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Current Affairs - 11 October 2025

TELE MANAS



• **Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States** (Tele MANAS) offers a wide range of **mental health services**.

- It was started by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2022**.
- **Aim:** To provide universal access to equitable, affordable, and quality mental health care through a **24x7 tele-mental health service**, forming a key digital component of the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP).
- This service is available across all **Indian States and Union Territories**, with assured linkages to ensure seamless care.
- The service is structured in a two-tier system to optimize care delivery and enhance support.
 - **Tier 1** comprises state Tele MANAS cells staffed with **trained counsellors and mental health specialists**. These professionals provide immediate support through: Tele-Counseling and Tele-Consultation.
 - **Tier 2** comprises **specialists from District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)** facilities and medical colleges, offering additional resources for physical consultations and audiovisual consultations via **e-Sanjeevani**.
- Tele MANAS launched its mobile app and video consultation services to enhance access to mental health support.
 - This app serves as a **comprehensive platform offering mental health resources**, including self-care tips, stress management strategies, and tools to recognize early distress signals.
 - It will now be available in **10 regional languages**, in addition to the **English and Hindi languages**.
 - These languages include Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Odia, Punjabi.



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INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION



- It is the **United Nations** specialized agency for information and communication technologies.

- It was established in **1865** as the **International Telegraph**

Union.

- In **1947** the ITU became a specialized agency of the United Nations.
- It is an intergovernmental organization that coordinates between governments and private sector bodies with respect to **global telecommunication and information communication technology (ICT) services.**
- **Member countries:** It has a membership of **194 countries** and more than 1000 companies, universities and international and regional organizations.
- **India and ITU:** India has been an active member of the ITU since 1869 and has been a regular member of the ITU Council since 1952.
- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland.
- **Functions of International Telecommunication Union**
 - Allocate global **radio spectrum and satellite orbits;**
 - Coordination and setting of technical standards related to telecommunication/ICT;
 - Work to improve access to ICTs in underserved communities worldwide;

What is India Mobile Congress (IMC) 2025?

- It is Asia's largest technology forum.
 - It is jointly organised by the **Department of Telecommunications and the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).**
 - The event brings together global ICT and digital ecosystem leaders to explore the innovations that are shaping the future of connectivity, digital transformation, and the evolving role of AI.
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NEW DELHI'S GROWING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TALIBAN

Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi is on an official visit to India. This is his first official trip since the Taliban's return to power.

Why India Is Choosing to Engage with the Taliban Now?

- Taliban leaders have consistently praised India's developmental role in Afghanistan, contrasting it with the "selfish motives" of the United States.
- Indian officials assessing these interactions believe the Taliban is eager for engagement and seeks India's assistance to rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure and economy.
- **Balancing Diplomacy with Principles**
 - India's outreach comes with moral and diplomatic dilemmas.
 - While engagement aligns with strategic and security interests, it raises questions about New Delhi's stance on the Taliban's regressive policies, especially regarding women's rights and freedoms.
- **A Changed Geopolitical Landscape**
 - The **regional power matrix** has shifted dramatically since the Taliban's last rule:
 - **Pakistan**, once the Taliban's key backer, is now an **uneasy partner**.
 - **Iran** is **weakened** by internal and economic challenges.
 - **Russia** is **embroiled in war**.
 - The **US**, under **Donald Trump 2.0**, has adopted a **non-committal approach**.
 - Meanwhile, **China** has **deepened its influence**, becoming the **first major power to exchange ambassadors** with the Taliban.
- **Strategic Imperatives for India**
 - India fears that **non-engagement would erode its decade-long investments** — in infrastructure, education, and connectivity projects — and diminish its regional security leverage.



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- Given Afghanistan's proximity and potential to influence India's internal security and trade routes, maintaining direct communication with Kabul has become essential.
- Unlike in the 1990s, the Taliban now faces no internal political opposition within Afghanistan.
- India's decision to side with the Taliban in **rejecting Trump's plan to reclaim the Bagram air base** underscores how far New Delhi's position has evolved — from isolation to pragmatic engagement.

