cooperation:** The two countries hold **biennial tri-service military exercises** across the Army (**Al Najah**), Air Force (**Eastern Bridge**), and Navy (**Naseem Al Bahr**).
- **Maritime Significance:** Oman's strategic location near the **Strait of Hormuz**, through which India imports nearly **one-fifth of its crude oil**, underscores its importance for India's energy security.
- **Port Access:** In **2018**, India signed an agreement to access **Duqm Port**, strategically located on Oman's southeastern coast overlooking the **Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean**, and close to **Iran's Chabahar Port**.

### Recent Outcomes Of recent Visit

- India and Oman moved towards the **formal signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)**, marking a major milestone in bilateral economic relations.
  - CEPA is expected to **boost bilateral trade, ease customs duties, liberalise services, and attract investments** across multiple sectors.
- The **India–Oman Business Summit in Muscat** provided strategic direction to deepen trade and investment collaboration between businesses of both countries.
- India invited **Omani companies and startups** to partner in India's growth journey amid rapid economic expansion and policy reforms.

Source: [The Print](#)

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## Recent Export Surge

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### Context

India's merchandise exports recorded a **22% surge in November**, reversing declines in September and October, making it one of the strongest export performances despite **50% US tariffs** on several products.

### Reasons Behind the Rise in Exports

- **Cost absorption by exporters:** Indian exporters absorbed US tariff costs to retain market access in anticipation of a near-term trade deal with the US.
- **Market diversification:** Exports rose not only to the US but also sharply to **China, Hong Kong and Europe**, reducing overdependence on a single market.
  - **China–Japan trade tensions:** Restrictions by China on Japanese imports boosted Indian exports, especially **seafood**, leading to a **90% rise to China** and **35% to Hong Kong**.
  - **Pre-CBAM stocking in Europe:** European buyers front-loaded imports ahead of the **EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**, boosting engineering exports.
- **Growth in tariff-exempt sectors:** Strong expansion in **electronics, pharmaceuticals, food items, tea, coffee and spices**, which face lower or no US tariffs.
- **Base effect:** November exports grew on a low base due to disruptions caused by the **Red Sea crisis** in the previous year.
- **Rupee depreciation:** A weaker rupee made Indian exports more competitive by lowering prices for foreign buyers.
- **Stabilisation of engineering exports:** Engineering goods, India's largest export category, rebounded with over **30% growth**, aided by European demand.

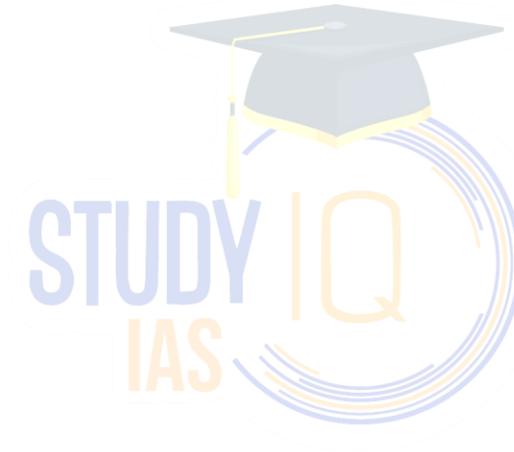
### Issues That Still Persist

- **High US tariff barriers:** The 50% tariffs continue to make many Indian products uncompetitive in the US market.
- **Order diversion to competitors:** Countries like **Vietnam and Bangladesh** are gaining long-term orders at India's expense.
- **Uncertainty of a trade deal:** Exporters are absorbing costs without assurance of a timely India–US trade agreement.
- **Logistics vulnerabilities:** Continued avoidance of the **Red Sea route** keeps freight costs high and supply chains fragile.
- **Dependence on short-term factors:** Export growth is driven by base effects, stockpiling, and currency depreciation rather than structural competitiveness.
- **Regulatory risks in Europe:** The upcoming **CBAM** will raise costs for carbon-intensive Indian exports.
- **Limited value addition:** Overreliance on low- and mid-value manufacturing reduces pricing power.

