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Current Affairs - 23 October 2025

SABARIMALA TEMPLE



- Located in the **Western Ghats** in the Pathanamthitta District of Kerala, the Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple is an **ancient temple** dedicated to **Lord Ayyappa**.
 - Ayyappa, also known as Dharma Shasta, is the **son of Shiva and Mohini**, the feminine form of Vishnu.
- The temple is situated **on a hilltop amidst 18 hills** at an altitude of 4,134 ft above sea level. It is surrounded by mountains and dense forests that are a part of the **Periyar Tiger Reserve**. It is **not open throughout the year**.
- It is **one of the largest annual pilgrimage sites in the world**, with an estimated **40 to 50 million pilgrims** visiting the temple every year, especially during the annual Mandalam-Makaravilakku season.
- It is said that the pilgrims have to follow a **41-day vratham (austerity period)** before going to Sabarimala.
- It is one of the few Hindu temples in India that is **open to all faiths**.
- There is a place near the temple, east of Sannidhanam (the abode of Lord Ayyappa), dedicated to Vavar (a Sufi and a close friend of Lord Ayyappa) which is called Vavaru Nada, an epitome of religious harmony.
 - The **main staircase** to the Sabarimala Temple is made up of **18 sacred steps**.

Sabarimala Case:

- **Women in their 'menstruating years'** (between 10 to 50 years) were customarily **prohibited from entering** the temple.
- In **2018**, the Supreme Court ruled that the Sabarimala temple's exclusion of women aged 10 to 50 was **unconstitutional**.
- The verdict **triggered widespread protests** and **remains under review** by a larger bench.



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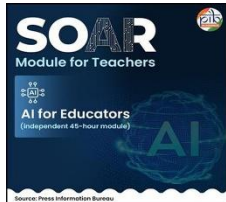
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SKILLING FOR AI READINESS (SOAR) PROGRAMME



- It was launched by the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)**.
- It aims to **integrate artificial intelligence** learning into **India's school education** and training ecosystem, preparing both students and teachers for a rapidly evolving digital world.
- SOAR's long-term vision is to **position India as a global leader in AI** by preparing its youth for AI-driven careers and entrepreneurial ventures.

Features of SOAR

- It focuses on school students from **class six to twelve** and **educators across India**.
- It is offering three targeted **15-hour modules** for students and a **45-hour module for teachers**. These courses introduce **foundational AI and machine learning concepts**, along with data literacy and the ethical use of technology.
- In support of this vision, the Union Budget 2025–26 has earmarked **₹500 crore** to establish a **Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for Education**.
 - The centre will focus on developing **AI-based learning tools**, promoting multilingual AI resources for Indian languages, and fostering innovative classroom practices.
 - It will also **strengthen AI curriculum development across technical institutions** and complement existing efforts by IITs and AICTE-approved colleges that already offer advanced courses in machine learning, deep learning, and data analytics.



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GOVT. PROPOSES MANDATORY LABELLING OF AI-GENERATED CONTENT

- India is witnessing a rapid surge in the use of **artificial intelligence (AI)** for content creation across social media, advertising, and entertainment.
- However, this rise has also sparked concerns about **synthetic content**, especially **deepfakes**, which use AI to fabricate hyper-realistic images, audio, and videos.
- These manipulations blur the line between reality and fiction, often being used for political propaganda, financial fraud, and reputational damage.
- Deepfakes gained national attention in **2023**, after a **digitally altered video of an actor** went viral, prompting widespread outrage and a strong government response.
- Prime Minister **Modi** termed deepfakes a new “crisis,” emphasising the need for regulatory intervention.

Key Provisions of the Proposed Rules

- **Mandatory Self-Declaration by Creators:**
 - Users uploading content on social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) must **declare whether their content is synthetically generated**.
- **Dual Labelling Mechanism:**
 - Platforms must ensure that AI-generated content carries **two visible markers**:
 - An **embedded label or watermark** within the content itself, covering at least **10% of the visual or audio duration**.
 - A **platform-level label** displayed wherever the content appears online.
- **Platform Accountability:**
 - If users fail to make such declarations, **social media companies will be responsible for proactively detecting and labelling** AI-generated content using technical measures and automated tools.
- **Definition of Synthetic Content:**



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- The draft defines synthetically generated information as “information artificially or algorithmically created, generated, modified, or altered using a computer resource in a manner that appears reasonably authentic or true.”
- **Consequences of Non-Compliance:**
 - Platforms that fail to verify and label synthetic content **may lose their legal immunity under Section 79 of the IT Act**, which currently shields intermediaries from liability for third-party content.
- **Metadata and Identifier Requirement:**
 - AI-generated material must be embedded with a **unique metadata identifier** that remains permanent and traceable, ensuring accountability in case of misuse.
- **Scope of Application:**
 - The draft applies not only to popular social platforms but also to **AI content creation tools** such as **OpenAI’s Sora** and **Google’s Gemini**, which must implement built-in watermarking and labelling systems.

