

## 22 March 2025: PCS Kindle (English)

### 1. Aurangzeb's Tomb

**Context:** The tomb of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in **Khuldabad, Maharashtra**, is currently under scrutiny. Recent protests have sparked violent clashes in Nagpur. The protests demand the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, which has been a symbol of historical grievances. In response, the Archaeological Survey of India has installed tin sheets around the tomb to protect it from vandalism and to maintain order.

- **Aurangzeb ruled the Mughal Empire from 1658 until his death in 1707.** (almost 50 years, making him the **longest-reigning Mughal emperor**.)
- His reign was marked by military and administrative challenges. He faced an agrarian crisis and increasing resistance from the Marathas. His final years were spent in the Deccan, where he died during a campaign against the Marathas.



#### Significance of Aurangzeb's Tomb:

- Unlike the grand tombs of previous Mughal rulers (e.g., Akbar, Shah Jahan), his grave is plain and unadorned.
- Aurangzeb chose a **simple burial in accordance with Islamic principles**. His tomb is located next to the dargah of Sheikh Zainuddin, a revered Sufi saint. This choice reflects his complex relationship with religion. While he was a hardline Sunni Muslim, he respected Sufi traditions, as seen in his burial site.
- His tomb's simplicity is similar to Babur's grave (who also preferred a simple burial).

### 2. Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission

**Context:** Recently, **Telangana has achieved notable success** in the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM). This mission, initiated by the Government of India, aims to develop 300 clusters of villages. It strives to bridge the rural-urban divide while maintaining rural community life.

- The SPMRM targets the development of rural areas by providing urban-like facilities. It encompasses 34 states and union territories. The mission focuses on creating clusters that improve local economies and living standards.

#### Funding Mechanism

- Funding for the mission is primarily achieved through the convergence of various government schemes. At least 70% of the total investment comes from these schemes.
- The **Ministry of Rural Development** also provides Critical Gap Funding (CGF), covering up to 30% of the investment. Maximum allocations are ₹30 crores for non-tribal clusters and ₹15 crores for tribal clusters.



#### Cluster Characteristics

- A '**Rurban cluster**' comprises geographically connected villages. Clusters have populations ranging from 25,000 to 50,000 in plain areas and 5,000 to 15,000 in hilly or tribal regions.
- They are designed around growth centres like large villages or block headquarters, facilitating economic transformation.

#### Development Focus:

- SPMRM aims to enhance sectors like agriculture, tourism, animal husbandry, and fisheries. Essential services include skill development, health facilities, upgraded schools, sanitation, piped water supply, and waste management.
- Digital citizen service centres are also part of the initiative.

### 3. APAAR ID Implementation

**Context:** The **Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR)** ID is aspect of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It aims to streamline student data management across educational institutions. Despite being portrayed as voluntary, there is growing pressure on parents and schools to adopt the APAAR system.

- It is designed to provide a unique identification number for students. This ID aims to facilitate seamless transitions between educational institutions.
- It is linked to the **Aadhaar system and stored in the DigiLocker**. The APAAR ID helps in maintaining standardised academic records.

#### Purpose of APAAR ID:

- The primary purpose of the APAAR ID is to accumulate and store students' academic accomplishments.
- It allows for easier verification and processing of academic transcripts. The system promotes the concept of **"One Nation, One Student ID."**

This aligns with the NEP's goals of improving educational data collection for better policymaking.

#### Is APAAR Mandatory?

- **APAAR is officially described as voluntary**. However, various circulars from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and state authorities encourage its adoption.
- Parents often receive unclear information regarding its voluntary nature.
- This has led to confusion and concern among parents about the necessity of enrolling their children.

#### Data Security Concerns:

- There are concerns regarding data security and privacy. Critics argue that the large-scale collection of minors' data without legal backing is unconstitutional.
- **The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF)** has raised alarms about the potential misuse of data. They point out that existing data protection laws prohibit tracking and monitoring of children.

#### How is APAAR ID Generated?

- The generation of an APAAR ID involves several steps. Schools verify students' demographic details such as name and date of birth. Parents must fill out a consent form. After verification, the APAAR ID is generated. Issues may arise if there are discrepancies in the names or details provided.

#### Opting Out of APAAR:

- Parents have the option to opt out of generating an APAAR ID for their children. They can write to schools expressing their decision.
- Digital rights advocates have provided templates to assist parents in this process. Despite the option to opt out, local pressures may complicate this choice.