### How These Issues Can Be Addressed

- **Fast-track trade negotiations with the US** to secure tariff rollbacks and long-term market access.
- **Enhance export competitiveness** through PLI schemes, technology upgradation, and scale economies.
- **Strengthen logistics resilience** by reducing port costs, expanding container availability, and diversifying shipping routes.
- **Prepare exporters for CBAM** through green manufacturing, carbon accounting, and climate finance support.
- **Promote market diversification** via FTAs with the EU, UK and Indo-Pacific partners.

Source: [Indian Express](#)



## Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill 2025

### Context

The Union government is set to introduce the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, which proposes a single higher education regulatory architecture by replacing the UGC, AICTE and NCTE in line with NEP 2020.

### About Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA)

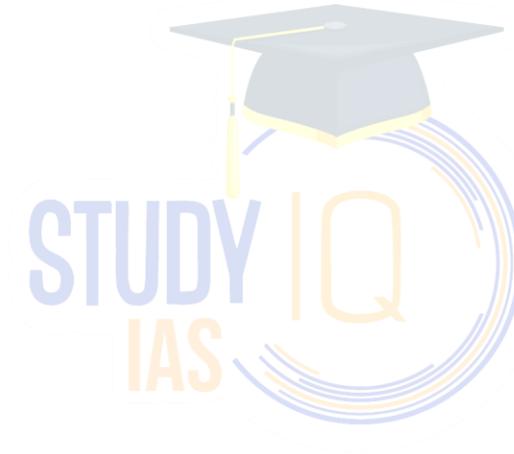
- **Structure:** An **umbrella Commission** coordinating three councils:
  - **Regulatory Council** – *Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyaman Parishad*
  - **Standards Council** – *Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad*
  - **Accreditation Council** – *Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad*
- **Composition:**
  - **Commission:**
    - **Chairperson:** Eminent person appointed by the President on Centre's recommendation.
    - **Members (≤12):**
      - Presidents of the three councils
      - Higher Education Secretary (Ministry of Education)
      - Two professors from state higher education institutions
      - Five experts
  - **Councils:** Each council headed by a **President** (minimum 10 years as Professor).
    - Each council to have **up to 14 members**.
      - **Regulatory & Standards Councils include:** Two senior academicians, One academician from state institutions, One State/UT nominee (rotational)
      - **Accreditation Council includes:** Two academicians from state institutions, Three from institutions of national importance
- **Powers:**
  - **Penalty powers enhanced sharply:** Fines ranging from **₹10 lakh to ₹2 crore** for violations.
  - Power to **authorise or revoke degree-granting status** of institutions.
  - Centre's decision final in disputes over policy interpretation.
  - Centre can **supersede the Commission or councils for up to six months**.
- **Functions:**
  - **Regulatory Council:** Ensure compliance with minimum standards for establishment and operation of institutions.
    - Facilitate **graded autonomy** and full accreditation of institutions.
    - Mandate **online public disclosure** of finances, courses and governance.
    - Regulate entry and standards of **foreign universities** in India.
  - **Standards Council:** Frame **learning outcomes**, qualification frameworks and academic standards.

- Prescribe minimum norms for institutions and staff qualifications.
- Promote integration of **Bharatiya knowledge, languages and arts**.
- **Accreditation Council:** Develop an **Institutional Accreditation Framework**.
  - Oversee assessment and accreditation based on public disclosures.

#### Key Drawbacks / Concerns

- **No fee regulation powers**, weakening the ability to curb commercialisation of higher education.
- **Separation of funding from regulation** may dilute accountability and equity in resource allocation.
- **Excessive centralisation**, with the Centre having overriding authority and limited role for states.
- **Marginalisation of State Higher Education Councils**, unlike earlier reform proposals.
- **High penalties without corresponding financial support**, especially burdensome for smaller institutions.
- **Risk of regulatory overreach**, as autonomy is coupled with strong punitive powers.
- **Exclusion of professional education sectors** (medical, legal, dental, pharma), limiting holistic reform.