Implementation Challenges and Future Outlook

- While the proposal has received broad support, experts caution about **implementation complexity**. Identifying AI-generated content in real-time, especially across diverse formats and languages, requires **advanced detection infrastructure**.
- Moreover, the challenge of **balancing regulation with innovation** Excessive compliance burdens could deter small creators and startups in India’s fast-growing **AI ecosystem**, valued at **over \$12 billion** by 2030.
- To address this, the government has invited **public and industry feedback** on the draft until **November 6, 2025**, signalling its intent to refine the framework before final notification.
- If executed effectively, the labelling rule could become a **global model for responsible AI governance**, ensuring that technological progress does not come at the cost of truth and public trust.



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NUTRITION NEEDS NUANCE - A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MARKETS, FARMING AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

- The **oversimplified narrative** (implicit in a joint study by ICMR and the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation on “Ways of Eating in India”) that blames carbohydrates for India’s dietary and health issues **has come under criticism**.
- Hence, a **more nuanced understanding of nutrition**, markets, agriculture, and socio-economic conditions shaping the Indian diet is the need of the hour.

India’s Carbohydrate-Heavy Diet:

- **Observation:** The Indian diet is predominantly carbohydrate-based — mainly from rice, roti, and other grain-based foods.
- **Issue:** The recent interpretation claiming that **62% of Indian caloric intake comes from carbohydrates** is grossly flawed, as it **overlooks diversity** in dietary patterns and socio-economic variations.
- **Neglected aspect:** The analysis **ignores hidden sugars** such as high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) increasingly used in processed foods and beverages.

Sugar and Cereal Consumption:

- **Data highlights:**
 - Per capita **cereal** consumption has been **declining steadily in India**, and per capita **sugar** intake has been on a **steady rise**.
 - **Per capita monthly cereal consumption reduced** from 13.4 kg (rural) and 10.6 kg (urban) in 1993–94 to much lower levels (9.4 kg and 8 kg respectively) in 2023–24.
 - The annual per capita **sugar** consumption has **increased** from 23.7 kg (2015) to 25.5 kg (2025).
 - However, **the total calorie intake per person per day has risen** from 2,233 to 2,383 kcal in rural areas in the last two years and from 2,250 to 2,470 kcal in urban India (MoSPI data).



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- **Interpretation:** The problem is overall high calorific intake dominated by sugars and refined carbohydrates (carbs), which is meddling with the human metabolism.

Health Implications:

- **Rising cases of Type-2 diabetes,** prediabetes, dyslipidemia, general obesity, and abdominal obesity highlight poor nutrition choices.
- **Around 61% of Indians** show risk factors linked to metabolic syndrome.
- However, correlating obesity and diabetes directly with cereal intake is misleading.

Need for Balanced Understanding:

- **A better comprehension of the agri-food ecosystem** — markets, farming practices, regional diets, and cultural food habits — is essential.
- **Nutrition education** should incorporate the diversity of Indian diets and promote local grains and minimally processed foods.
- **Policy and public health interventions** must focus on whole foods, moderation, and awareness rather than vilifying single food groups.

Way Forward:

- **Promote evidence-based nutrition:** Encourage comprehensive dietary studies that reflect regional diversity and socio-economic variations.
- **Support traditional farming systems:** Strengthen local food systems that produce diverse, whole, and minimally processed foods.
- **Curb ultra-processed food promotion:** Introduce stricter labelling and regulation to reduce hidden sugars and unhealthy fats.
- **Enhance public awareness:** Campaigns must educate people on balanced diets, mindful eating, and sustainability.

