

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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SUPREME COURT DIRECTIVE ON SACRED GROVES

In News

- The Supreme Court of India directed that there is a need for a nationwide survey of sacred groves under the guidance of the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.

More about the News

- The SC directed to classify Sacred Groves as **'forests'** and notify them as **'community reserves'** under the **Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) 1972**.
- The court mandated the formation of a **'Community Reserve Management Committee'** to the State government to oversee their conservation and management.

What are Sacred Groves?

- Sacred groves are patches of trees or forest areas that are **traditionally protected by local communities** for their religious, cultural, and ecological significance.
- They are known by diverse names:** Devarakadu in Karnataka, Kavu in Kerala, Sarna in Madhya Pradesh, Oran in Rajasthan, Devrai in Maharashtra, Umanglai in Manipur, Law Kyntang/Law Lyngdoh in Meghalaya, Devan/Deobhumi in Uttarakhand etc.
- Sacred groves preserve** biodiversity, regulate climate, conserve water, support livelihoods, protect cultural heritage, and promote environmental awareness.

What are community reserves?

- The concept of community reserves was introduced through the **Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Act, 2002**, to recognize and protect community-managed ecosystems.
- These reserves are designated over private or community-owned lands where local communities voluntarily participate in habitat conservation to protect wildlife and traditional conservation values.
- Key provisions include:**
 - Land-use changes within these reserves require approval from the reserve management committee and the state government.
 - The Chief Wildlife Warden** has the overall authority over the reserve's management.

The WLPA and FRA: A potential conflict

- The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**, was enacted to recognize the traditional rights of forest-dwelling communities over forests, including sacred groves.
- By classifying sacred groves as community reserves under WLPA, the decision contradicts FRA's objective.

T.N. Godavarman v. Union of India Case (1996)

- In this case, the Supreme Court interpreted Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The court ruled that 'forest land' includes;
 - Areas considered as 'forest' in the dictionary sense.
 - Any area recorded as forest in government records, irrespective of ownership.

Way Forward

- Inclusive Policy Formulation:** The MoEFCC should develop a comprehensive Sacred Grove Conservation Policy in consultation with local communities, ensuring that governance aligns with the FRA.
- Co-Management Approach:** Instead of transferring full control to the Forest Department, a co-management model between gram sabhas and forest officials could be explored.
- Legal Harmonization:** A legal reconciliation between the WLPA and FRA is necessary to prevent jurisdictional conflicts and uphold community rights.
- Scientific Mapping with Traditional Knowledge:** While satellite mapping is crucial, community knowledge should be integrated into identifying and managing sacred groves.

Source: TH

BUDGETARY ALLOCATION FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In News

- In 2025, the government allocated ₹96,777 crore for urban development, an increase from the previous year, but after adjusting for inflation, this marks a reduction.

Key Highlights of the Budget

- Key schemes like the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)** saw **significant cuts**, reflecting a gap between policy ambitions and actual spending.

- **Transfers to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** were reduced, and revenue loss due to GST has compounded the issue.
- **Central Sector Schemes**, especially for metro projects, **received higher funding**, but urban programs like Swachh Bharat Mission, and Smart Cities Mission faced cuts.
- The introduction of a **`10,000 crore Urban Challenge Fund** highlights a focus on capital-intensive infrastructure projects, with limited attention on sustainable development, employment generation, and social equity.

Urbanization Growth

- India's urbanisation is driven by economic distress, unlike the Global North where it followed industrialisation and colonial wealth transfer.
- India's urbanisation is categorized as "poverty-driven urbanisation" with both rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban migration.
- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the inadequacies of urban planning, with reverse migration showing gaps in infrastructure.

