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Institute of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 12 April 2025

AMRIT BHARAT STATION SCHEME



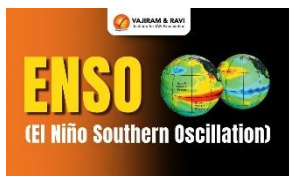
- It is an ongoing Indian Railways mission **launched in February 2023**.
- It aims to enhance and **modernize railway stations** throughout the Indian Railways network.
- The scheme currently intends to upgrade and modernize a **total of 1,300 stations** across the Indian Railway system.
- It envisages the development of stations **on a continuous basis with a long-term approach**.
- It involves the **preparation of Master Plans** and their **implementation in phases to improve the amenities** at the stations, like improvement of **station access**, circulating areas, **waiting halls, toilets**, lift/escalators as necessary, cleanliness, **free Wi-Fi**, kiosks for local products through schemes like **'One Station One Product'**, better passenger information systems, executive lounges, nominated spaces for business meetings, landscaping etc.
- The scheme will **cater to each station according to its unique requirements**, and also draw inspiration from the local culture, heritage, and architecture of the region in the redesign of every station.
- The scheme emphasizes **upgrading station structures**, integrating stations with the surrounding city areas on both sides, promoting **multimodal connectivity**, providing **facilities for individuals with disabilities** (Divyangjans), implementing **sustainable and eco-friendly solutions**, introducing ballastless tracks, **incorporating 'Roof Plazas'** when required, and considering the feasibility and phasing of improvements.
- The ultimate goal is to **transform these stations into vibrant city centres** over the long term.

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ENSO (EL NIÑO SOUTHERN OSCILLATION)



- **ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation):** ENSO is a significant climate phenomenon that involves changes in sea-surface temperatures (SST) in the central and eastern tropical **Pacific Ocean**. It affects various global weather patterns, including wind behavior, atmospheric pressure, and rainfall distribution.

- **El Niño:** Warmer-than-usual sea surface temperatures, associated with unusual global warming patterns.
- **La Niña:** Cooler-than-usual sea surface temperatures, often linked with colder atmospheric patterns and stronger trade winds.
- **ENSO-Neutral:** Neither **El Niño** nor **La Niña** dominates the climate system, making forecasts less certain, but often acting as a **transitional phase** between the two extreme conditions.

ENSO-Neutral Phase

- The **ENSO-neutral phase** is typically seen as a **transition period** between **El Niño** and **La Niña**.
- In March 2025, NOAA scientists observed that **SST anomalies in the Niño-3.4 region** had reached **-0.01°C**, much warmer than the **La Niña threshold of -0.5°C**.
- The **cool waters** that had characterized **La Niña** in previous months have now **faded**.
- Despite the presence of some **La Niña-like atmospheric conditions** (like **strong trade winds**), the **lack of cool SSTs** has led to the **declaration of ENSO-neutral conditions**.
- **Temperature and Atmospheric Changes:** The shift to neutral conditions occurred as **warm waters** spread westward across the **eastern Pacific**. Simultaneously, the pool of **cool water** beneath the surface began to shrink.
 - Although **signs of La Niña** (like strong trade winds) persisted for a short time, the absence of cold surface waters meant the system no longer met the criteria to be classified as **La Niña**.

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ASIATIC LIONS



- The Asiatic lion, also known as the Persian Lion or Indian Lion, belongs to the subspecies **Panthera leo persica**.

- It is found exclusively in **India**, specifically in the **Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary** in Gujarat.

- Once widespread across **West Asia** and the **Middle East**, the Asiatic lion has now become **extinct** in these regions, with India being the last refuge of this species.
- Current distribution:** The latest lion census (2020) by the Gujarat Forest Department records **674 lions** spread across **30,000 sq km** in **nine districts** and **53 talukas** of Saurashtra.
 - Due to sustained conservation, the **IUCN** moved the Asiatic lion from “**Critically Endangered**” (1990s) to “**Endangered**” (since 2008) on its **Red List**.