Source: [Indian Express](#)



## Protection of Aravalli Range

### Context

The Supreme Court (November 2025) has settled a **uniform, scientific definition of the Aravalli Hills and Ranges, paused fresh mining leases and renewals**, and directed preparation of a **Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM)** across Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat to protect the fragile ecosystem.

### Supreme Court Directions Related to the Aravallis

- **Uniform definition adopted:** Only hills above 100 metres will be classified as part of the Aravalli Hills and Ranges.
- **Pause on new mining:** Fresh mining leases and renewals prohibited until scientific mapping and impact assessments are completed.
- **Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM):**
  - Demarcation of **no-mining zones**.
  - Identification of **limited, tightly regulated mining areas**.
  - Mapping of **ecologically sensitive zones**, wildlife corridors and aquifers.
  - Assessment of **cumulative environmental impacts and carrying capacity**.
  - Clear **restoration and rehabilitation measures**.
- **Scientific mapping mandated:** Comprehensive mapping of the Aravalli range across all states.
- **Strict regulation of stone-crushing units** to curb air pollution and ecological damage.
- **Continuation of existing legal mining:** Allowed under **stringent regulation** to prevent the rise of illegal mining mafias.

### About Aravalli range

- It is one of the **oldest fold mountain ranges in the world**, dating back to the **Precambrian era**.
- It extends for about **690 km**, running **southwest–northeast** across **Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi**.
- Originates near **Palanpur (Gujarat)** and ends near **Delhi Ridge**.
- **Highest Peak:** **Guru Shikhar (1,722 m)** in the **Mount Abu** region of Rajasthan.
- Composed mainly of **igneous and metamorphic rocks** such as gneiss, schist, quartzite and marble.

### Significance of the Aravalli Range

- **Barrier against desertification:** Forms a natural divide between the **Thar Desert** and the **Indo-Gangetic plains**.
- **Climate and air-quality regulator:** Stabilises local climate and reduces dust and particulate pollution.
- **Water security:** Crucial for **groundwater recharge** and the source region of rivers such as **Banas, Sahibi, Sabarmati and Luni**.
- **Biodiversity support:** Hosts forests, wildlife corridors, protected habitats and aquifer recharge zones.

- E.g., Harbour more than 200 bird species and endangered mammals such as leopards, grey langurs, hyenas, jackals, honey badgers and jungle cats.
- **Economic resources:** Rich in **sandstone, limestone, marble, granite**, and minerals like **lead, zinc, copper, gold and tungsten**, though overexploited.
- **International commitments:** Protection aligns with India’s obligations under the **UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**.

### Issues Associated with the Aravalli Range

- **Excessive and Illegal Mining:** Unchecked extraction of stone, sand and minerals has damaged vegetation, aquifers and soils, contributing to desertification and ecological loss.
  - E.g., A recent drone survey near Bhilwara (Rajasthan) revealed large-scale mining beyond legal limits.
- **Air and Dust Pollution:** Stone crushing and mining generate high levels of dust and particulate pollution, worsening air quality in Delhi-NCR and local communities.
- **Depletion of Groundwater and Water Resources:** Mining disrupts **natural groundwater recharge**, leads to water scarcity, and dries up lakes and wetlands that are crucial for local ecology and human use.
- **Loss of Forest Cover and Biodiversity:** Deforestation due to mining, grazing and human encroachment reduces native vegetation and habitat, threatening species and ecological functions.
- **New Definition Lead to Human Wildlife Conflict:** The new **100-metre height criterion** for defining Aravalli hills has sparked criticism, with experts warning it may exclude protective ecological areas and shrinking wildlife habitats and increasing human–wildlife conflict in the region.