Key Urban Challenges in India

- Lack of precise data on urban population (2021 Census missing); around 40% of India's population is urban.
- **Planning Issues:** Spatial plans are outdated, causing overcrowding and slums.
 - ♦ Plans focus on capital growth rather than addressing people's needs.
- **Climate Change Impact:** Pollution, urban flooding, and heat island effects severely affect cities, especially in Delhi's NCR region.
- **Governance Challenges:** Despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment, urban planning in Indian cities is controlled by undemocratic bodies.
 - ♦ Cities receive a minimal 0.5% of GDP in intergovernmental transfers.

Initiatives

- **Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) 2.0** was launched on October 1st, 2021 for a period of five years with a vision of achieving safe sanitation and scientific processing of municipal solid waste in all cities.
- **AMRUT 2.0** was launched on 1st October 2021 to make cities 'self-reliant' and 'water secure'.

- The **Smart Cities Mission** was launched to enhance the quality of life in 100 selected cities by providing efficient services, robust infrastructure, and a sustainable environment.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) 2.0** aims to construct 1 crore houses for urban poor and middle-class families over the next five years, with an investment of ₹10 lakh crore and a government subsidy of ₹2.30 lakh crore.
- **Street Vending Plans:** Development of 100 weekly 'haats' or street food hubs in select cities.
 - ♦ States encouraged to create street-vending plans for more hubs as per local needs

Suggestions and Way Forward

- The progress has been made towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but still urban areas struggle with poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.
- The challenges faced by Indian cities call for comprehensive national interventions to improve urban planning, governance, and infrastructure.
- Urban development requires sustained investments, with cities being recognized as growth hubs.
- There is a need to focus on sustainable, low-rise, **radial development** over high-rise buildings to prevent urban sprawl and reduce carbon emissions.

Source: TH

STRY GENE FOR GENDER IDENTIFICATION

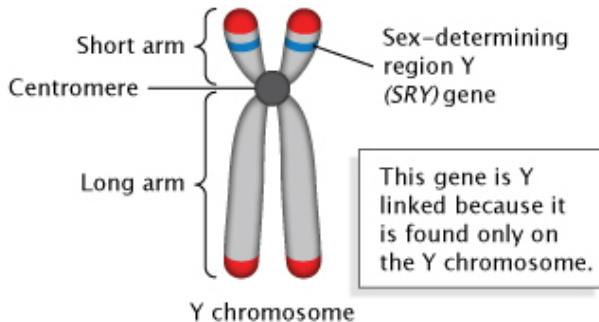
Context

- Recent studies have uncovered exceptional cases where individuals with the SRY gene have developed as females, highlighting the complexities of genetic influence on gender determination.

The SRY Gene (Sex-determining Region Y)

- **The SRY gene** on the Y chromosome **determines if a baby will be male or female.**
 - ♦ If the SRY gene is present, the baby will develop male characteristics and if the SRY gene is absent or mutated, the baby will develop female characteristics.
- The SRY gene produces a protein that attaches to DNA and controls the activity of other genes.

- The SRY protein starts processes that cause the fetus to develop male gonads (testes) and prevents the development of female reproductive structures.



Mechanism of Sex Determination

- Chromosomes:** Each human cell has **46 chromosomes, or 23 pairs**. One pair of these chromosomes is the sex chromosomes, which determine the sex of the individual.
 - Female sex:** Females have two X chromosomes, or XX.
 - Male sex:** Males have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome, or XY.
- Fertilization:** When an egg is fertilized by sperm with an X chromosome, the resulting zygote will be female (XX). When an egg is fertilized by sperm with a Y chromosome, the resulting zygote will be male (XY).

Unusual Sex Development

- In rare cases, an **SRY gene may be translocated** from the Y chromosome to the X chromosome.
 - If a baby inherits two X chromosomes, and one of them has the SRY gene, they usually **develop male characteristics** but are unable to have children.
 - However, there are rare cases where individuals with two X chromosomes and the **SRY gene develop as females**.
- X Chromosome Inactivation:** If a woman has the "male" gene (SRY) on one of her X chromosomes, that specific X chromosome (the one with SRY) is the one that gets turned off.
 - This is because the SRY-carrying X is often missing other important genes, and turning it off prevents developmental issues.

