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Current Affairs - 27 October 2025

WHAT IS THE ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION (APEC)?



- It is a **regional economic forum established in 1989** to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific.
- It aims to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative, and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.
- The **focus** of APEC has been **on trade and economic issues**, and hence, it **terms the countries** as “**economies**”.
- It has been **operating on the basis of non-binding commitments**, with **decisions taken through commitments and consensus undertaken on a voluntary basis**.
- There are **no binding commitments or treaty obligations**.

Member Countries:

- Currently, APEC has **21 members**.
 - The **criterion for membership**, however, is that **each member must be an independent economic entity, rather than a sovereign state**.
 - The grouping's **current members** are **Australia, Brunei, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and Taiwan**.
 - The **APEC Secretariat** is based in **Singapore** and operates as the core support mechanism for the APEC process.
 - APEC's member economies are home to more than 2.9 billion people and make up over **60 percent of global GDP**.
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NATIONAL CRISES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

NCMC
National Crisis Management Committee

- It is established under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005** by the central government.
- The committee shall be the **apex body** for dealing with the situation arising out of a major disaster.

Composition of National Crises Management Committee:

- **Chairperson:** It is headed by the **cabinet secretary**.
- **Members:** Members _____ will _____ constitute the **Union Home Secretary, Defence Secretary**, secretary (co-ordination), cabinet secretariat and member and head of department, the National Disaster Management Authority.
- The chairperson of the NCMC **can co-opt experts** or officers from central/state governments or any organisation, based on the nature of the crisis.

Role of National Crisis Management Committee:

- It shall **evaluate preparedness** to respond to **any threatening disaster situation**, emerging disaster situation or disaster and give directions, where necessary, for enhancing such preparedness.
- It **shall coordinate and monitor** actions of the concerned ministries or departments of the government of India, state governments, national authority, state authorities, governmental and non-governmental organisations in relation to disaster response.
- It shall **give directions** as may be necessary for the proper coordination and monitoring of disaster response in the country.



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MISHTI SCHEME



- The **Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes (MISHTI)** scheme is a government-led initiative aimed at increasing the mangrove cover **along the coastline and on salt pan lands**.
 - It was launched after India joined the **'Mangrove Alliance for Climate'** launched during the 27th Conference of Parties (COP27) to the UNFCCC held in November 2022.
- It was **launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change** in

Objective: To **restore mangrove forests** by undertaking mangrove reforestation/afforestation measures along the coast of India, states Government of India.

Features of MISHTI Scheme:

- It is primarily focused on the **Sundarbans delta, Hooghly Estuary in West Bengal** and other bay parts of the country, but also includes other wetlands in the country.
 - **Financial assistance:** Under this scheme the government is providing **financial assistance to local communities** to undertake mangrove plantation activities.
 - It leverages the strengths and provisions of different government schemes and initiatives such as the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**, the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) Fund** and other relevant sources.
 - The plantation activities are carried out in a **participatory manner**, involving local **communities and NGOs**, to ensure sustainability and community ownership of the initiative.
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FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES IN INDIA: WHY AND WHAT'S NEXT

- Under the UGC's 2023 regulations, foreign universities ranked **within the top 500 globally** can apply to establish campuses in India.
- A total of 17 foreign universities have announced plans to set up campuses across India, most from the United Kingdom, with QS World University Rankings 2026 positions ranging from 51 to 558.
- Six Australian universities have announced India plans. Among them:
 - Deakin University and University of Wollongong have already begun operations in GIFT City.
 - Italy's Istituto Europeo di Design, a renowned fashion school, will set up in Mumbai.
- From the United States, Illinois Tech will be the first to establish a campus in Mumbai, while globally, US universities lead with 84 overseas campuses, followed by UK institutions with 46.

Why UK Universities Are Expanding to India?

- During UK PM Keir Starmer's visit, a joint statement highlighted the "**explosion in demand for higher education in India**", creating a major opportunity for UK universities seeking new funding streams.
- India's growing youth population and the government's push to internationalise education under the NEP 2020 have made it a prime destination for global universities.
- **Financial Pressures in the UK**
 - UK universities are facing a deep financial crisis:
 - Tuition fee freeze for domestic students (for several years) and rising inflation have squeezed budgets.
- **Search for New Revenue Sources**
 - The UK higher education sector is in a volatile environment and must "find new sources of revenue" while maintaining quality.



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- **Strategic Partnerships with India**

- UK universities view India not just as a market but as a strategic partner for long-term collaboration.
- Partnerships with Indian institutions can help them:
 - Diversify student bases.
 - Strengthen global research collaborations.
 - Support India's rise as an international education hub.

What UK Campuses in India Mean for Indian Students?

- The UGC regulations enabling foreign campuses in India come amid a sharp drop in Indian students going overseas post-Covid due to stricter immigration policies in destination countries.
 - The UK issued 1.39 lakh study visas to Indian students in 2022, but this dropped to 88,732 in 2024.
 - The UK now restricts foreign students from bringing dependents and plans to reduce graduate visa duration from two years to 18 months.
 - Similar immigration curbs in Canada and the US have led to fewer Indian students pursuing higher education there.
 - **Access to Global Education at Home**
 - With these restrictions, the arrival of foreign universities in India offers a viable alternative. Students can:
 - Access the same curriculum, degree, and pedagogy as their parent campuses.
 - Potentially study a semester or year abroad through exchange programs.
 - Avoid the high cost of living and tuition overseas.
 - However, experts caution that studying at an India campus won't automatically guarantee international job opportunities or post-study work visas, which require physical presence abroad.
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NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME SURVEY

- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is preparing to launch the country's **first-ever National Household Income Survey (NHIS)** in **February 2026**, a landmark initiative to gather comprehensive income data from Indian households.
- The survey aims to fill a critical information gap in India's economic landscape by providing a reliable estimate of income distribution, data that has long been missing from the country's statistical system.
- According to **MoSPI**, the NHIS will be one of the "toughest" surveys ever conducted by the ministry due to the sensitive nature of the data being collected.
- The results of the survey are expected to be available by **mid-2027**.