#### Challenges in Implementation

- The implementation of APAAR faces several challenges. Many parents are unaware of their rights regarding the programme.
- Additionally, some states have threatened consequences for schools that do not comply with APAAR registration.

### 4. 2030 Global Forest Vision Report

**Context:** **Priority Actions for Governments in 2025** was published on March 19, 2025, by the Forest Declaration Assessment before World Forest Day. *The report was backed by the United Nations Development Programme, Climate Land Use Alliance, and other partners.*

#### Deforestation Statistics:

- In 2023, deforestation reached a staggering 6.37 million hectares. This is equivalent to nine million soccer fields.

- The Amazon, Southeast Asia, and Africa are the most affected regions. Cattle ranching is the leading cause of deforestation in the Amazon, accounting for 80% of forest loss.

#### Key Drivers of Deforestation:

- The primary drivers include agricultural expansion for palm oil, soy, and beef. In Indonesia and Malaysia, palm oil production threatens species like orangutans and Sumatran tigers.
- Between 2017 and 2022, over 800 million trees were cut in the Amazon to meet beef demand.

#### Trade Policies and Deforestation

- The 2030 Global Forest Vision report calls for stronger trade policies. It recommends banning imports of products linked to deforestation.
- The European Union has enacted the Deforestation Regulation, which requires proof that products do not come from cleared forests. The United States is also tightening regulations on illegal logging.

#### Challenges in Enforcement:

- Despite these regulations, enforcement remains challenge. Small farmers in producing countries often lack the technology to certify their products as deforestation-free.
- Countries like Brazil and Indonesia fear that strict regulations could harm their economies, as agriculture is a primary income source.

#### International Cooperation and Support:

- The report advocates for enhanced international cooperation. It suggests expanding deforestation-free trade laws to major economies like China and India.
- Additionally, it calls for financial and technical support for farmers in producing nations. Improved global monitoring systems are also essential to track deforestation-linked products.

#### Future Outlook:

- If governments do not act swiftly, biodiversity loss will accelerate. This will hinder efforts to meet global climate and nature goals.
- The upcoming COP30 in Brazil will be important platform for discussing these issues and potential solutions.

## 5. African Penguin Conservation in South Africa

**Context:** The African penguin, a unique species endemic to southern Africa, is facing alarming population declines. Recent legal actions in South Africa have initiated measures to protect these penguins and their breeding sites. A landmark court ruling on March 18, 2025, imposed a 10-year ban on commercial fishing around six vital breeding colonies. This decision aims to address the critical threats to their food supply, particularly from sardine and anchovy fishing.

#### Population Decline and Threats:

- The African penguin population has decreased by over 60% since the 1980s.
- Factors contributing to this decline include overfishing, oil pollution, and predation.
- The number of breeding pairs plummeted from over 140,000 in the late 1950s to just over 25,000 by 2009.
- Conservationists warn that without intervention, these penguins could face extinction in the wild by 2035.

#### Recent Legal Measures:

- The High Court of South Africa's ruling prohibits commercial fishing within a 20 km radius of breeding colonies on Robben Island and Bird Island. More stringent restrictions apply to other colonies. The ruling is a response to a legal action initiated by conservation organisations, including Birdlife South Africa and SANCCOB. It aims to ensure the long-term survival of the African penguin and other marine species.

#### Breeding and Nesting Habits:

- African penguins breed year-round, with peak periods occurring between March and May in South Africa. They typically form monogamous pairs, with 80-90% remaining together across breeding seasons. Females

lay two eggs, which both parents incubate for 38-40 days. After hatching, parents alternate feeding and guarding duties until the chicks are old enough to join crèches for protection.

#### Physical Characteristics:

- African penguins are smaller than their Emperor counterparts. They measure 60-68 cm in length and weigh between 3.7-4 kg. Their distinctive black and white plumage includes a black band across the breast. Juveniles have grey feathers, while adults possess a characteristic circle of featherless skin around their eyes.

#### Feeding and Predation:

- The diet of African penguins consists mainly of squid, sardines, and anchovies. They face threats from various predators, including leopards, feral cats, and birds such as the kelp gull. At sea, seals and sharks also prey on them. This complex food web marks the importance of marine ecosystem management in conservation efforts.