Concluding remarks

- The SRY gene remains central to male sex determination, but rare genetic anomalies can lead to unexpected outcomes.

- The study emphasizes the **need to examine translocation chromosomes** for associated deletions that might influence gender outcomes.
- Understanding such genetic variations can help in **medical counseling and diagnosing disorders** of sex development (DSDs).

Source: TH

GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO ERADICATING LEFT-WING EXTREMISM (LWE) BY 2026

In News

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah reaffirmed the government's goal to eliminate Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) by March 31, 2026 after security forces neutralized 31 Maoists in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh.

Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)

- Definition:** LWE refers to individuals or groups who promote radical leftist ideologies and seek to overthrow the state through violence. It has its roots in the **1967 Naxalbari** uprising in West Bengal.
- Terminology:**
 - Maoists (global term).
 - Naxalites (India-specific term, derived from the 1967 Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal).
- Regions Affected (Red Corridor):**
 - Highly affected: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal.
 - Moderately affected: Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala.
- Decline in Naxalim:** 53% decrease in LWE-related incidents (16,463 cases from 2004-2014 to 7,700 cases from 2014-2024).
 - 70% decline in civilian and security personnel deaths.

Reasons for the Decline in Naxalism

- Strategic & Security Measures:**
 - SAMADHAN Doctrine (2017):**
 - The acronym SAMADHAN represents eight key pillars: Smart Leadership (S) for strong political and bureaucratic execution, Aggressive Strategy (A) focusing on proactive security operations, Motivation & Training (M) to enhance the capabilities of security forces, Actionable Intelligence

(A) to improve surveillance and tracking of Maoist activities, Dashboard-based Key Performance Indicators (D) for real-time monitoring of LWE incidents, Harnessing Technology (H) through AI, drones, and digital security systems, Action Plan for Each State (A) to tailor counter-insurgency efforts, and No Access to Financing (N) to disrupt Maoist funding channels and illicit networks.

- **Military Operations:**

- ♦ **Operation Octopus, Operation Double Bull, Operation Chakrabandha:** Large-scale operations against Maoist hideouts.
- ♦ **Formation of special task forces:** CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), Greyhounds, Special Intelligence Branch (SIB).
- ♦ **Better intelligence & drone surveillance:** Improved tracking of Maoist movements.

- **Improved Centre-State Coordination:**

- ♦ **Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Scheme:** Funds provided to states for counter-insurgency.
- ♦ **Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS):** Capacity-building of police forces in Maoist-affected areas.

- **Socio-Economic & Developmental Initiatives:**

- ♦ **Rehabilitation of Surrendered Cadres:** Vocational training and financial assistance for reintegration into society.
- ♦ Skill Development Centres and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) set up in LWE-affected districts.
- ♦ **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):** 15,000 homes sanctioned for surrendered Maoists.
- ♦ **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) initiative:** Providing livestock to surrendered Maoists for financial stability.

Source: TH

- ♦ The **Kitchener House** inside Fort William has been renamed **Manekshaw House**, and South gate, formerly known as **St. George's Gate** is now **Shivaji Gate**.

Fort William

- The first Fort William was constructed by the British East India Company in **1696** along the eastern banks of the **Hooghly River**.
 - ♦ It was named after **King William III of England**.
- **Structure:** The fort is known for its irregular octagonal structure and arched windows.
 - ♦ **There are six gates:** Chowringhee, Plassey, Calcutta, Water Gate, St Georges and the Treasury Gate.
 - ♦ **The Maidan**, the largest park in India, is located in front of the fort.
- In **1756**, Nawab **Siraj-ud-Daulah of Bengal** attacked and captured the fort, leading to the infamous '**Black Hole of Calcutta**' incident.
- After the British regained control following the **Battle of Plassey (1757)**, a new and more fortified structure was built between **1758 and 1781** under the command of **Robert Clive**.

