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Table of Content

INDIA'S RISE AS A GLOBAL POWER IN INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL GRAVITAS

Context

- Recently, the Vice-President of India, in a Conference on **Indian Knowledge Systems**, said that 'India's rise as a global power needs to be accompanied by the rise of its intellectual and cultural gravitas'.

About India's Intellectual & Cultural Gravitas

- India's knowledge traditions span thousands of years — from the analytical rigor of Nyaya philosophy and the introspection of Vedanta, to the rich intellectual debates at ancient universities like Nalanda, Vikramshila, Takshashila, Vallabhi, and Odantapuri, and continuing to the scientific acumen of the modern age.
  - It includes the **education ecosystem**, **global recognition, and knowledge diplomacy.**
- **Literary & Philosophical Excellence:** The **Vedas,** Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita are studied in philosophy and theology courses globally, including the contributions of **Panini, Aryabhata, and Kautilya.**
  - **Thinkers** such as Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and Amartya Sen represent a rich tradition of inquiry and humanism.
  - **Authors** like Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy have shaped modern literary conversations.
- **Spiritual & Wellness Influence:**
  - **Yoga: International Yoga Day (June 21st)** is a UN-designated celebration **initiated by India.**
  - **Ayurveda:** Traditional Indian medicine has inspired a booming global wellness industry.
  - **Meditation and Mindfulness:** These practices are now central to mental health programs and corporate wellness worldwide.
- **Art & Cinema:** Indian films enjoy massive audiences in countries like **Nigeria, Russia, Egypt**, and across the Indian diaspora.
  - Dance numbers, costumes, and themes have even influenced music videos and Hollywood choreography.
- **Global Festivals:** Diwali & Holi are celebrated in multicultural cities across the world, from London to Sydney, often by people of non-Indian descent too.

Why Intellectual and Cultural Gravitas Matters?

- **Global Thought Leadership:** India's economists, legal scholars, and climate thinkers are increasingly influencing international frameworks and dialogues.
- **Government-Led Outreach:** Through institutions like ICCR and MEA's public diplomacy initiatives, India promotes its cultural heritage globally.
- **Heritage Conservation:** Projects like **'Digital India'** and **'Adopt a Heritage'** reflect efforts to preserve and present India's cultural treasures for future generations and global visitors.
  - Projects like the **Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum** aim to transform colonial-era buildings into global cultural landmarks.
- **Policy Commitment:** The National Education Policy (NEP) encourages multidisciplinary learning and critical thinking, emphasizing global competence with Indian values.
- **Institutional Innovation:** Investments in IITs, IISc, and AIIMS signify India's intent to lead in science, technology, and medicine; however, to secure a truly holistic and sustainable leadership role on the world stage, India must also prioritize the advancement of social sciences, ethics, and philosophy.
- **Soft Power Diplomacy:** Indian literature, festivals, textiles, and cuisine offer not just aesthetic appeal—but windows into pluralism, resilience, and philosophical depth.
  - Events like International Yoga Day and exhibitions of **Buddhist relics in Thailand** reflect India's spiritual outreach.

Challenges to Intellectual and Cultural Leadership

- **Declining Academic Freedom:** Political interference in universities and research institutions has led to **censorship and self-censorship.**
  - India's ranking in the **Academic Freedom Index** has dropped sharply, placing it among countries with 'completely restricted' academic environments.
- **Ideological Polarization:** The dominance of certain ideological narratives has marginalized alternative viewpoints, especially in humanities and social sciences.
  - Regional diversity is underrepresented in national narratives, limiting holistic cultural diplomacy.

- **Low Investment in Research & Innovation:** India's R&D expenditure remains low compared to global leaders.

  - Bureaucratic hurdles and lack of autonomy in institutions stifle innovation and original scholarship.

- **Brain Drain & Talent Retention:** Many top scholars and researchers seek opportunities abroad due to better funding, freedom, and recognition.

  - Domestic institutions **struggle to offer competitive environments** for cutting-edge research.

- **Digital Colonialism & Cultural Representation:** Global tech platforms dominate cultural dissemination, often sidelining indigenous voices.

  - **India's digital infrastructure** for cultural exports (e.g., literature, art, heritage) needs strategic investment.

- **Youth Disconnect & Cultural Continuity:** Urban youth often lack exposure to classical arts, regional languages, and traditional knowledge systems.

  - Cultural education in schools is minimal, weakening intergenerational transmission.

India's Efforts & Initiatives in Intellectual and Cultural Leadership

- **Education & Knowledge Systems**

  - **NEP 2020** pushes multidisciplinary learning, integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), and promotion of Indian languages.