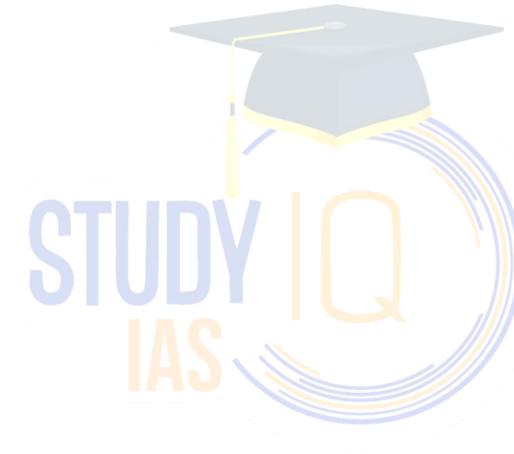
### Various Initiatives for Protection of Aravallis

Initiative / Measure	Implementing Authority	Key Features
<b>Aravalli Green Wall Project (2025)</b>	MoEFCC, Govt. of India	5-km green buffer across 29 districts in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana & Delhi; afforestation with native species
<b>Detailed Action Plan (DAP) for Aravalli Restoration</b>	MoEFCC	Afforestation, waterbody revival, mine-site restoration; convergence with MNREGA & CAMPA
<b>State Rehabilitation Programmes</b>	State Governments (e.g., Haryana, Rajasthan)	Hill rehabilitation, community forestry, green cover expansion
<b>Protection of Eco-Sensitive Zones (e.g., Mangar Bani)</b>	State Governments / Courts	No-construction and no-mining notifications

### Way Forward

- **Grant statutory ecological protection** to the entire Aravalli landscape by declaring it an eco-sensitive or critical ecological zone.
- **Enforce strict regulation and monitoring of mining and construction**, including real-time surveillance and strong penalties to curb illegal activities.
- **Implement large-scale ecological restoration**, including afforestation with native species, mine-site rehabilitation and waterbody revival under initiatives like the Aravalli Green Wall.
- **Undertake comprehensive scientific mapping and continuous monitoring** to identify aquifer recharge zones, wildlife corridors and no-go areas for development.
- **Strengthen institutional and community participation mechanisms**, involving state governments, local communities and a dedicated Aravalli conservation authority for coordinated governance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)



## Today's Prelims Topics

### Goldar Committee Recommendations on National Account Statistics

#### Context

An Advisory Committee on National Account Statistics (ACNAS) under the chairmanship of professor B.N. Goldar has recommended revising the base year for National Accounts.

#### What are the Recommendations?

- **Base Year Update:** Recommended revision of the national accounts base year from 2011–12 to 2022–23 to reflect the current economic structure.
- **Improved Data Integration:** Proposed incorporation of new and updated datasets, including GST data, digital economy indicators, PLFS, and other administrative sources.
- **Capturing Structural Changes:** Aimed at better accounting for structural shifts in the economy, including formalisation and sectoral transformation.
- **Informal & Digital Economy Coverage:** Sought improved estimation of the informal sector and digital activities to enhance the accuracy and credibility of GDP estimates.

Source: [PIB](#)

### Jumping Genes

#### Context

A new study has found that some bears in Greenland are using jumping genes to modify their DNA.

#### About Jumping Genes

- They are **mobile DNA sequences** that can move from one position to another within an organism's genome.
- **Function:** Their insertion at different genomic sites can **alter gene expression**, sometimes leading to adaptive traits.
  - They can drive **genetic variation and evolution**, and may help organisms adapt to environmental stress.
- **Discovery:** Identified by **Barbara McClintock**, who was awarded the **Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine** in 1983.

Source: [Live Science](#)

### ASPIRE Scheme

#### Context

The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is implementing the ASPIRE (A Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industry, and Entrepreneurship) scheme to promote entrepreneurship and livelihood opportunities in rural areas,

#### About ASPIRE Scheme

- **Launch:** Introduced in 2015 by the **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)**.
- **Purpose:** Aims to promote **innovation and entrepreneurship** by establishing a nationwide network of **Livelihood Business Incubators (LBIs)**.
- **Key Features:**
  - **Skill Development:** Focuses on **skilling and re-skilling** unemployed youth, self-employed individuals and wage earners, particularly in **agro-based and rural sectors**.