#### Conservation Status:

- African penguins have been classified as endangered by the IUCN since 2010. The recent court ruling is step towards reversing their population decline. It not only benefits the penguins but also supports other marine predators and the sustainability of fish species crucial to the ecosystem.

## 6. 4-Point Action Plan for Addressing Issues with IBC

**Context:** The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in India has undergone scrutiny and recommendations for improvement. A recent report by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance brought into light persistent issues affecting the effectiveness of the IBC. The Committee emphasised the need for a structured approach to enhance the resolution process for distressed corporate assets.

#### Current Challenges in the IBC Process:

- Key issues include conflicts of interest, lack of transparency, and delays in resolution.
- The framework for monitoring resolution professionals is weak.
- Additionally, operational creditors have limited representation in the Committee of Creditors (CoC). These challenges hinder the IBC's potential to resolve insolvency cases efficiently.



#### Four-Point Action Plan:

- To address the identified challenges, the Parliamentary Panel recommended a four-point action plan:
  - **Direct Submission System:** A central online portal for submitting resolution plans is proposed. This aims to ensure confidentiality and fairness in the submission process, preventing undue advantages.
  - **Enhancing Resolution Professionals' Role:** The Committee suggested strengthening professional standards for resolution professionals (RPs). This includes rigorous certification, specialised training, and independent performance reviews to ensure accountability.
  - **Transparent Monitoring of Timelines:** A structured mechanism is needed to track the duration of insolvency cases. Implementing a tabular system would help monitor delays and processing inefficiencies, aiding policymakers in making informed decisions.
  - **Review of Committee of Creditors' Structure:** The structure of the CoC should be revisited to enhance the representation of operational creditors. This would ensure a more equitable resolution process, recognising the critical role operational creditors play.

#### Significance

- The recommendations aim to boost the integrity and efficiency of the IBC. By ensuring confidentiality in submissions and enhancing the role of RPs, the resolution process can become more transparent and fair.

- Monitoring timelines will help address delays. Revisiting the CoC structure will empower operational creditors, leading to better outcomes.

## 7. Gaps in Forest Finance

**Context:** A new report titled, “Transforming Forest Finance,” reveals that existing funding mechanisms are insufficient and often counterproductive. It highlights an alarming gap between required and actual financial support for forest conservation. The findings come just before the International Day of Forests, observed on March 21.

### Current Financial Landscape:

- The report estimates that approximately \$460 billion is necessary annually to effectively halt deforestation. However, actual financial support is lower.
- For every dollar allocated to forest protection, six dollars are spent on activities that promote deforestation, such as industrial agriculture and logging.
- In 2023, private financial institutions invested \$6.1 trillion in deforestation-linked sectors, while governments provided \$500 billion in harmful subsidies.

### Debt Burdens:

- Developing nations are grappling with an enormous debt burden, collectively amounting to \$11 trillion.
- This financial pressure often compels these countries to exploit their forests for short-term economic benefits.
- Experts argue that the current financial system prioritises immediate profits over sustainable practices, necessitating urgent reforms.

### REDD+ Programme:

- The REDD+ programme, which incentivises countries to *reduce deforestation*, has faced criticism for its inadequate payments.
- Current compensation rates range from \$5 to \$10 per tonne of carbon, while the true cost of emission reductions is estimated to be between \$30 and \$50 per tonne.
- This discrepancy discourages forest-rich nations from prioritising conservation efforts.

### Examples of Successful Funding Models

- Despite the challenges, the report identifies successful funding models that demonstrate effective conservation outcomes.
- Initiatives such as the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund and the Podáali Fund show that direct funding to Indigenous communities leads to better forest management and protection.

### Recommendations:

- The report outlines six key actions to address the forest finance crisis.
- First, it calls for reforming public and multilateral finance to increase funding for conservation efforts.
- Second, it recommends overhauling sovereign debt systems to alleviate financial pressures on developing countries.
- Third, governments should redirect harmful subsidies towards sustainable alternatives.
- Fourth, there is a need for increased direct funding to local and Indigenous communities.
- Fifth, strengthening financial regulations is essential to ensure banks account for deforestation risks.
- Finally, the report advocates for innovative financing models, such as the proposed Tropical Forest Forever Facility, to provide stable funding for conservation.

### Implications for Global Climate Policy:

- As the 30th Conference of Parties (COP30) approaches, these findings are poised to influence global discussions on forest finance and sustainability.