  - New academic models like Four-Year Undergraduate Programmes, NHEQF, and digital platforms like SWAYAM and AAPAR modernize learning delivery.

  - **PM-YUVA 3.0** promotes young writers in 22 Indian languages + English, focusing on India's heritage and global diaspora.

- **Science, Technology & Innovation:**

  - Vision India Techade aims for global tech leadership across AI, quantum computing, and research.

  - Flagship missions:
    - Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)
    - National Quantum Mission
    - India AI Mission
    - Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

- Global collaborations through initiatives like the U.S.-India TRUST and INDUS-X strengthen academic and tech partnerships.

- **Cultural Renaissance & Thought Leadership:**

  - Events like India Leadership Conclave 2025 highlight India's journey "From Roots to Rockets."

  - Institutionalizing **Indian Knowledge Systems** via libraries, clubs, and language labs to keep traditional wisdom relevant.

  - Ministry of Culture's **5-Pillar Vision for Viksit Bharat 2047**

  - **Kalagram Initiatives**: Cultural villages like the one at **Prayagraj's Mahakumbh** are being replicated nationwide to showcase India's spiritual and artistic traditions.

  - **UNESCO Recognitions:** Sites like **Assam's Moidams** and **Maratha military landscapes** are being promoted for World Heritage status.

Way Ahead

- **Strengthen Academic Autonomy:** Implement safeguards for free inquiry and diverse thought in universities.

- **Invest in Cultural Infrastructure:** Support museums, translation projects, and global cultural festivals.

- **Promote Indic Thought Globally:** Encourage publication and dissemination of Indian philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics.

- **Empower Youth Engagement:** Integrate cultural education into curricula and support creative industries.

Source: PIB

SC TO ECI: CONSIDER AADHAAR, VOTER ID & RATION CARDS FOR BIHAR ELECTORAL ROLL REVISION

Context

- The Supreme Court (SC) told the Election Commission of India (ECI) to consider Aadhaar card, voter ID card and ration card also as acceptable documents for the "**Special Intensive Revision"** of electoral rolls in Bihar, while leaving the final decision to the ECI.

About

- As per the ECI, those who don't figure in the **2003 electoral rolls of Bihar** (when the poll panel says it did its last Special Intensive Revision) have to submit any of 11 documents to prove date and / or place of birth.

- Further, for those **born after July 1, 1987, they need their parents' birth proof too** – which is akin to citizenship proof.
  - The list of documents includes **neither Aadhaar or PAN, nor old voter ID.**
- The Election Commission derives its powers from **Article 324** of the Constitution and carries out revision of electoral rolls under **Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1950.**

Who Qualifies as an "Ordinary Resident"?

- Eligibility to vote depends on the concept of "ordinary residence", defined under **Section 19 of the RPA, 1950.** A person qualifies if they;
  - Have a genuine, habitual presence in the constituency.
  - Are not present merely temporarily (e.g., students in hostels may not qualify).
  - Intend to stay or return regularly to the location.

India's Commitment to Universal Adult Suffrage

- India after independence adopted universal adult suffrage regardless of gender, caste, religion, education, or property.
- **Article 326** of the Constitution guarantees voting rights to all citizens aged 18 and above, following the **61st Constitutional Amendment, 1989.**
- **Status of the Right to Vote in India:**
  - The Supreme Court in **Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India (2006)** held that the 'right to elect' is a **statutory right** under **Section 62 of the RPA, 1951**, and not a fundamental or constitutional right.
  - In **Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023),** the Supreme Court declined to reopen the settled position.

Why Electoral Roll Accuracy Matters?

- Accurate and up-to-date electoral rolls are central to free and fair elections, ensuring the principle of "one person, one vote". Inaccuracies in the rolls can lead to;
  - **Disenfranchisement** of eligible voters,
  - **Inclusion of ineligible individuals**, enabling impersonation or dilution of genuine votes,
  - **Distortion of electoral outcomes**, eroding public trust.

- **Safeguards Against Arbitrary Deletion:**
  - **Lal Babu Hussein v. Electoral Registration Officer (1995):** The SC struck down the ECI 1992 and 1994 guidelines that allowed District Collectors and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to delete names from electoral rolls based on mere suspicion of foreign origin.
  - **Md. Rahim Ali v. State of Assam (2024):** The SC again held that suspicion alone is not sufficient grounds for deleting a name from the voter list.

Special Provisions for Absent Voters

- India also provides alternate voting mechanisms for those unable to vote in person;
  - **Postal ballots under Rule 18** of the **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961** – for armed forces, government officials on duty, and election staff.
  - **Overseas voters** can register under **Section 20A of the RPA, 1950**, though they must **vote in person.**
- Efforts to introduce proxy or online voting for overseas citizens are ongoing but not yet implemented.

