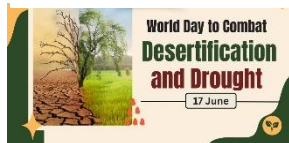


WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT 2026



- It is observed annually on **June 17** to spread awareness about international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought.

- In 2026, the theme “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.” highlights the importance of rangelands—ecosystems that have long been undervalued despite their critical role.
- This year’s observance also aligns with the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists**.

What are Rangelands?

- **Rangelands** are expansive natural areas primarily characterized by native vegetation like grasses, shrubs, and forbs.
- Covering about **50%** of the Earth's land surface, they play a vital role in supporting livestock, wildlife, and diverse ecosystems.
- These lands are **not typically suitable for intensive agriculture** due to limitations such as low precipitation and poor soil quality.
- Rangelands **store vast amounts of carbon** and either originate or serve as **freshwater catchment areas** for most of the world’s largest rivers and wetlands.
- They **support the lives of around two billion people** worldwide, including **many pastoralists and Indigenous Peoples** whose knowledge and stewardship have sustained these landscapes for generations.
- Rangelands **provide almost 70 per cent of livestock feed globally**, making them critical to food systems.
- **Indian rangelands** occupy about 121 million hectares, from the **Thar Desert to the alpine meadows in the Himalayas**.

International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists:

- The **United Nations** has declared **2026** as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.
- **Led by Mongolia** and supported by a broad coalition of organisations, this initiative aims to raise awareness, encourage responsible investments and shape policies that safeguard rangelands and pastoralist livelihoods.
- **Present in more than 75 percent of countries** and **managing** at least **one quarter of the world's land**, pastoralists herd about **one billion animals worldwide**.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):

- It is the **only legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management**.
- It was set up to **address desertification and the effects of drought**.
- **Adopted on June 17, 1994**, it entered into force on December 26, 1996 after the 50th ratification was received.
- The UNCCD is **one of the three Rio Conventions**—along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)—and was **called for in Agenda 21**, the programme of action adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or Earth Summit).
- There are **197 Parties** to the Convention, including 196 country Parties and the European Union. It works together to **improve the living conditions for people in drylands**, to maintain and **restore land and soil productivity**, and to **mitigate the effects of drought**.
- Parties to the Convention meet in **Conferences of the Parties (COP)** every two years, as well as in technical meetings throughout the year.
- The UNCCD **permanent secretariat** is located in **Bonn, Germany**.
- The UNCCD's success relies on reliable, up-to-date information on drought, desertification and land degradation.
- **Every 4 years**, parties must report on the actions they have undertaken to implement the convention.

INDIA INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DEMOCRACY AND ELECTION MANAGEMENT (IIIDEM)



- It was established in 2011 by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to serve as a premier global centre for electoral training, research, and capacity building.
- It functions under the **direct supervision of the ECI** and operates from its **independent campus in Dwarka, New Delhi**.
- In pursuance of its vision and mission, the **key functions** of IIIDEM are:
 - To promote and lay down standards for professional competence in election management
 - To **innovate electoral processes** to promote electoral integrity and ease of voting
 - To encourage and promote **research and knowledge development**
 - To develop **training, academic, and capacity-building programs**
 - To enrich democratic systems, values, and practices
 - To promote **international cooperation** and global engagements
- IIIDEM aims to achieve its vision and mission by following a strategy based on **four key strategic pillars**:
 - **Strengthen National Programs**
 - **Expand Global Programs and Engagements**
 - **Encourage Research and Knowledge Development**
 - **Promote Sustainable Democracy and Election Management**
- IIIDEM collaborates and partners with various national and international **organizations** like the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) on various aspects of democracy and election management.
- Through MoUs, bilateral engagements, international conferences, exposure visits, and customized capacity-building programs, IIIDEM fosters global cooperation.

KISHAU DAM PROJECT



The eight-year deadlock on the construction of Kishau Dam ended recently after the Centre and beneficiary states agreed to cover the ₹2,000 crore power component cost for the project.

- It is a **multipurpose dam project** proposed to be built on the **Tons river** (a major tributary of river Yamuna) along the **Uttarakhand-Himachal Pradesh border**.
- **Beneficiary States:** Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.
- The project envisages construction of a **concrete dam**, thus creating an installed capacity of **4 x 165 MW (660 MW) of hydroelectric power**, create an **irrigation potential** of 97,000 hectares, and **supply 517 million cubic metres (MCM) water annually to Delhi, Rajasthan and Haryana**.
- It will play a crucial role in **enhancing the flow of fresh water into the Yamuna**, particularly during lean seasons.
- For the construction of this project, a **joint venture of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh Government, Kishau Corporation Limited** has been formed in the year 2017.

Recent Consensus:

- As part of the project, **90 percent of the water component** will be funded by the Centre as central assistance and the remaining **10 percent** will be borne by the **six beneficiary states**.
- Himachal Pradesh's share of water will be allocated to Delhi and Rajasthan in return for sharing the cost of Himachal Pradesh's portion of the power component.

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT



According to a new report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) developing countries could save nearly \$500 billion annually if they were able to borrow at the same interest rates as developed economies.