- Immediate financial reform is crucial to safeguarding forests, which serve as vital natural defences against climate change.

## 8. Sonic Weapons

**Context:** Sonic weapons have emerged as contentious tools in crowd control. Recent protests in Serbia have brought into light their potential use. President Aleksandar Vucic denied allegations of using a banned sonic weapon against demonstrators. This raises questions about the legality and ethics of such devices. Sonic weapons can produce loud sounds designed to disperse crowds. They have been in use since the early 1990s, with military applications becoming prominent in the 2000s.

### Definition and Functionality:

- Sonic weapons, also known as acoustic weapons, emit loud sounds over long distances. They can produce both audible and inaudible sound waves. These devices are capable of delivering voice messages or other sounds. The technology has evolved since its inception, focusing on crowd control and military applications.

**Types of Sonic Weapons:** There are three primary types of sonic weapons:

- **Long-range Acoustic Device (LRAD):** Developed by Genasys Inc, LRAD can project sound intelligibly over 8,900 metres. It can reach sound levels of 160 decibels, causing pain and potential hearing damage.
- **Mosquito:** This device emits high-pitched sounds that are painful to younger individuals, typically teenagers and those in their twenties. It is ineffective for older adults due to natural hearing loss.
- **Infrasonic Weapon:** A newer technology that produces low-frequency sounds. These sounds are typically inaudible but can induce disorientation and pain. Research is ongoing regarding its effectiveness as a weapon.

### Health Effects of Sonic Weapons:

- Sonic weapons can inflict serious harm. They may cause eardrum damage and hearing loss. Prolonged exposure can lead to tinnitus, headaches, and nausea. The severity of these effects depends on distance from the source and duration of exposure. Human rights organisations express concern over the indiscriminate nature of these weapons. They can harm not only targeted individuals but also bystanders and law enforcement personnel.

### Ethics:

- The use of sonic weapons raises legal and ethical questions. In many jurisdictions, their use is restricted or banned. The potential for causing harm to innocent individuals complicates their deployment in crowd control situations. Critics argue that sonic weapons can violate human rights, particularly during protests.

### Military Applications:

- Sonic weapons have been adopted by military forces, notably in conflict zones like Iraq. Their ability to control crowds without lethal force is appealing.
- However, the consequences of their use remain a subject of debate. The long-term health effects on individuals exposed to sonic weapons are not well-documented.

## 9. Dog-Faced Water Snake

**Context:** Recently, the dog-faced water snake, scientifically known as *Cerberus rynchops*, was documented for the first time in Assam's Nalbari district. This sighting is as it is located approximately 800 km from its known coastal habitats in Bangladesh. The presence of this species in inland areas raises questions about its adaptability and movement patterns.

- The dog-faced water snake is a rear-fanged, mildly venomous, semi-aquatic snake.
- It primarily inhabits brackish waters and is known for its unique hunting strategy.
- The snake preys on fish and crustaceans in shallow waters using a sit-and-wait approach.

- Typically, it is found in coastal ecosystems, including mangroves, mudflats, and estuaries across South and Southeast Asia, as well as parts of Australia.
- The sighting of the dog-faced water snake in Assam is unprecedented. It challenges the understanding of the species' habitat preferences. This discovery could provide vital information about the species' dispersal mechanisms and ecological adaptability.

## 10. X Files Lawsuit Against Indian Government Over Censorship

**Context:** Recently, social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, has initiated legal proceedings against the Government of India in the Karnataka High Court. The lawsuit challenges the government's interpretation of Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology (IT) Act. X argues that the government's content regulation practices are unlawful and infringe upon online free speech.


### Background of the Dispute

- The conflict began when X declined to join the Government of India's 'Sahyog' portal, designed for cooperation between social media platforms and law enforcement.
- Elon Musk, CEO of X, contended that the platform has its own system for sharing information regarding cybercrime.
- X is the only major platform that has not complied with the Sahyog initiative, which has been adopted by 38 other companies.

### The Sahyog Portal:

- The Sahyog portal, launched by the Ministry of Home Affairs, aims to enhance online safety by facilitating communication between government agencies and social media platforms.
- It automates the process of issuing notices to intermediaries under the IT Act to remove content deemed unlawful.
- This initiative has raised concerns regarding transparency and the potential for arbitrary censorship.

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