- **Capital Support:** Provides up to ₹1 crore to government agencies and ₹75 lakh to private agencies for procurement of **plant and machinery**.
- **Operational Support:** Offers up to ₹1 crore to both government and private agencies to meet **operational expenses**, including manpower and incubation costs.

Source: [DD News](#)

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## Nyayashastra

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### Context

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) organised an academic programme titled “Natyashastra – Synthesis of Theory and Praxis” at the Red Fort, New Delhi, during the 20th Session of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### What is the Natyashastra?

- The **Natyashastra** is an ancient Indian treatise on **performing arts**, traditionally attributed to **Bharata Muni** (c. 2nd century BCE–2nd century CE).
- It lays down the **theoretical and practical foundations** of **drama (natya)**, **dance (nritya)**, **music (sangeeta)**, **stagecraft**, **aesthetics**, and **dramaturgy**.
- Central to the text is the concept of **Rasa** (aesthetic experience), explaining how emotions are evoked in the audience through **Bhava**, **Abhinaya**, **Raga**, **Tala**, and **Natya**.
- It treats performance as a **holistic knowledge system**, integrating philosophy, psychology, ethics, and artistic technique.
- Recognised globally, the Natyashastra has been inscribed in **UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register**, underscoring its civilisational significance.

### About Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)

- **Established:** 1987
- **Under:** Ministry of Culture, Government of India
- **Mandate:** Acts as a **national research and documentation centre** for India’s **arts, culture, heritage, and knowledge systems**.
- **Core Focus Areas:**
  - Performing arts, visual arts, architecture, literature, philosophy, and cultural history
  - Interdisciplinary research linking **art, science, ecology, and society**
- **Functions:**
  - Research, documentation, publication, and archiving of cultural knowledge
  - Organising seminars, exhibitions, academic programmes, and international collaborations
- **Role in Heritage Conservation:**
  - Active engagement with **UNESCO cultural conventions**, including intangible cultural heritage
  - Promotes classical texts like the Natyashastra as **living knowledge traditions**
- **Location:** New Delhi

Source: [PIB](#)

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## Species in News

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### Mindanao Island



**News?** The victim of Bondi island shooting had visited southern part of Mindanao island weeks before incident.

#### About Mindanao Island

- **Location:** Southernmost major island of the **Philippines**,
- Bordered by: **Sulu Sea, Celebes Sea, and Philippine Sea.**
- **Size:** **Second-largest** island of the Philippines (after Luzon).
- **Strategic Waters:** Near key maritime routes connecting the **South China Sea and Pacific Ocean.**

Source: [Indian Express](#)



**Personality in News**

**Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II**



**News?** A postage stamp in honour of the king Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II (Suvaran Maran) was released by Vice President C P Radhakrishnan.

**About Perumbidugu Mutharaiyar II (705–745 CE.)**

- He was also known as **Suvaran Maran** or **Shatrubhayankar**.
- He belonged to the **Mutharaiyar** dynasty, powerful feudatories of the **Pallava Empire** in early medieval South India.
- His domain covered **central Tamil Nadu**, including present-day **Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Pudukkottai, Perambalur**, and regions along the **Cauvery basin**.
- **Tiruchirappalli** functioned as a major political centre during his reign.
- Known as a **valiant military leader**, he fought alongside Pallava king **Nandivarman II** in multiple campaigns.
- A strong patron of **Shaivism**, while also allowing **philosophical debates** with Jain and Buddhist scholars.
- Jain monk **Vimalachandra** is recorded as visiting his court, indicating **religious pluralism and intellectual engagement**.
- The Mutharaiyars were notable **temple builders**, particularly of **rock-cut cave temples and early structural stone temples**.

Source: [Indian Express](#)