- It is a **permanent intergovernmental body** established by the **United Nations General Assembly in 1964**.
- It **supports developing countries** to access the **benefits of a globalized economy** more fairly and effectively.
- It provides economic and **trade analysis**, facilitates consensus-building and offers technical assistance to **help developing countries use trade, investment, finance and technology** for inclusive and sustainable development.
- It is **part of the UN Secretariat**.
- It reports to the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council but has its own membership, leadership, and budget.
- It is also **part of the United Nations Development Group**.
- **Members:** 195 nations (including India)
- **Headquarter:** Geneva, Switzerland
- **It helps countries to:**
 - Comprehend options to address **macro-level development challenges**
 - Achieve beneficial integration into the **international trading system**
 - **Diversify economies** to make them less dependent on commodities
 - Limit their exposure to **financial volatility and debt**
- **Reports published by UNCTAD:** Trade and Development Report, World Investment Report and The Least Developed Countries Report



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KASHMIR SAFFRON



Kashmir saffron

- It is often called “red gold” for its distinctive aroma, flavour, and natural colouring properties.
- It is primarily cultivated in **Pampore and nearby regions of South Kashmir**.
- It has secured **Geographical Indication (GI) tag** in 2020.
- **Characteristics:** The saffron plant produces **purple flowers with bright orange to red stigmas**, which are carefully dried to obtain the highly valued spice.
- The saffron available in Kashmir is of three types: **Lachha Saffron, Mongra Saffron and Guchhi Saffron**
- **Required Climatic conditions:**
 - It grows at an **elevation of 1,500-2,000 m above mean sea level**.
 - **Climate:** Saffron cultivation requires explicit climatic conditions with temperatures ranging from not more than 35 degree Celsius or 40 degree Celsius in the summer to about -15 degree Celsius or -20 degree Celsius in the winter.
 - It can be grown in dry, moderate and continental climate types.
 - **Soil:** It thrives on loamy, sandy, and calcareous soils.
 - Saffron grows best on acidic soil. It thrives well when the soil pH is 5.5 to 8.5.
- In **India around 90% of saffron production comes from Kashmir**, where it has been grown for centuries.

WORLD GOLD COUNCIL



- It is a **nonprofit association** of the **world’s leading gold producers** formed in 1987.
- It is a market development organization for the gold industry which includes **29 major gold mining companies**.

- **Aim:** It aims to maximize the industry's potential growth by **monitoring and defending existing gold consumption.**
 - It achieves this by setting up **gold standards, proposing policies**, ensuring fairness and sustainability in the gold mining industry, and promoting the usage and demand for gold for individuals, industries, and institutions.
- The WGC is also the global authority on gold, and they offer comprehensive analyses of the industry.
- The most **famous publications are quarterly reports** on the gold market and gold demand trends analyzed by both sector and geographical location.
- It also co-sponsors researching the development of new uses of gold, or of new products containing gold.
- It covers the markets which comprise about three-quarters of the world's annual gold consumption.
- The WGC was the **creator of the first gold exchange-traded fund.**
- **Headquarters:** London, UK.

NATIONAL STATISTICAL COMMISSION



- It was set up in 2005 on the recommendations of Rangarajan Commission (2000).
- **Mandate:** It was established to serve as a nodal body for **all core statistical activities of the country** and also evolve, monitor and enforce statistical priorities and standards and to ensure statistical co-ordination.
- **Composition:**
 - It consists of a **part-time Chairperson, four part-time Members** having specialization and experience in areas of statistics,
 - **CEO of NITI Aayog** as an **ex-officio Member.**

- **Chief Statistician of India** is the Secretary of the Commission. (He is also the Secretary to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation).
- **Functions of National Statistical Commission:**
 - To **identify the core statistics**, which are of national importance and are critical to the development of the economy;
 - To **constitute professional committees** or working groups to assist the Commission on various technical issues;
 - To **evolve national policies** and priorities relating to the statistical system;
 - To **evolve standard statistical concepts**, definitions, classifications and methodologies in different areas in statistics;
 - To **evolve national strategies** for the collection, tabulation and dissemination of core statistics, including the release calendar for various data sets

RBI'S LATEST MEASURES TO ATTRACT NRI DEPOSITS

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has temporarily withdrawn interest rate ceilings on certain **FCNR(B)** and **NRE deposits**, while also introducing a special swap facility to encourage higher foreign currency inflows from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).

FCNR(B), NRE and NRO Accounts

- India offers specialized banking accounts for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to facilitate savings, investments, and remittances.
- **Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) [FCNR(B)] Account**
 - An FCNR(B) account is a **fixed deposit account maintained in foreign currency**.
 - Key features include:
 - Deposits are maintained in designated foreign currencies such as the US Dollar, Pound Sterling, Euro, Australian Dollar, Canadian Dollar, and Singapore Dollar.

- Depositors are protected from exchange rate fluctuations because both principal and interest are repaid in the same foreign currency.
- Interest earned is exempt from Indian income tax.
- **Non-Resident External (NRE) Account**
 - Deposits are made using foreign currency and converted into Indian rupees.
 - Both principal and interest are fully repatriable.
 - Interest income is tax-free in India.
 - Available as savings, current, recurring, or fixed deposit accounts.
 - NRE accounts are primarily used by NRIs to maintain and manage overseas earnings in India.
- **Non-Resident Ordinary (NRO) Account**
 - An NRO account is meant for managing income earned in India. Sources of funds may include Rent, Dividends, Pension, Interest income and Other domestic earnings.
 - Account is maintained in Indian rupees.
 - Interest income is taxable in India.
 - NRO accounts are generally used to manage domestic income streams while residing abroad.

Implications for the Economy

- The RBI's measures are expected to:
 - Strengthen foreign exchange reserves
 - Improve dollar liquidity in the banking system
 - Support the rupee against external pressures
 - Lower funding costs for banks
 - Facilitate overseas borrowing by public sector entities
- At a time of global uncertainty and volatile capital flows, attracting stable NRI deposits can provide an important buffer for India's external sector.