Concluding remarks

- India's electoral democracy rests on the legitimacy of its voter rolls. The **right to vote may be statutory**, but it carries the **moral and democratic weight of a fundamental right.**
- The success of electoral reforms will depend on how well India can balance integrity with inclusion — the twin pillars of a healthy electoral process.

Source: TH

NITI AAYOG ROADMAP FOR STRENGTHENING STATE SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY COUNCILS

In News

- NITI Aayog has released a comprehensive roadmap to empower **State Science & Technology (S&T) Councils** across India.

Key Objectives

- **Enhance State S&T Ecosystems:** Bridge the gap between scientific innovation and socio-economic development at the state level.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Improve coordination among ministries, state governments, academia, industry, and funding agencies.

- **Promote Innovation:** Support patent facilitation, remote sensing, grassroots innovation, science popularisation, and capacity-building.

Major Challenges Identified

- **Weak Governance:** Irregular meetings, lack of executive leadership, and delays in decision-making.
- **Inadequate Funding:** Disparities in budget allocations, over-reliance on core grants, and underutilization of available central support.
- **Manpower Shortages:** Many councils have unfilled positions, limited career progression, and insufficient skilled personnel.
- **Limited Collaboration:** Weak linkages with industry, academia, and central institutions restrict the impact and reach of S&T initiatives.
- **Administrative Bottlenecks:** Rigid rules and fragmented mandates slow down project execution and resource utilization.

Recommendations

- **Structural Reforms:** Expand Governing Councils to include representatives from central institutions, universities, industry, and PSUs.
  - Appoint a full-time Executive Director with scientific expertise for each council.
- **Financial Support:** States should allocate at least 0.5% of GSDP to S&T.
  - Shift from core grants to project-based grants (except for NE and UTs).
  - Encourage performance-based grants and wider funding from industry and central ministries.
- **Human Resources:** Maintain a 70:30 ratio of scientific to non-scientific staff.
  - Ensure regular positions are state-supported with clear career progression.
  - Use faculty secondment and retired scientists for capacity building.
- **State-Focused Roles:** Conduct state-specific S&T need mapping.
  - Establish substructures (e.g., Patent Facilitation, Tech Transfer, Biodiversity Cells).
- **Program Redefinition:** Prioritize R&D support to state institutions.
  - Institute state-level awards, fellowships, and internships.
  - Regularly update science cities and centres for outreach.

- **Collaboration & Linkages:** Strengthen ties with central government agencies, industry, PSUs, and academic institutions.
  - Organize annual STI conclaves and collaborative activities for knowledge exchange.

Source: PIB

CIMMYT SEEKS INDIA'S SUPPORT TO SUSTAIN GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION

Context

- The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) is currently facing a severe funding crisis and is turning to India for financial support to sustain its global agricultural research efforts.

Background

- USAID, which administered foreign aid on behalf of the U.S. government, contributed approximately **$83 million** to CIMMYT in 2024 — **nearly 40%** of its **$211 million** annual budget.
- With **USAID ceasing operations**, CIMMYT is now looking for increased financial contributions from nations like India that have historically benefited from its cutting-edge agricultural research.

About CIMMYT

- **Founded:** It was founded in **1966** and headquartered in **Mexico.**
- **Origin:** It evolved from a Rockefeller Foundation project with Mexican government support in the 1940s-50s.
- **Key Contributions:**
  - Led by **Dr. Norman Borlaug,** CIMMYT was central to the **Green Revolution in Asia.**
  - **It developed high-yielding, semi-dwarf wheat** varieties such as Lerma Rojo 64A, Sonora 64, and Mayo 64.
  - It collaborated with Indian scientists to create Kalyan Sona (1967), Sonalika (1968), and later PBW 343 (1995).
- **Current Impact:**
  - CIMMYT-derived varieties are grown on over 60 million hectares globally.
  - In India, 50% of wheat cultivated is from varieties released post-2019 through CIMMYT–ICAR collaboration.

- **Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA);**
  - **Established:** 2011 as a joint initiative of CIMMYT and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
  - **Locations:** Research stations in Ludhiana (Punjab), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), and Samastipur (Bihar).
  - **Focus Areas:** Climate-resilient crops, heat tolerance, nitrogen-use efficiency, disease resistance, and sustainable farming.