Conclusion:

- India's nutrition policy must move beyond simplistic carbohydrate-bashing towards a holistic approach that integrates health, ecology, and economy.
 - **Over-generalisation of nutritional information** not only distorts public understanding but also risks harming farmers and consumers alike.
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NEW SAFEGUARDS ADDED TO GOVERNMENT'S ONLINE CONTENT BLOCKING RULES

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) is amending the Information Technology Rules, 2021 to ensure that only senior officials can issue online content blocking notices under Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000.
- This means that content removal requests sent to platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) will now be authorised only by:
 - **Joint Secretary (JS)** or an **equivalent officer** at the Centre or state level,
 - **Director-level officers** where no JS exists, and
 - In police departments, **Deputy Inspector General (DIG)** or above, specifically authorised.
- Each order must specify:
 - The legal basis and statutory provision,
 - The nature of the unlawful act, and
 - The specific URL or digital location of the content to be removed.
- Additionally, all such orders will undergo a **monthly review** by an officer not below the rank of Secretary, such as the IT Secretary (Centre) or Home/IT Secretaries (State).
- The **amendments will come into effect from November 15**, and a **Template Blocking Order** will be provided to central and state agencies for uniformity in issuing lawful takedown notices.

Boosting transparency
The amended rules on social media takedown notices seek to build clarity in government communication and reduce arbitrary or unclear takedown action. The amendment will be notified within a week and is expected to take effect from November 15.

What is Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology Rules, 2021?
This rule allows government officials to flag online content that may violate Indian laws or pose risks. When flagged under Rule 3(1)(d), social media companies lose "safe harbour" protection, meaning they can be held legally responsible for the content – like publishers, not just intermediaries.

Each notice must now:
 ✓ Clearly state it is a "warning", not a takedown order.
 ✓ Explain why safe harbour does not apply.
 ✓ Be issued only by authorised senior officers.

What is changing?
Notices under these rules will now: Include a clear explanation ("reasoned intimation").
Be issued only by Joint Secretary & above (Central level) and Deputy Inspector General & above (State level).

- **Rule 3(1)(d): The Basis for Safeguards**
 - The new rules focus on **Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021**, which allows officials to flag specific online content.



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- When a government notice is issued under this rule, social media platforms lose “**safe harbour**” protections—meaning they may be held legally responsible for user-generated content unless they justify or remove it.
 - Officials clarified that such notices are not direct takedown orders but warnings indicating that safe harbour protections no longer apply to the flagged content.
 - **Reason for the Amendment**
 - According to a senior official, in some states, junior police officers such as sub-inspectors and assistant sub-inspectors had been issuing blocking notices to social media companies.
 - The new amendment seeks to prevent misuse of power by restricting this authority to senior officers, thereby ensuring greater accountability and transparency.
 - Experts say that the move would ensure all blocking orders are **reasoned, justified, and issued by senior officials.**
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MOUNT ETNA



- It is an **active stratovolcano** located on the **island of Sicily** in the **Mediterranean Sea**. (Sicily is a **part of Italy**.)
 - It lies above the convergent plate **margin between the African Plate and the Eurasian Plate**.
 - It is the **tallest active volcano in Europe**.
 - It is the **highest mountain in Italy** south of the Alps.
 - It is about 11,000 feet (3,350 meters) high.
 - It covers an area of 1,190 sq.km. with a basal circumference of 140 km.
 - The **eruptive history** of the volcano can be **traced back 500,000 years**, and **at least 2,700 years of this activity has been documented**.
 - The ancient Greeks created legends about it.
 - It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.
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KALI TIGER RESERVE



- It is situated in the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka.

- It covers an area of 834.16 sq.km.
- It is **composed of Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary and Anshi National Park.**
 - These two protected areas are **contiguous to each other** and form a single tract of the protected area located in the biologically sensitive **Western Ghats.**

River: The **Kali River**, which forms the **major source of water for Uttara Kannada**, flows through the tiger reserve, and hence the name.

Vegetation: It is a blend of **semi-evergreen and moist deciduous** forests, interspersed with **patches of bamboo and grasslands.**

Flora: The reserve is rich in plant diversity, featuring species like **teak, silver oak, eucalyptus**, and various **medicinal plants.**

Fauna:

- Animals found in the Tiger Reserve include **Tiger, Leopard, Elephant, Bison, Wild dog, Sambar, Spotted deer, Sloth bear, Wild boar, Hanuman langur, Bonnet macaque**, etc.
 - The area holds one of the **highest populations of Great Indian Hornbills in the Western Ghats.**
 - It is also home to **rare black panthers.**
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