Source: TH

POTASH MINING IN INDIA

In News

- Surveys conducted by the Geological Survey of India (GSI) have identified **potash reserves in Rajasthan**, presenting an opportunity to decrease India's dependence on imports.

What is Potash?

- **Potash** refers to potassium-bearing minerals, mainly used in fertilizers (90% usage).
- **Applications:** One of the three primary nutrients in **NPK fertilizers (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium)**.
 - ♦ **Potash alum** helps remove water hardness and has antibacterial properties.
 - ♦ Used in **production of glass ceramics**, soaps and detergents, and explosives.
- **Types of Potash Fertilizers:**
 - ♦ **Sulphate of Potash (SOP):** Premium, chloride-free, used for fruits and vegetables.
 - ♦ **Muriate of Potash (MOP):** Contains chloride, used for carbohydrate crops like wheat.

NEWS IN SHORT

FORT WILLIAM RENAMED VIJAY DURG

Context

- Fort William in Kolkata, the **headquarters of the Eastern Army Command**, has been renamed **Vijay Durg**.

Potash Reserves in India

- **Punjab and Rajasthan** identified as key states with significant reserves.
 - ♦ **Punjab:** Potash reserves in Fazilka and Sri Muktsar Sahib districts.
 - ♦ **Rajasthan:** Nagaur-Ganganagar basin, Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Churu, and Bikaner districts. Rajasthan alone contributes **89%**.

Why is Potash Mining Important for India?

- **Reducing Import Dependence:** India currently imports **50 lakh tonnes** of potash annually.
- **Boosting Domestic Fertilizer Industry:** Will enhance agricultural self-reliance.
- **Economic Benefits:** Employment generation and regional economic development.

Challenges and Concerns

- **Environmental and Land Issues:** Potash deposits in Punjab are **450 meters below the surface**.
 - ♦ Farmers fear **land acquisition** and loss of livelihoods.
 - ♦ The government claims mining will use an **advanced drilling system** with **zero land impact**.
 - ♦ An **Environmental and Social Impact Assessment** is being conducted.

Government Policy and Classification

- **Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS):** Provides subsidies based on actual nutrient content (N, P, K).
- **Critical Mineral Status:** Recognized under the **Mines & Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment (MMDR) Act, 2023** to boost domestic production and reduce import dependency.

Source: IE

COOK ISLANDS

Context

- New Zealand has raised significant concern regarding the Cook Islands' preparation to sign a cooperation deal with China.

About

- **Political Status:** The Cook Islands is a self-governing nation in free association with New Zealand. It was formerly a dependent New Zealand colony from **1901 to 1965**.
- **Geography:** The Cook Islands are located in **Polynesia, Oceania**, in the South Pacific Ocean.

- ♦ They are situated northeast of New Zealand, between **American Samoa** and **French Polynesia**.
- ♦ The nation consists of **15 islands**, with a total land area of approximately 236.7 square kilometers. These islands were formed by **volcanic activity**.
- **The administrative seat is Avarua**, located on the island of **Rarotonga**.



Source: TH

BALTIC NATIONS

In News

The three Baltic states disconnected their electricity systems from Russia's power grid to integrate the countries more closely with the European Union and boost security.



Baltic nations

- Baltic states are in the northeastern region of Europe and contain the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, on the eastern **shores of the Baltic Sea**.
- They are bounded on the west and north by the **Baltic Sea**, which gives the region its name, on the east by Russia, on the southeast by Belarus, and on the southwest by Poland.

Baltic Sea

- The **largest expanse of brackish water in the world**, the semi-enclosed and relatively shallow.
- The Baltic Sea is an **arm of the North Atlantic Ocean**. It is bound by the **Scandinavian Peninsula**, the mainland of Northern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Europe, and the Danish islands.
- The **Baltic Sea** is artificially linked to the **White Sea by the White Sea Canal** and to the **North Sea by the Kiel Canal**.
- It includes the **Gulf of Bothnia, the Bay of Bothnia, the Gulf of Finland, the Gulf of Riga, and the Bay of Gdańsk**.