Background and Need for the Survey

- While India regularly conducts large-scale surveys on **consumption, employment, and household expenditure**, there has never been a successful nationwide effort to measure **household income**.
- Earlier attempts, dating back to the 1950s, failed because the income data collected were often inconsistent, in many cases showing household income to be lower than the sum of consumption and savings.
- The absence of reliable income data has long hindered **evidence-based policymaking**.
- Policymakers have had to rely on consumption data as a proxy for income distribution, which often masks the true extent of **income inequality, underemployment, and informal sector earnings**.

Challenges in Conducting Income Surveys

- According to MoSPI's pre-survey testing conducted in August 2025, **95% of respondents found income-related questions "sensitive"** and were **uncomfortable disclosing income details** from different sources.
- Most also **refused to answer questions related to taxes paid**.



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- This hesitation stems from cultural and psychological barriers, concerns about privacy, and fear of disclosure to tax authorities.
- To address this, MoSPI has emphasised **public awareness, transparency, and anonymity assurances** as critical factors for the survey's success.

Pre-Survey Findings and Strategy

- The pre-survey testing of the NHIS questionnaire revealed that:
 - **73%** of respondents found the questionnaire relevant.
 - **84%** had a partial-to-good understanding of the survey's purpose.
 - **95%** considered income-related data “sensitive” and required assurance of confidentiality.
- To overcome these challenges, MoSPI will conduct an extensive **communication campaign** to inform households about the survey's objectives and the strict protocols.
- Field staff will be trained to **build rapport with households**, clarify misconceptions, and assure respondents that the data will be used solely for statistical purposes.
- MoSPI will develop a **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** for surveyors to ensure uniformity, accuracy, and privacy protection during data collection.

Significance of the Survey

- The NHIS will provide critical insights into **income inequality, taxation patterns, and the structure of household earnings** across urban and rural India. The data will help policymakers design more effective **welfare schemes, social security programmes, and fiscal redistribution policies**.
 - It will also support India's efforts to align with global statistical standards such as those set by the **United Nations System of National Accounts (SNA)** and the **OECD's Guidelines for Income and Wealth Distribution**.
 - By capturing detailed information on sources of income, including wages, self-employment, agriculture, remittances, and government transfers, the NHIS will enable a **more accurate mapping of India's economic reality**, particularly for informal sector workers who make up nearly 80% of the workforce.
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WESTERN GHATS UNDER THREAT: WHY IUCN HAS RAISED THE RED FLAG

- The IUCN World Heritage Outlook is the only global assessment that evaluates all natural and mixed World Heritage sites every 3–5 years.
- It tracks their conservation status, identifies threats, and highlights best management practices to enhance long-term preservation.
- Implemented by the IUCN World Heritage Team and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), it provides reliable, transparent, and independent data about the state and prospects of these globally significant natural sites.
- This initiative supports stakeholders in aligning conservation strategies with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) goals for 2030.

IUCN's Global Conservation Assessment

- The IUCN's World Heritage Outlook 4 report identifies **climate change, tourism, invasive species, and road development** as the four major threats to biodiversity loss in South Asia.
- It categorises sites as “good,” “good with some concerns,” “significant concern,” and “critical,” reflecting their conservation status and urgency of action.
- Based on four assessment cycles since 2014, the report finds that **40% of World Heritage sites face conservation concerns**, with **climate change emerging as the most pervasive threat** and a decline in the number of sites showing positive conservation outlooks for the first time.

Why the Western Ghats Are Becoming Increasingly Fragile?

- The Western Ghats, one of the world's richest biodiversity hotspots, face escalating threats from **hydropower projects, tourism, plantations, and climate change**.
- **Unregulated tourism** has led to garbage accumulation, often eaten by wildlife such as elephants, aggravating human-animal conflict.
- **Commercial plantations** are replacing natural forests, while invasive species like eucalyptus and acacia—introduced during colonial times—are spreading rapidly.



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- **Climate change** is driving species like the Nilgiri flycatcher and black-and-orange flycatcher to shift to higher altitudes due to rising temperatures.
- Elsewhere, in the Sundarbans, **salinity, pollution, over-extraction of resources, and sea level rise** are eroding mangrove biodiversity and threatening iconic species like the swimming tigers.

A Glimmer of Hope for Global Biodiversity Conservation

- Despite alarming trends, the **IUCN report** highlights positive examples of effective conservation and collaboration worldwide.
- **Global Conservation Successes**
 - **Seven sites in China**, including the Badain Jaran Desert, Chengjiang Fossil Site, and Mount Huangshan, are recognised as “**best protected and managed**” areas.
 - Such examples show that focused policies and community involvement can reverse ecological decline.
- **A Call to Action**
 - Though Natural World Heritage sites cover **less than 1% of Earth’s surface**, they nurture **over 20% of global species richness**, hosting **75,000 plant species** and **30,000 animal species** — making them vital for ecological stability.
 - The report aligns with the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, urging nations to halt biodiversity loss through better integration of **nature and culture** in conservation.
 - Hope lies in **local participation and youth engagement**, as seen in **Mount Wuyi (China)** and **Sinharaja Forest Reserve (Sri Lanka)**, where community-driven stewardship has improved protection and awareness.

Conclusion

Described as a “**guide for action**”, the IUCN’s 10-year analysis serves as a **litmus test** for conservation efforts — reminding nations that coordinated global action can still secure the planet’s most precious ecosystems.
