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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

## Current Affairs - 16 March 2026



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### UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME



Recently, in a new report, Safe disposal of unused medicines by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warned that the improper disposal of medicines poses serious risks to both environmental and public health.

- It is the leading global **authority on the environment**.
- It was **founded in 1972** after a UN General Assembly resolution.
- **Mandate:** It was conceived to monitor the **state of the environment and coordinate responses** to the world's greatest environmental challenges.
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Structure:**
  - **United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA):** UNEA is the world's **highest-level decision-making body** on environmental issues, comprising all UN member states.
    - It **meets biennially** to set global priorities, adopt resolutions, and guide UNEP's overall policy direction.
  - **Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR):** It acts as the **main advisory body** to UNEA and helps in preparing its agenda.
  - **Secretariat:** The UNEP Secretariat, led by the **Executive Director**, implements UNEA decisions and oversees day-to-day operations.
  - **Regional and Thematic Offices:** UNEP functions through multiple regional offices in Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, Latin America, West Asia, and North America.
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Functions**
  - It **develops and supports global environmental treaties**, such as the CBD, CITES, and Minamata Convention.



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- Hosts secretariats of major environmental conventions and supports the negotiation of new environmental agreements.
- It publishes authoritative research and assessments, including the Global Environment Outlook and Emissions Gap Report.
- It supports developing countries with environmental capacity building, funding, and technical assistance.
- **Headquarters:** Nairobi, Kenya.

### CENTRAL ADOPTION RESOURCE AUTHORITY



Central  
Adoption  
Resource  
Authority

Central Adoption Resource Authority issued nationwide directions to strengthen adoption procedures, safeguard records

and protect children's identity.

- It is a statutory body of the **Ministry of Women & Child Development**, Government of India.
  - Through Section 68 of the **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act 2015)**, CARA attained the status of a statutory body.
- **Mandate:** Primarily deals with the adoption of orphan, abandoned, and surrendered children through its associated/recognised adoption agencies.
- It is designated as the Central Authority to **deal with inter-country adoptions** in accordance with the provisions of the **Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993**, ratified by the Government of India in 2003.
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi.
- **Functions of Central Adoption Resource Authority:**
  - To promote In-country adoptions and to facilitate Inter-state adoptions in coordination with State Agency;
  - To regulate **Inter-country adoptions**;

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- To frame regulations on adoption and related matters from time to time as may be necessary;
  - To carry out the functions of the Central Authority under the Hague Convention on protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption;
  - Any other function as may be prescribed.
  - It monitors and regulates bodies such as the **State Adoption Resource Agency (SARA)**, **Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA)**, **Authorised Foreign Adoption Agency (AFAA)**, **Child Welfare Committees (CWCs)**, and **District Child Protective Units (DPUs)**.
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### GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD



#### Great Indian Bustard

Recently, the Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change informed that Project Great Indian Bustard (GIB) has entered the fourth year of its captive breeding programme.

- It is a **large terrestrial bird endemic** to the Indian subcontinent.
- **Habitat:** The bird is primarily found in **dry grasslands and scrublands**, which are rapidly declining due to agricultural expansion and development.
- **Distribution:** Its core population survives in **the Thar Desert**, mainly in Jaisalmer and Barmer districts **of Rajasthan**.
- **Characteristics of Great Indian Bustard:**
  - It is one of **the heaviest flying birds in the world**.
  - **Life Span:** The bird has a **lifespan of 12–15 years**.
  - **Diet:** These birds are opportunist eaters. Their diet ranges widely depending on the seasonal availability of food. They **feed on grass seeds**, insects like grasshoppers and beetles, and sometimes even small rodents and reptiles.
- **Conservation Status:**

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- IUCN: Critically Endangered
- CITES: Appendix 1
- Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule 1

### JNANPITH AWARD



Recently, Tamil lyricist and author R. Vairamuthu has been selected for the Jnanpith Award for the year 2025.