The Pakistan Factor in India–Taliban Relations

- The deteriorating relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan has created new opportunities for India's engagement with Kabul.
- As Pakistan deports thousands of Afghan refugees, India has stepped in to provide humanitarian aid and logistical support to Afghanistan.
- India has delivered **extensive relief shipments to Afghanistan**, including: 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat; 300 tonnes of medicines; 27 tonnes of earthquake relief material; 40,000 litres of pesticides; 100 million polio doses; 1.5 million Covid-19 vaccine doses; 11,000 hygiene kits for drug de-addiction programmes.
- India and Afghanistan have also discussed strengthening **sports cooperation, particularly in cricket**, which enjoys massive popularity among Afghan youth.

What the Taliban Seeks from India?

- The **Taliban government** has requested **India to issue visas for Afghan businessmen, patients, and students**, aiming to restore people-to-people ties disrupted since the regime change.
 - However, this demand faces challenges because **India does not officially recognise the Taliban**, has **security concerns** regarding visa applicants, and currently **lacks functional consulates or a visa office** in Afghanistan.
 - Despite these limitations, New Delhi has expressed willingness to continue and expand development projects across all 34 Afghan provinces.
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ATACAMA DESERT



- It is the driest desert in the world, located in **northern Chile**,
- It is nestled between the **Andes Mountains** on the east and the **Pacific Ocean on the west**.
- It forms a continuous strip for nearly **1,000 km** along the narrow coast of the northern third of Chile.
- **Bordered by:** It is bordered by Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia
- It also hosts **12 volcanoes**, mainly located in the western outliers of the Andes.
- **Rainfall:** Average rainfall in this region is about 1 mm per year. Some locations within the desert have never had any rainfall whatsoever.
- **Temperature:** Temperatures are comparatively mild throughout the year. The average temperature in the desert is **about 63 degrees F (18 degrees C)**.
- **Natural Resources:** This region has the largest natural **supply of Sodium Nitrate**, which can be used for producing fertilizers and explosives, amongst other things.
- **Chinchorro Mummies:** The oldest artificially mummified human remains have been found in the Atacama Desert.

What is Cistanthe longiscapa?

- This small, resilient flower known locally as “**pata de guanaco**,” blooms during rare rainfall events in the **Atacama Desert**.
- It has the ability to switch **between different types of photosynthesis**, making it a model plant for extreme environments.
- Under stress from drought, intense sunlight or salinity, the plant activates a water-saving method known as **Crassulacean Acid Metabolism (CAM) metabolism**.
- When conditions improve, it reverts to the more common C3 photosynthesis.



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GAZA CEASEFIRE PLAN - IMPLICATIONS AND BALANCING PRINCIPLES

- **Israel and Hamas** have **agreed** to the initial phase of a ceasefire proposal in Gaza, based on US President Donald **Trump's 20-point peace plan**.
- The agreement has sparked optimism about the **reopening of the Red Sea shipping route**, which has remained disrupted due to Houthi rebel attacks since late 2023.
- The development has broader **implications for regional stability and India's diplomatic positioning** in West Asia.

Key Features of the Ceasefire Plan:

- **Immediate ceasefire, Israeli withdrawal,**
- Release of hostages and prisoners,
- Exclusion of Hamas from governance, and
- Demilitarisation of Gaza.
- Alongside, the plan also includes **international reconstruction** For example, investment in Gaza's **water, energy, health, and infrastructure** sectors.

Israel and Hamas Reactions:

- **Israel:** PM Benjamin Netanyahu supports the plan reluctantly amid resistance from right-wing coalition partners opposed to Palestinian participation in governance.
- **Hamas:** Expressed willingness to negotiate but opposes mandatory disarmament, viewing it as compromising Palestinian sovereignty.

