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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 21 March 2026



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NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY COUNCIL



- It was established in 1958 as an **autonomous organization**.
- It works under the **Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It is a **multipartite, non-profit organization** with equal representation from employers' & workers' organizations and the Government, apart from technical & professional institutions and other interests.
- **Headquarters:** New Delhi
- **National Productivity Council Objectives:**
 - Increase awareness of productivity concepts and techniques
 - Strengthen microeconomic foundations of economic development
 - Function as a think tank for the Government
 - Provide premier productivity consultancy and training services
 - Enhance focus on productivity
- **National Productivity Council Functions:**
 - Consultancy to organizations on productivity improvement
 - Training of personnel at different levels
 - Dissemination of productivity information through seminars, workshops, conferences, etc
 - Productivity Research and Database
 - Productivity Publications
- NPC has professionals from diverse fields to provide Consultancy, Capacity Building, and Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) services to various organisations, including Central Government Ministries and State Governments.
- It is a constituent of the **Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO)**, an Inter-Governmental Body of which the Government of India is a founding member.

US EYES IRAN OIL RELIEF: CAN INDIA GAIN?

As the West Asia conflict chokes global oil supplies and pushes prices sharply higher, the US is considering temporarily removing sanctions on Iranian crude oil already at sea — a move that could significantly benefit India, once a major buyer of Iranian oil.

Background: How Did We Get Here?

- In response to the US-Israel offensive that began on February 28, Iran effectively choked vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz.
- The Strait accounts for one-fifth of global oil and LNG flows.
- Its effective closure, combined with attacks on energy infrastructure across the region, has caused a sharp surge in global oil prices.
- While some oil is being rerouted through alternative passages, the bulk of supply through the Strait has gone offline.

Why This is Strategically Significant?

- Amid rising oil prices due to the West Asia conflict, the US is considering easing sanctions on Iranian crude already at sea to stabilise supply.
- This would be a temporary and partial unsanctioning, not a permanent policy shift.
- The Iranian oil, if released, would primarily divert supplies that were previously heading to China — redirecting them to global markets.
- It mirrors the earlier month-long universal waiver on sanctioned Russian crude, suggesting the US is willing to use sanctions policy flexibly as an economic weapon.

Can India import Iranian oil

- With the US weighing a temporary suspension of sanctions on Iranian crude already at sea, the big question is — will India seize the opportunity?
- Industry analysts say Indian refiners are well-placed to act fast if a waiver is announced.
- **India's Historical Ties with Iranian Oil**
 - India was once a major buyer of Iranian crude, importing significant volumes of Iranian Light and Heavy grades.



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- Key reasons: strong refinery compatibility and favourable commercial terms (discounted pricing).
 - Following US sanctions tightening in 2018, India stopped Iranian imports from May 2019, replacing those volumes with Middle Eastern, US, and other grades.
 - **Current Iranian Oil Availability**
 - Estimated 170 million barrels of Iranian crude currently on the water, including floating storage and in-transit cargoes (Kpler data).
 - A portion of this remains unsold — representing potential incremental supply if sanctions ease or enforcement weakens.
 - This is a significant swing factor in global crude flows.
 - **Can Indian Refiners Handle Iranian Crude**
 - Indian refiners retain the ability to re-integrate Iranian barrels with minimal operational adjustments, given:
 - Prior experience in processing Iranian grades
 - Presence of established trading setups
 - The transition would be similar to how India rapidly scaled up Russian crude imports after Western sanctions created an opportunity.
 - India's rapid pivot to Russian oil after Western sanctions offers a clear blueprint for Iran. Analysts say a similar rapid increase could be seen with Iranian crude if conditions align.
 - **India's Oil Import Vulnerability — The Bigger Picture**
 - India depends on imports for over 88% of its crude oil requirement.
 - 2.5–2.7 million bpd of India's crude imports — roughly half of total oil imports — have transited the Strait of Hormuz in recent months (longer-term average: ~40%).
 - The Strait's effective closure has made diversification of supply sources — including potential Iranian crude — an urgent energy security priority for India.
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GOVT ASKS WHATSAPP TO BLOCK DEVICES IN DIGITAL ARREST SCAMS