- It is the **highest literary honour of India**, given to writers who have excelled in literature in different Indian languages.
- It was instituted in 1961.
- **Award:** The prize carries a cash prize of **Rs 11 lakh**, a **bronze statuette of Vagdevi** (Goddess Saraswati), and a **citation**.
- It is sponsored by the cultural organization Bharatiya Jnanpith.
- **Eligibility and Rules:**
  - It is given **every year** to an author for his/her outstanding **contribution towards Indian literature through creative writing** in any of the **Indian languages** mentioned in **Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution and English**.
  - Only those **creative writers who are alive** and are Indian citizens, can be proposed for the Award.
  - A language which receives the award in a particular year is not eligible for consideration for the **next two years**.
  - A writer who receives the Award once will not be considered again.
  - The Award may not be given in a particular year if the Jnanpith Award Selection Board feels that there is no suitable name which comes up to the expected standard of the Award.
- The **first recipient** of the award was **Malayalam poet G. Sankara Kurup**, who received the award in 1965 for his collection of poems Odakkuzhal.

### THORIUM AND INDIA'S 100 GWE NUCLEAR POWER VISION

The SHANTI Act 2025 marks a major step in expanding India's nuclear energy sector by opening it to public and private participation, academia, and industry, while highlighting the need for a supportive regulatory framework.

However, India's planned 100 GWe nuclear capacity by 2047 relies heavily on imported uranium, as domestic reserves are limited. Meeting this target would require 18,000–20,000 tonnes of uranium annually, raising concerns about long-term sustainability and global competition for uranium resources.

#### **Thorium Recycling as a Solution to Uranium Constraints**

- With global energy demand expected to rise beyond 2047, nuclear power will remain important until alternatives such as fusion become viable.
- However, reliance on once-through uranium fuel cycles is unsustainable due to limited global reserves.
- Nuclear fuel recycling can increase the energy extracted from fuel by 50–100 times, but many countries avoid it due to concerns over nuclear weapons proliferation.
- India's thorium-based fuel cycle offers a potential solution. With the **largest thorium reserves in the world**, India could achieve greater energy independence while reducing proliferation risks.
- Advancing thorium utilisation therefore requires significant research, innovation, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

#### **Fast Breeder Reactors and Thorium Pathways for India's Nuclear Future**

- India's nuclear strategy is based on a **three-stage programme** designed to utilise its vast thorium resources.
  - **Stage I:** Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)
    - Fuel: Natural Uranium (U-238)
    - Process: Uses natural uranium to produce electricity and converts into plutonium as a byproduct.

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- **Stage II: Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)**
    - Fuel: Plutonium- 239 (from Stage I) and Uranium- 238.
    - Process: FBRs produce more fissile material than they consume (breeding), essential for generating the inventory needed for the final stage.
  - **Stage III: Thorium-Based Reactors**
    - Fuel: Thorium- 232 and Plutonium- 239.
    - Process: Utilizes thorium-232, which converts into uranium-233 to generate energy, aimed at long-term sustainability.
  - **Role of Fast Breeder Reactors**
    - FBRs are intended to irradiate thorium and produce uranium-233, the key fuel required for the third stage of the nuclear programme.
    - However, large-scale deployment of fast reactors is expected only in the coming decades.
  - **Expanding PHWR Capacity and the 100 GWe Mission**
    - India's 100 GWe nuclear energy target by 2047 is currently driven mainly by Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) using imported uranium.
    - This expansion also creates an opportunity to irradiate thorium within PHWRs, helping produce uranium-233 earlier.
  - **HALEU–Thorium Fuel as an Alternative Path**
    - Thorium can be used in PHWRs together with High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium (HALEU) without major design changes.
    - This approach offers advantages such as higher fuel burnup, reduced spent fuel, improved safety, and lower waste management costs.
  - **Toward Energy Independence**
    - With policy support from the SHANTI Act, collaboration between government, industry, and academia can accelerate innovation and help India achieve greater energy security and nuclear self-reliance.
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### INDIA-US TRADE DISPUTE AND ITS IMPACT

- Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 allows the U.S. government to investigate and respond to foreign trade practices that are considered **unfair, discriminatory, or harmful to U.S. businesses**.
- Under this provision, the **Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR)** can examine policies of foreign governments that restrict U.S. commerce.
- If such practices are confirmed, the U.S. government may take retaliatory actions such as imposing tariffs or other trade restrictions.
- Section 301 has previously been used in trade disputes with several countries, including China.

