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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 25 March 2026



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NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY AUTHORITY



NATIONAL
BIODIVERSITY
AUTHORITY

- It is a statutory body established under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**.
- It was formally set up in 2003.
- **Headquarters:** It is located in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- **Functions:**
 - The NBA performs facilitative, regulatory, and advisory functions for the Government of India, particularly on matters related to the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of biological resources, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from them.
- **National Biodiversity Authority Composition**
 - **Chairperson:** An eminent person with proven knowledge and experience in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of biological resources, and equitable sharing of benefits.
 - **10 Ex-officio Members:** Senior representatives from the Government of India, nominated to provide policy insights and ensure inter-ministerial coordination.
 - **5 Non-Official Members:** Experts and **professionals from diverse fields** related to biodiversity management, nominated to contribute independent perspectives and specialized expertise.

Administrative Structure:

- **State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs):** Functioning at the **state level** to regulate access to biological resources within their jurisdiction.
- **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs):** Established at the **local village or panchayat level** to promote grassroots-level biodiversity conservation and documentation.

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SC RESERVATIONS AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION: SUPREME COURT'S RULING

- The Supreme Court, in its recent ruling, held that a person who has converted to Christianity cannot continue to claim Scheduled Caste (SC) protections. The court upheld the Andhra Pradesh High Court's order in this regard.
- The ruling sits at the intersection of two conflicting realities:
 - **Constitutional Design** - SC status is a legal-social identity tied to specific religions under the 1950 Order.
 - **Ground Reality** - Caste-based discrimination has been shown to persist even after conversion, particularly among Dalit Christians.

What the Court Said?

- The SC ruled that other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism, a person cannot simultaneously:
 - Profess and practice a religion, and
 - Claim membership of a Scheduled Caste
- The court described the bar as "**absolute**" with "**no exceptions**", stating that the two positions are "mutually exclusive and contrary to the Constitutional scheme."
- The court held that the loss of SC status upon conversion is not gradual — it is instant: "Once the appellant converted to Christianity, the caste status which he earlier enjoyed... stood eclipsed in the eyes of law."
- **The Legal Basis**
 - SC status is defined through the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, which restricts SC status to Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists.
 - The court held that claiming SC benefits for statutory purposes while professing another religion is constitutionally impermissible.
- **Scheduled Tribes: A Different Standard**
 - The court clarified an important distinction:

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- For Scheduled Tribes, religion is not the determining factor.
 - ST identity depends on whether a person continues to be part of the community in terms of customs and social recognition.
 - This makes the SC and ST frameworks legally distinct on the question of religious conversion.
- **What Does "Profess" a Religion Mean**
 - The court gave an important constitutional interpretation of the word "profess" as used in the 1950 Order:
 - It is not merely a private belief or personal conviction
 - It requires an outward, public manifestation of one's faith
 - "The term 'profess' connotes to publicly declare or practice a religion"
 - By this standard, the appellant's role as a pastor — leading prayers and organising gatherings — was itself conclusive proof of his religious identity.
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ASSAM RIFLES



- It is one of the **six Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)** that come under the MHA's administrative control.
- **Function:** It conducts **counterinsurgency operations** in north-eastern India and other areas where deemed necessary.
- **Headquarter:** The headquarters of the Director-General of Assam Rifles (DGAR) is in **Shillong**.
 - Assam Rifles **has its origins in 1835** as a militia called the 'Cachar Levy' to protect British tea estates and their settlements against tribal raids.
 - It later **became the 'Frontier Force'** conducting punitive expeditions across the borders of Assam.
 - In 1870, the existing elements were merged into three Assam Military Police Battalions, sending men as part of the British Army to Europe and West Asia.

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- In 1917, the name was changed to Assam Rifles.
 - **Major Roles:**
 - The force has evolved post-Independence, from combat roles during the Sino-India War 1962 to being a part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka in 1987, besides performing peacekeeping roles in north-eastern India.
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GLOBE NETWORK



- The GlobE Network is a global platform of **specialised anti-corruption law enforcement authorities**.
 - It was established under the Riyadh Initiative during **Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency**.
 - It is operating under the framework of the **United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)**
 - **Members:** The Network **comprises 135 member countries** and 250 member authorities, along with 18 observers including **EUROPOL**, the **World Bank**, and the International Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities.
 - **Governance:** The **steering committee**, consisting of **one chair, one vice-chair, and 13 members**, provides leadership and direction for the organisation.
 - The **Ministry of Home Affairs** is the central authority for GloBE Network, while **the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate** are its member authorities from India.
 - **Functions:**
 - The GlobE Network complements formal legal assistance mechanisms by enabling faster, more flexible, and direct agency-to-agency engagement.
 - It enables direct, practitioner-level cooperation among member agencies for the investigation, prosecution, and recovery of proceeds of corruption.
 - The Network is governed by its members and is supported by **the United Nations Office against Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** which provides the Network's secretariat.
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DISTRICTS AS EXPORT HUBS (DEH) INITIATIVE

Districts
AS Export Hubs
(DEH) Initiative

- It was **launched in 2019** to foster balanced regional development across all districts of the country.
- The objective of DEH is to **identify, brand and promote products from each district**, encouraging their sale in both domestic and international markets.
- It is an initiative of the **Directorate General of Foreign Trade**, Department of Commerce.
- Under this initiative, the **export promotion activities are being decentralised** to make the districts active stakeholders in boosting export growth of the identified products and services from the districts.