Asiatic vs African Lions

Feature	Asiatic Lion (<i>Panthera leo persica</i>)	African Lion (<i>Panthera leo melanochaita</i>)
Size	Slightly smaller	Generally larger
Mane	Shorter, less developed	Fuller, denser mane
Social	Males stay with pride	Males leave pride unless mating or kill
Habitat	Dry deciduous forest (India only)	Savannas, shrublands, deserts
Distribution	Exclusive to Gir, Gujarat	Widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa
IUCN Status	Endangered	Vulnerable
CITES Listing	Appendix I	Appendix II
Protection in India	Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 – Schedule I	–
Major Threats	Inbreeding, diseases, habitat loss, human conflict	Hunting, habitat loss, conflict

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About Gir and Girnar

- **Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary** was established in **1965** over **1,412 sq km**, with an **additional buffer zone** of **470 sq km**, totalling **1,882 sq km** of protected habitat.
- **Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary**, established in **2008**, is located in the **Junagadh district** and covers the **Girnar hills** of the **Saurashtra region**.
- It comprises **dry deciduous forests**, with species like **teak, dhak, and acacia**, and supports a diverse fauna, including **Asiatic lions, leopards, Chinkara, Chousingha**, and over **300 species of birds**.
- The **Girnar Sanctuary** functions as an **extension habitat** for lions beyond Gir National Park.

INDEX OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION (IIP)



- The **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** is a key statistical tool used to measure the **short-term changes in the volume of production** in Indian industries.
- It provides insight into the **growth or contraction of industrial activity** over a given period, making it a crucial **economic performance indicator**.
- The **IIP is published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO)**, which is part of the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**.
- The **current base year** for the index is **2011–12**. This base year was adopted to reflect **modern industrial structure and production patterns**, following periodic revisions from earlier base years such as **1937, 1946, 1951, 1956**, and so on.

Sectoral Composition of IIP (Weight-wise)

- **Manufacturing: 63%** of total weight (809 items)
- **Mining: 37%** (29 items)
- **Electricity: 99%** (1 item)

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Sectoral Growth (Year-on-Year in February)

- **Mining:** Slowed sharply to **6%**, down from **8.1%** in Feb 2024.
- **Manufacturing:** Grew at **9%**, lower than **4.9%** a year ago.
- **Electricity:** Output growth dropped to **6%** from **7.6%** in Feb 2024.

Eight Core Industries (Weight in IIP: 40.27%)

- Listed in **decreasing order of weightage:**
 - Refinery Products
 - Electricity
 - Steel
 - Coal
 - Crude Oil
 - Natural Gas
 - Cement
 - Fertilisers.

US DOLLAR FALLS – INDIAN RUPEE AND EMERGING MARKET CURRENCIES BRACE FOR IMPACT

The U.S. dollar has sharply declined despite President Trump pausing his trade moves, reflecting reduced confidence in the American economy.

Wall Street stocks also fell after a brief rally, and long-term U.S. Treasury yields are rising, signaling a major weekly jump not seen since 2001.

Impact on the Indian Rupee

- **Weak Opening**
 - The Indian rupee opened weak on April 11 despite favorable global cues.
- **Support from Dollar Decline**
 - A continued sharp decline in the U.S. dollar index and falling oil prices are expected to support the rupee in the near term.

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- **Rupee Outlook**

- According to experts, while the rupee may gain some strength, it is unlikely to appreciate beyond the 86 level.

Bond Market Shock

- President Trump's reversal on tariffs is believed to have been prompted by a sharp selloff in U.S. government bonds, signaling plummeting confidence in the American economy.
- Major foreign investors like Japan and China reportedly dumped U.S. debt amid growing trade war concerns.
- **Understanding Government Bonds**
 - Government bonds are debt instruments issued to fund public spending, offering interest in return.
 - The U.S. currently has over \$35 trillion worth of bonds in circulation, much of it held by foreign investors.
- **Bond Yields and Currency Value**
 - Higher bond yields (and lower bond prices) tend to attract foreign capital, strengthening the domestic currency.
 - This is part of the carry trade strategy, where investors borrow in low-interest economies to invest in high-yield markets, influencing global currency flows.
- **Changing Perception of U.S. Bonds**
 - Historically seen as safe, U.S. bonds are now facing volatility.
 - Yield spikes suggest rising risks, making it more costly for the U.S. government to raise funds and potentially affecting its ability to finance key programs like Social Security and Medicaid.
- **Investor Concerns Mounting**
 - For the first time in two years, investors are demanding a higher premium on junk-rated U.S. debt compared to European equivalents—indicating fears of a significant economic slowdown.