#### **First Investigation: Excess Manufacturing Capacity**

- On March 11, 2026, the U.S. Trade Representative initiated a Section 301 investigation against 16 economies, including India.
- The investigation aims to determine whether these countries have developed excess manufacturing capacity that allows them to export large volumes of goods to the U.S., thereby harming American industries.

#### **Second Investigation: Forced Labour Concerns**

- A day after the first investigation, the U.S. announced a **second Section 301 investigation covering 60 countries**, including India.
- This investigation aims to determine whether countries have taken adequate steps to prevent the **import of goods produced through forced labour**.
- The U.S. government argues that the failure to eliminate such practices could negatively affect American workers and businesses.
- This inquiry will evaluate whether the participating countries have implemented effective policies to prevent forced labour in global supply chains.

### Possible Impact on Indian Industries

- The outcome of the investigations could have implications for several Indian export sectors.
- For example, sectors such as **steel, aluminium, automobiles, and auto components** already face significant tariffs in the U.S. market.
- In addition, India's **textiles and apparel sector** has expressed concerns about rising uncertainty in global trade conditions.
- Industry representatives have noted that the new investigations could add further pressure on export-oriented industries that are already facing global economic challenges.

### ON THE RIGHT TO DIE WITH DIGNITY

- The debate surrounding the right to die with dignity lies at the intersection of constitutional law, medical ethics, and human rights.
- The case of Harish Rana brought this debate to the forefront of Indian constitutional discourse.
- After remaining in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) for more than a decade following a tragic accident, Rana's parents approached the Supreme Court seeking permission to withdraw life support.
- Their plea raised profound questions about the meaning of life, dignity, and autonomy under **Article 21** of the Indian Constitution.

### The Tragedy of Harish Rana and the Constitutional Question

- In 2013, 20-year-old Harish Rana suffered critical injuries after falling from the fourth floor of his accommodation.
- The accident left him in a PVS, with no ability to respond to stimuli. For thirteen years, he remained dependent on life support systems, primarily sustained through Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH).
- Despite continuous medical attention and devoted care from his parents, no signs of recovery appeared.

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- Confronted with the emotional and physical burden of prolonged treatment without improvement, his parents petitioned the Supreme Court seeking permission to withdraw life support.
- Addressing this question required a deeper interpretation of the right to life guaranteed under **Article 21**.

### The Supreme Court's Reasoning in the Harish Rana Case

- The first issue concerned whether Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) qualified as medical treatment.
- The Court determined that CANH involves continuous **medical supervision**, specialised knowledge, and periodic evaluation.
- Because its administration requires professional expertise and emergency management, it was recognised as a form of medical intervention.
- The second issue concerned whether withdrawing this treatment would serve Rana's best interests.
- The Court emphasised that such decisions must consider the perspectives of family members, **medical professionals**, and the patient's condition.
- When recovery becomes impossible and treatment merely prolongs **biological life** without improvement, continuing intervention ceases to serve a meaningful purpose.
- Consequently, the Court concluded that withdrawing life support was consistent with Rana's **best interests**, recognising the limits of medical treatment in circumstances where recovery is unattainable.

### Constitutional Morality and the Ethics of Death

- While the Constitution safeguards life as a fundamental right, it also recognises that dignity, autonomy, and personal choice are essential components of that right.
  - Situations involving irreversible medical conditions challenge **traditional assumptions** about the purpose of life-sustaining treatment.
  - By allowing passive euthanasia under **strict safeguards**, the judiciary has attempted to reconcile ethical considerations with constitutional values.
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