- In a digital arrest scam, fraudsters:
 - Impersonate law enforcement officers (CBI, police, ATS, etc.) on video calls.
 - Tell victims they are under investigation for serious crimes.
 - Psychologically trap them and coerce them into transferring large sums of money to avoid "arrest".
- **How Big is the Problem?**
 - 1.23 lakh cases of digital arrest were recorded in 2024 alone — nearly three times the number in 2022.
 - **Total estimated losses:** nearly ₹3,000 crore.
 - The Supreme Court took suo motu cognizance (acted on its own) of the issue in October 2024, expressing "grave concern".
 - Fraudsters use mule accounts (third-party bank accounts) to move crores across banks and state borders within minutes, making them hard to trace.

Key Measures WhatsApp Has Been Asked to Implement

- **Blocking Device IDs of Repeat Offenders**
 - WhatsApp has been asked to assess and block the Device IDs (unique identifiers of phones/devices) used in digital arrest scams.
 - This would prevent repeat offenders from simply creating new accounts on new or the same devices.
 - A detailed proposal is expected within 45 days.
- **Skype-like Safety Features**
 - WhatsApp has been asked to introduce safety features similar to Microsoft's Skype, including:
 - More information about who is calling
 - Warning signals for suspicious or unverified accounts
 - Better detection of scam networks

- **Retaining Deleted Account Data**
 - WhatsApp must ensure user data from deleted accounts is retained for at least 180 days, as required under IT Rules, 2021.
- **Blocking Harmful APK Files**
 - APK files are Android app installation files — scammers often use malicious APKs to gain access to victims' devices.
 - WhatsApp has been asked to strengthen its technology to detect and block such harmful files and similar content.
- **AI & Machine Learning to Detect Impersonation**
 - WhatsApp is expanding its AI and machine learning systems to detect:
 - Impersonation of law enforcement officers
 - Misuse of official logos (Delhi Police, Mumbai Police, CBI, ATS, etc.)
 - Synthetic or AI-generated/deepfake content used in video call scams

SIM Binding Directive — A Separate but Related Order

- In November 2025, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) directed all app-based communication platforms — WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, Snapchat — to implement **SIM binding**.
 - SIM binding (SIM linkage) means the app can only be used with one specific, active SIM card, eliminating anonymous or multi-device misuse.
- This strengthens user traceability and national security compliance.
- WhatsApp has committed to implementing this within 4–6 months and submitting an Action Taken Report (ATR) by March-end.

WhatsApp's Commitments to Law Enforcement

- Timely response to flagged fraud networks and impersonation reports.
- Compliance with updated IT Rules for identification and labelling of AI-generated or deepfake content.
- Enhanced cooperation with investigative agencies on digital extortion cases.



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LIPULEKH PASS



The historic cross-border trade between India and China through the Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district is set to resume this June.

- **Location:** It is a **high-altitude mountain pass** located in the **Kumaon region of Uttarakhand**, near the **trijunction of India, Nepal, and China**.
- It links the Indian state of **Uttarakhand** with the **Tibet region of China**.
- Its elevation and strategic location make it a gateway to the higher reaches of the Himalayas.
- It is the first Indian border post opened for **trade with China**.
- **Other passes:** This was followed by the opening of **Shipki La Pass**, Himachal Pradesh and **Nathu La Pass**, Sikkim.
- **Significance of Lipulekh Pass**
 - **Ancient Trade Route:** Lipulekh Pass has been utilized for centuries as a trade route, connecting the Indian subcontinent with the Tibetan plateau.
 - **Religious Significance:** It is a **key corridor for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra** and plays an important role in connecting border communities, especially tribal groups such as the Bhotiyas who depend on cross-border trade.

NCERT BOOK BAN, A CHAPTER ON JUDICIAL TRANSPARENCY

- The ban on an NCERT Class VIII textbook raises serious concerns about censorship, procedural fairness, and natural justice.
- A complete blanket ban was imposed, and those responsible for the content were penalised without a hearing, undermining due process.
- The passages addressed issues such as judicial delay, case backlog, and judicial corruption, all widely acknowledged realities.