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GIVING SHAPE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE

- The **National Education Policy (NEP)** of India envisions a radical transformation of the country's higher education system.
- The **policy aims to break down the silos within the current structure** by promoting large multidisciplinary institutions that **focus on cross-disciplinary education, research, and a more collaborative approach to learning.**
- To achieve these ambitious goals, a **clear roadmap is required** to transition from a fragmented system of universities and colleges to an integrated, collaborative educational ecosystem.

The Need for Multidisciplinary Education

- **Multidisciplinary** refers to the inclusion of several academic disciplines in a single program or project, where each discipline retains its distinct methods and boundaries.
- **An example** of this would be a research project where experts from different disciplines such as economics, political science, and sociology contribute their perspectives without engaging in collaborative synthesis.
- **The aim** here is not to merge the knowledge but to create a broad, diverse educational environment.
- The **existing higher education** system in India is **predominantly organised along disciplinary lines**, where each institution focuses on a specific field of study.
- The **proposed shift towards multidisciplinary education** seeks to **break down these barriers** by integrating multiple disciplines within single institutions or programs.
- However, **this change does not necessarily imply integration or collaboration among disciplines**, but rather the **coexistence of various fields within a broader framework.**

Moving Towards Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration

- While multidisciplinary education involves multiple disciplines working in parallel, the **cross-disciplinary approach** goes a step further by **developing collaboration** and dialogue between disciplines, though it does not necessarily call for full integration.

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- This approach is designed to create connections between fields, allowing for the exchange of ideas and perspectives.
- For example, a collaboration between educationists and economists to explore the economic implications of educational reforms would be an example of cross-disciplinary work.
- To achieve this, the university of the future must go beyond being a mere collection of departments.

Overcoming Challenges and Future Considerations

- The transformation of India's higher education system is a long-term process that will require significant investment and a re-evaluation of public spending priorities.
- It will also demand careful consideration of regulatory frameworks to ensure that institutions have the flexibility to experiment with new models of teaching, research, and collaboration.
- The challenge lies in ensuring that faculty and students are not only encouraged but also adequately supported to engage in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research.
- Institutional leaders must recognise that interdisciplinary work requires not just intellectual curiosity but also financial and administrative support to thrive.

Conclusion

- The National Education Policy offers a visionary approach to reshaping India's higher education landscape, with an emphasis on breaking down the silos that currently divide disciplines.
- Achieving this vision will require a careful and strategic transformation of India's higher education institutions, focusing on fostering collaboration, dialogue, and integration across disciplines.
- By establishing multidisciplinary universities, encouraging cross-disciplinary teaching and research, and promoting interdisciplinary thinking, India can create a dynamic and flexible educational ecosystem.

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SUPREME COURT MANDATES TIMELINE FOR PRESIDENTIAL ACTION ON STATE BILLS

- In a first-of-its-kind ruling, the Supreme Court has now stipulated that the President must take a decision on such Bills within three months from the date of receipt.
- If this deadline is missed, the Centre must provide appropriate reasons to the concerned State.

Broader Implications for Federalism and Governance

- This decision is **a step forward in balancing India's quasi-federal structure by upholding the legislative autonomy of State Assemblies.**
- The Court cautioned against arbitrary inaction, saying delays in Presidential assent “would fall foul of basic constitutional principles” and hurt the federal spirit.
- **Key implications include:**
 - **Accountability:** Both Governors and the President are now expected to act within reasonable timelines, ensuring Bills are not held in indefinite abeyance.
 - **Judicial Oversight:** Courts have reaffirmed their power to intervene when constitutional authorities fail in their duties.
 - **Policy Efficiency:** State governments can now pursue their legislative agendas with greater clarity and predictability.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's directive to time-bound Presidential decisions under Article 201 marks a significant milestone in India's constitutional journey. It protects legislative sovereignty, ensures accountability among top constitutional functionaries, and reaffirms the importance of timely governance in a federal democracy.