Institutional mechanism

- An institutional mechanism has been set up in all States/UTs by forming the **State Export Promotion Committee (SEPC)** and **District Export Promotion Committee (DEPC)** at the district level.
- The initiative has **identified export potential in specific districts** across the country, spanning critical sectors like agriculture, toys, and GI products.
 - **District Export Action Plans (DEAP)** detailing the existing bottlenecks in the supply chain and identifying possible interventions to mitigate the existing gaps for export of the above identified products.
- It is supporting **local exporters/manufacturers to scale and find potential buyers** outside India.
- **Coverage:** The DEH initiative has **identified products and services with export potential** in all districts across the country, including **GI products, agricultural clusters, and toy clusters**.

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SUPREME COURT ON WOMEN IN ARMED FORCES - PERMANENT COMMISSION AND EQUALITY

- The Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment addressing discrimination faced by women Short Service Commission Officers (SSCWOs).
- **Recognition of Systemic Bias**
 - The Court observed that a long-held presumption that women lacked long-term career prospects led to an uneven playing field.
 - This assumption adversely affected their chances of obtaining permanent commission.
- **Flaws in the Evaluation System**
 - The Court found that the Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) of women officers were graded casually.
 - Women were often assigned average or lower scores.
 - Higher grades were informally reserved for male officers eligible for PC.
 - This resulted in a structural disadvantage when women were later evaluated for permanent commission.
- **Unequal Opportunity Structure**
 - The Court noted that women officers were not encouraged for career-enhancing courses.
 - They were denied key appointments.
 - They had weaker service profiles due to systemic neglect.
 - This reflected an “unequal opportunity structure” within the Armed Forces.

Key Directions of the Supreme Court

- **Grant of Permanent Commission**
 - Women officers who met eligibility criteria are entitled to Permanent Commission. The Court held that inclusion in the consideration zone is a constitutional obligation, not discretion.

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- **Pensionary Benefits**
 - Women officers denied PC but released from service will be deemed to have completed 20 years of service.
 - They will receive a pension and consequential benefits.
- **No Vacancy Cap Barrier**
 - The Court rejected the argument of limited vacancies.
 - It held that vacancy caps cannot override the need for equality.
- **Relief Across Forces**
 - The judgment extends relief to all three branches of the Indian Armed Forces.
 - This ensures uniform application across all branches.

Constitutional and Legal Principles

- **Equality Before Law**
- **Equal Opportunity in Public Employment**
- **Substantive Equality**
 - The Court emphasised that formal equality is insufficient.

Broader Implications

- **Institutional Reform**
 - The Armed Forces will need to:
 - Reform evaluation systems like ACRs.
 - Ensure fair access to training and promotions.
 - **Gender Inclusion**
 - The judgment strengthens the case for:
 - Greater inclusion of women in defence services.
 - Expansion of roles beyond traditional limitations.
 - **Precedential Value**
 - The ruling builds upon earlier judgments and sets a precedent for addressing systemic discrimination in institutions.
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DEEPENING GLOBAL CORRUPTION AS A POINTER FOR INDIA

- The Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2025 presents a troubling global picture: corruption is intensifying, weakening **democratic accountability**, eroding **public institutions**, and narrowing civic freedoms.
- The global average score has declined to 42, with most countries below 50 and only a few maintaining high standards of **transparency** and **institutional integrity**.
- This reflects a systemic decline in governance quality worldwide.

Global Decline and Its Implications

- The global trend reveals a strong link between weakening oversight mechanisms and rising corruption.
- Countries with reduced civil liberties and compromised institutional independence tend to experience worsening governance outcomes.
- The shrinking number of high-performing nations underscores a regression in **accountability frameworks** and **regulatory standards**.
- Corruption is increasingly embedded within governance systems, affecting both developed and developing economies.

India's Position: Growth Without Governance Gains

- India, with a CPI score of 39 and rank of **91**, remains in the lower half globally.
- Despite significant economic growth, its score has stagnated over a decade, indicating limited progress in **governance reform**.
- While India performs better than some neighbours, it lags behind countries that have strengthened institutional capacity, policy consistency, and regulatory predictability.
- This divergence highlights a mismatch between economic expansion and improvements in public sector accountability.
- Sustained growth without parallel institutional strengthening risks undermining long-term development goals.

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- **Economic Costs of Corruption**

- Corruption imposes substantial economic costs by increasing transaction costs, fostering inefficiencies, and encouraging **rent-seeking behaviour**.
- Globally, it accounts for significant losses in output. In India, estimates suggest direct losses of around 0.5% of GDP, rising to 1–1.5% when indirect effects are included.
- These losses translate into reduced spending on infrastructure development, healthcare systems, education investment, and industrial growth.
- Corruption diverts resources away from productive uses, weakening overall **economic efficiency** and slowing development.

Structural Challenges: The Compliance Burden

- A major structural issue lies in India's complex compliance architecture.
- Thousands of legal provisions, many involving criminal liability, create a burdensome regulatory environment.
- Entrepreneurs must navigate extensive compliance obligations, increasing uncertainty and costs.
- This complexity expands **discretionary power** among officials, raising the likelihood of corruption.
- Instead of ensuring compliance, excessive regulation often fosters informal practices and weakens **ease of doing business**.
- Simplification of laws and reduction of criminal provisions are essential for improving **regulatory transparency**.

Conclusion

- India's **constitutional framework**, democratic institutions, and growing digital capacity provide a **solid foundation**, however, persistent corruption perceptions indicate gaps in implementation.
 - Long-term progress depends on cumulative reforms that enhance **accountability**, strengthen **institutional resilience**, and improve **governance standards**.
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