Implications for Agricultural Research

- **USAID's Role:** As the principal development aid arm of the U.S. government, USAID supported international agricultural innovation for decades.
- **Post-Closure Impact:**
  - Loss of consistent donor support (USAID contributed nearly 40% of CIMMYT's budget).
  - Potential slowdown in global R&D, especially in developing regions.
  - CIMMYT warns that effects will be felt severely post-2026.

Why Should India Step Up?

- **Strategic Agricultural Interests:** India cultivated wheat on **32 million hectares** in **2024**. Of the top 10 wheat varieties, **6 are CIMMYT-derived**, covering ~15.3 million hectares.
- **Food Security and Climate Challenges:** Rising March temperatures in north India are causing wheat yield losses. Every 1°C rise in night temperatures reduces yield by 6%.
  - CIMMYT's research on heat-tolerant and high-yield wheat is crucial for Indian food security.
- **India's Global Image:** By stepping up funding, India can promote itself as a leader in South-South cooperation and influence global R&D priorities in food security.
  - It can also support capacity-building for Africa and other developing regions using Indian agricultural experience.
- **Human Resource Linkages:** Many Indian scientists are currently working at CIMMYT offices across the world.
  - Indians constitute around 10% of CIMMYT's global workforce.

Way Ahead

- **India should raise its funding substantially,** to sustain existing research platforms, secure a say in governance and priority-setting, and support regional and global food security initiatives.

- **Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** Seed companies, agri-tech firms, and CSR initiatives of major Indian corporations can be tapped to co-finance agricultural R&D.
- **Regional Leadership in Agri-Innovation:** India can lead a Global South Agricultural Innovation Forum with CIMMYT, targeting Africa and Asia by promoting technology transfers, joint breeding programs, and sustainable practices.

Source: IE

NEWS IN SHORT

DHAMMACHAKRA PRAVARTANA DIVAS

Context

- The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, celebrated Ashadha Purnima—the day that marks the Dhammachakra Pravartana Divas.

About Dhammachakra Pravartana Divas

- Celebrated on **Ashadha Purnima (full moon day of Ashadha month)**, it commemorates the **first discourse of Lord Buddha** after attaining enlightenment.
- The sermon was delivered to his **five ascetic disciples (Pañcavargiya)** at **Deer Park (Ṛiṣipatana Mrigadaya) in Sarnath,** near Varanasi.
- The day symbolizes the **"Turning of the Wheel of Dharma"** (Dhammachakra Pravartana), initiating the propagation of Buddhist teachings.

Cultural and Religious Significance

- It is the **second most sacred day** in the Buddhist calendar after Vaishakha Purnima (Buddha Purnima).
- It also marks the start of **Varsha Vassa**—the monastic rain retreat, a period of self-discipline and spiritual introspection.
- It is also known as;
  - **Esala Poya in Sri Lanka**
  - **Asanha Bucha in Thailand.**

Source: PIB

LOTUS BLOOMS IN KASHMIR'S WULAR LAKE

Context

- After a gap of nearly three decades, the lotus has bloomed in Kashmir's Wular Lake.

About

- The lake witnessed a return of lotus bloom after 30 years, following a severe flood **in 1992 that buried lotus rhizomes under layers of silt.**

- This revival is attributed to desilting and ecosystem restoration efforts undertaken by the **Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA)**, which began in 2020.

Wular Lake

- **Location:** It is located in the **Bandipora district** of Jammu and Kashmir and is situated on the foothills of **Haramuk Mountain**.

  - It is spread in a total area of **200 square km** covering almost **24 km in length** while its **breadth is 10 km.**

  - The main source of water for Wular Lake is **River Jhelum.**

- Wular Lake is **India's largest freshwater lake** and the second largest in Asia (after Lake Baikal).

- The lake is also said to be a remnant of **Satisar Lake** that existed in ancient times.

- The lake also has a **small island** in its centre called the 'Zaina Lank'. This island was constructed by **King Zainul-Abi-Din.**

- It was designated as a **Wetland of International Importance** under the **Ramsar Convention** in **1990.**

Source: IE

TURKANA BASIN

In News

- Recent studies extracted 18–20 million-year-old enamel proteins from extinct mammal fossils in the Turkana Basin, Kenya.

About Turkana Basin

- The **Turkana Basin** is a vast endorheic region in northwestern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, centered around **Lake Turkana**— the world's largest desert lake—renowned for its rich fossil record, unique biodiversity, and critical contributions to the study of human and mammalian evolution.

Source: TH

ZONAL COUNCILS OF INDIA

Context

- Union Home Minister chaired the **27th meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council** in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

What are Zonal Councils?

- The Zonal Councils are the **statutory bodies** established under the **States Reorganisation Act of 1956.**

- The act divided the country **into five zones** (Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern) and provided a zonal council for each zone.