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- References to ethical standards like the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct and accountability mechanisms indicate informed critique rather than **malicious intent**.
- However, the Court viewed such discussion as an attack on its dignity, highlighting growing **institutional sensitivity** to criticism.

Freedom of Speech and Constitutional Boundaries

- The ban directly impacts the freedom of speech guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a).
- Restrictions are permissible only under Article 19(2) on specific grounds such as public order, defamation, or contempt of court, and must be imposed through law made by the state.
- Judicial orders do not fall within this definition, as clarified in Naresh Shridhar Mirajkar vs State of Maharashtra.
- Under the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, contempt requires material that scandalises the court or obstructs justice.
- General references to systemic issues fail to meet this threshold. The absence of a rigorous **constitutional scrutiny** in determining contempt raises concerns about the misuse of judicial power.

The Paradox of Judicial Power

- Courts serve as the ultimate protectors of **fundamental rights**, yet when they impose restrictions such as book bans, citizens are left without effective remedy.
- This creates a paradox where the guardian of rights becomes the source of **rights limitation**.
- Such actions risk weakening **judicial legitimacy** and public confidence in democratic institutions.

Conclusion

- The textbook ban reflects a deeper tension between institutional authority and constitutional freedoms.
 - Protecting judicial dignity cannot come at the cost of civil liberties. Reform must be structural, intellectual, and moral, supported by transparency and accountability.
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POBITORA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



- **Location:** It is located in Assam.
- This wildlife sanctuary was **established in 1998**.
- The sanctuary consists of the **Rajamayong Reserve Forest** and Pobitora Reserve Forest.
- The region was once part of the vast floodplains of the Brahmaputra River and was known for its rich flora and fauna.
- The Government of India included **Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary** with the association of a rhino **breeding program** named “**Indian Rhino Vision 2020**”.
- **Vegetation:** The landscape is dominated by **alluvial grasslands** and dense patches of tall elephant grass.
- **Flora:**
 - 72% of Pabitora consists of the **wet savannah of Arundo donax**, Erianthus ravennae, Phragmites karka, Imperata cylindrica, and Saccharum spp.
 - **Water hyacinth** (Eichornia crassipes) is a major problem, especially to waterfowl, as it forms thick mats on the water surface.
- **Fauna:**
 - It is known for holding the highest density of **Greater One Horned Rhinoceros in the country**.
 - The other animals are leopard, wild boar, Barking deer, wild buffalo, etc.

NAVROZ



- Navroz is an **Iranian and Persian New year**.
- The word ‘**nov**’ means ‘**new**’ and **roz** means ‘**day**’. Therefore, the word translates to a new day.’
- It marks the **beginning of the spring season** and is celebrated with great fervour by members of the **Parsi community across the globe**.



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- **Historical Background:**
 - Nowruz's origins can be traced back to the **ancient Persian empire and the Zoroastrian calendar**, where it marked one of the holiest days of the year.
 - The festival of Nowruz is **named after the Persian king, Jamshed**, who is credited for creating the Persian or the Shahenshahi calendar.
 - It is said that the festival came to India courtesy of an 18th-century wealthy tradesman from Surat, Nusservanji Kohyaji, who often travelled to Iran and began celebrating Nowruz in India.
- It is listed in the **list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of India**.

DIEGO GARCIA



- **Location:** It is a **coral atoll** located in the central **Indian Ocean**.
- It is the largest and southernmost member of the **Chagos Archipelago**.
- It is part of the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)** and accounts for more than half the land area.
- It was **discovered by the Portuguese** in the early 16th century, it was for most of its history a dependency of Mauritius.
- In 1965 it was **separated from Mauritius** as part of the newly created BIOT.
- In 1966, the **UK leased Diego Garcia to the US** to create an air and naval base. For constructing the defence installation, the inhabitants of the island were forcibly removed.
- Diego Garcia is the **United States' major geostrategic and logistics support** base in the Indian Ocean.
- A non-binding 2019 UN General Assembly vote demanded that Britain end its "colonial administration" of the Chagos Archipelago and that it be returned to Mauritius.