India's Response and Position:

- India termed the plan as a "**significant step forward**," reflecting India's support for peace and reconstruction.
- India may contribute through **infrastructure reconstruction** owing to its technical expertise and balanced relations with both Israel and the PA.
- **India's official stance since October 7, 2023**, remains cautious—condemning terrorism while reiterating support for a two-state solution ensuring both Israel's security and Palestine's sovereignty.

Current Affairs - 11 October 2025

India's Potential Role in Reconstruction:

- India could be invited to assist in Gaza's reconstruction, **leveraging its experience** in infrastructure, water management, and energy projects.
- **However**, recruitment of Indian workers replacing Palestinian labourers in Israel may worsen Palestinian economic exclusion and social resentment.
- India must ensure its **involvement contributes to reconciliation**, not division.

Way Forward:

- **Maintain diplomatic equilibrium:** Continue balancing relations with Israel and Palestine, rooted in non-alignment and peaceful resolution principles.
- **Conditional engagement:** Tie participation in reconstruction to Palestinian sovereignty and compliance with international humanitarian laws.
- **Humanitarian leadership:** Increase support through UNRWA, medical aid, and peacekeeping contributions.
- **Regional cooperation:** Work closely with GCC states under the IMEC framework to promote peace-driven economic integration.
- **Renewed maritime focus - Government shipbuilding revival plan:** The Union Cabinet approved a **₹69,725 crore package** to revitalise India's shipbuilding industry—a strategic response to global disruptions, and a push for self-reliance.
- **Support exporters:** Introduce freight subsidies or logistics reforms to assist labour-intensive sectors.

Conclusion:

- India's nuanced stance on the Gaza ceasefire plan reflects its **strategic maturity and moral consistency**.
 - While aligning with global peace efforts, India must ensure that its participation in reconstruction and diplomacy remains **anchored in its historical commitment** - a durable two-state solution that upholds justice, sovereignty, and regional stability.
 - The Israel-Hamas ceasefire brings **cautious optimism for global trade recovery and maritime stability**.
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SPARK-4.0 INITIATIVE



- **Studentship Program for Ayurveda Research Ken (SPARK) 4.0** is the flagship initiative of the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences.
- This initiative aims to **ignite scientific curiosity** and research aptitude among **undergraduate Ayurveda students across India**.

Features of SPARK-4.0 Initiative

- Under this program, **300 Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS)** students from colleges recognized by the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) will **receive a studentship of ₹50,000** (₹25,000 per month for two months).
- SPARK enables undergraduates to undertake short-term, **independent research projects** guided by faculty mentors.
- It offers **hands-on exposure to research methodology**, experimental design, and data analysis — helping participants gain foundational experience in scientific investigation at an early academic stage.
- **Institutions** are encouraged to support selected students by providing research facilities and academic guidance during the two-month project period.
- Each selected scholar will also **receive a certificate** upon successful completion and approval of their final research report.
- **Significance:** It will strengthen India's research capacity in traditional medicine and to integrate innovation with heritage.



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PALAMAU TIGER RESERVE



- It is located on the western side of the Latehar district on the Chhotanagpur plateau in Jharkhand.
- The reserve forms a **part of the Betla National Park**.
- It is spread over an area of approximately 1026 sq. km.
- It is one of the first 9 tiger reserves created in the country at the inception of 'Project Tiger'.
- It is the **first reserve in the world** in which a **tiger census** was carried out as a **pugmark count**, as early as 1932 under the supervision of J.W. Nicholson.
- The terrain is undulating with valleys, hills, and plains.
- Three **rivers**, namely **North Koyal, Auranga, and Burha**, flow through the valleys.
- The area is **drought-prone**, with **Burha** being the only perennial river.
- The geological formation consists of **gneiss** and includes **granite and limestone**.
- The area is very **rich in minerals** like **Bauxite and Coal**.

Flora: The vegetation comprises **moist deciduous and dry deciduous forests** to include **Sal and bamboo** as the major components.

Fauna: Some keystone and principal species found in the reserve include **Tiger, Asiatic Elephant, Leopard, Grey wolf, Wild dog, Gaur, Sloth bear** and **four horned antelope**.