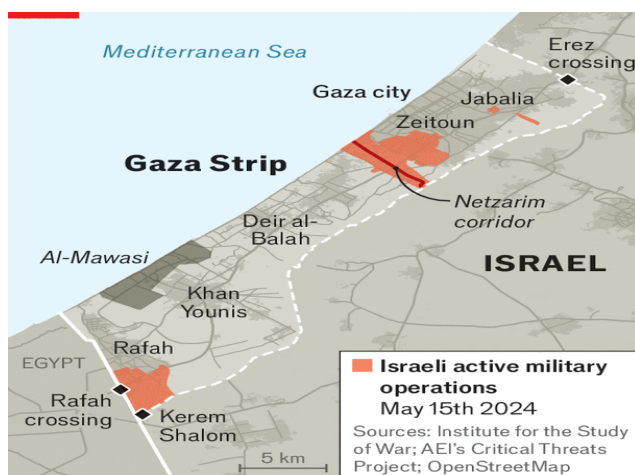
Source :TH

NETZARIM CORRIDOR

In Context

- Israeli forces have withdrawn from the **Netzarim Corridor** as part of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement.

About Netzarim Corridor



- The Netzarim Corridor was a **strip of land in the Gaza Strip** that was under Israeli military control during the conflict.

- It was a strategic military zone established by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during the 2023-2025 Gaza War.
- It stretched from the **Gaza-Israel border to the Mediterranean Sea**, effectively bisecting the Gaza Strip.
- The corridor was named after the former Israeli settlement of **Netzarim** that once **existed in the area**.

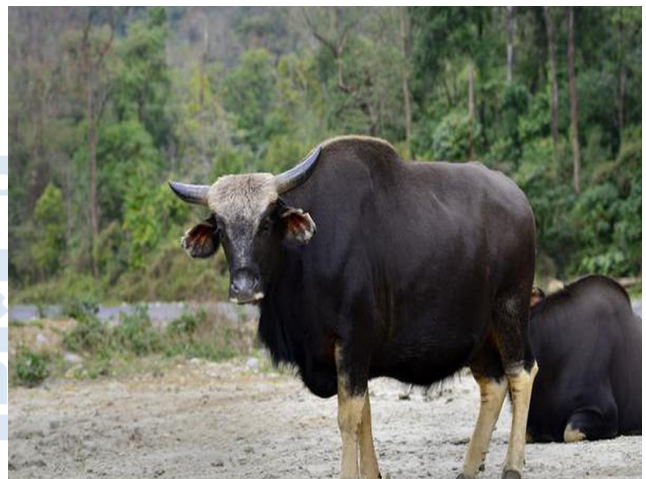
Source: FE

MITHUNS

In News

- In Arunachal Pradesh, mithuns will wear fluorescent collars to improve visibility on highways and prevent fatal accidents.

About Mithuns (*Bos frontalis*)



- Mithun is often called 'cattle of the mountains'.
- It is a rare cattle species reared in the subtropical rain forests of Northeastern hilly regions of India.
- It is the State animal of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.
 - ♦ It is also found in the hills of Manipur and Mizoram.
- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- **Importance :** Mithuns are prized for their meat, milk, and draught power.
 - ♦ They play a crucial role in the socio-economic and cultural lives of many tribal communities in the northeast.
 - ♦ Its possession is considered as a sign of prosperity.

Source: TH

EXERCISE 'CYCLONE 2025'

In News

- **Exercise 'Cyclone 2025'** began at the Mahajan Field Firing Range in Rajasthan .

Exercise 'Cyclone 2025'

- It is a **joint military exercise** between India and Egypt .

- ♦ The first edition of the exercise was conducted in 2023 in India.
- It is a 14 day exercise which aims to enhance defence cooperation by sharing professional skills and improving interoperability of special forces in desert environments.

Source :PIB