- **Members:** Each zonal council consists of the following members:

  - **Home minister** of the Central government, the common chairman of the five zonal councils.

  - **Chief ministers** of all the States in the zone.

  - Two other ministers from each state in the zone.

  - **Administrator** of each union territory in the zone.

- **Each chief minister acts** as a **vice-chairman** of the council by rotation, holding office **for a period** of one year at a time.

- **North-Eastern Council:** In addition to the above Zonal Councils, a North-Eastern Council was created by a separate Act of Parliament **the North-Eastern Council Act of 1971.**

  - Its members include **Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim.**

- **The zonal councils** are **only deliberative and advisory bodies. They aim at;**

  - **Promoting cooperation and coordination** between states, union territories and the Centre.

  - **Discuss and make recommendations** regarding matters like economic and social planning, linguistic minorities, border disputes, interstate transport, and so on.

- Each Zonal Council has also constituted a **Standing Committee** at the level of **Chief Secretaries.**

Source: AIR

TALASH INITIATIVE

In News

- The **National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS)**, an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, in partnership with UNICEF India launched **TALASH (Tribal Aptitude, Life Skills and Self-Esteem Hub).**

About

- It is the first program of its kind in India, specifically aimed at supporting the holistic development of tribal students enrolled in **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs)** across 28 States and 8 Union Territories

- TALASH is designed to foster both educational and personal growth among tribal students and offers life skills, and career clarity, empowering students to discover their strengths and plan their futures.

Source: PIB

BHARAT 6G ALLIANCE (B6GA)

In News

- The Union Minister of Communications recently reviewed the progress of the **Bharat 6G Alliance (B6GA)**, highlighting India's ambition to become a global leader in 6G technology by 2030.

About Bharat 6G Alliance (B6GA)

- Bharat 6G Alliance is **India's flagship platform for collaborative 6G innovation**, uniting diverse stakeholders to build an advanced, secure, and globally relevant 6G ecosystem.

- The Alliance is central to India's **"Bharat 6G Vision,"** aiming for pre-commercial 6G trials by 2026 and commercial **rollout by 2029–2030.**

- It targets **achieving 10% of global 6G intellectual property rights (IPRs),** positioning India as a global technology leader.

Source: PIB

ISLANDS PROTECTION ZONE (IPZ) NOTIFICATION

In News

- The Union environment ministry has issued a new notification extending and amending the rules for infrastructure projects under the Islands Protection Zone (IPZ) Notification 2011.

About

- The Island Protection Zone (IPZ) Notification, 2011 is a **legal framework** issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to regulate and protect the coastal and marine ecosystems of India's islands, particularly the Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

- As per the notification, the validity of clearances for infrastructure projects under the IPZ 2011 is now 10 years (previously 7 years).

- The notification comes amid a surge in infrastructure and tourism projects in the islands, including the 81,800 crore Great Nicobar Holistic Development Project (port, airport, power plant, township, trunk road)

Difference from CRZ

- **CRZ (Coastal Regulation Zone):** Applies to mainland India's coast.

- **IPZ:** Applies only to the islands.

Source: HT

MEDIUM ALTITUDE LONG ENDURANCE (MALE) DRONES

Context

- To strengthen surveillance along its land and maritime borders, India has accelerated the procurement of **87 Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drones** from indigenous manufacturers.

About the MALE Drones

- **Role:** MALE drones provide advanced, real-time **Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR)** capabilities and can operate effectively across diverse terrains. They are equipped for both surveillance and combat operations.

- **Capabilities:**
  - **Endurance:** Over **30 hours** of continuous flight.
  - **Altitude:** Can operate at a maximum altitude of at least **35,000 feet**.

- **Significance:**
  - These drones must have **more than 60% indigenous content**, and several major Indian defence companies are likely to be part of this procurement.
  - Marks India's **first major indigenous procurement** of MALE-class drones — previously, India largely depended on imports from **Israeli firms**.

Source: TH

INS NISTAR

Context

- The Indian Navy has received **INS Nistar**, its first **indigenously designed and built Diving Support Vessel (DSV)**, from **Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL)**, Visakhapatnam.

About

- **Name:** Nistar, derived from **Sanskrit**, means liberation, rescue, or salvation.
- **Built as per:** Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) classification rules.

- **Features:** Equipped with advanced **Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs)** for diver monitoring and salvage operations up to 1000 meters deep.
- **Key Role:** Acts as the 'Mother Ship' for the **Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV)**, which rescues and evacuates personnel in case of submarine emergencies.
- **Significance:** Around **75% indigenous content** — a milestone in the Indian Navy's path towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence manufacturing.

Source: DD News

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