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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 22 July 2026

WHO WAS BATUKESHWAR DUTT?



- Batukeshwar Dutt was an **Indian revolutionary** and a **freedom fighter** in the early 1900s.
- He was **born** on November 18, 1910, in **Bengal's** Burdwan district.
- He was a **close associate** of freedom fighters **Chandrashekhar Azad** and **Bhagat Singh**. He **joined** the **Hindustan Republican Association (HRA)** and **learned** how to **make bombs**.
- **The Central Assembly Bombing (April 8, 1929):**
 - He is best known for having exploded non-lethal bombs, **along with Bhagat Singh**, in the **Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi** on **8 April 1929**.
 - This was planned to **protest the passage** of the repressive **Public Safety Bill** and **Trade Disputes Bill**.
 - During the action, they raised the **historic slogan Inquilab Zindabad!** (Long Live the Revolution!), and **distributed leaflets** stating, "if the deaf are to hear, the sound has to be very loud".
 - **Bhagat Singh** and **Batukeshwar Dutt** quietly **courted arrest** after the incident.
- **Bhagat Singh** was **also tried** for his involvement in the **murder of British police officer John Saunders**, along with **Rajguru** and **Sukhdev**. He was **sentenced to death** and **executed** on **23rd March 1931**.
- **After Dutt's release**, he took part in the freedom struggle notably in the **Quit India Movement**. He was **jailed again** for four years.
- He **passed away** on **July 20, 1965**.
- He was **cremated** in the **Hussainiwala National Martyrs Memorial in Punjab**. This is the **same place** where his friends **Bhagat Singh**, **Shivaram Rajguru**, and **Sukhdev Thapar** were cremated.

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VANDE MATARAM BILL: BRINGING THE NATIONAL SONG AT PAR WITH THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

The **Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026**, is set to be introduced in the Rajya Sabha during the monsoon session.

The Bill seeks to amend the Prevention of Insults to **National Honour Act, 1971**, granting the national song, 'Vande Mataram', the same statutory protection currently reserved for the national anthem, 'Jana Gana Mana'.

What Does the Bill Propose?

- Under Section 3 of the 1971 Act, **intentionally preventing** the singing of the national anthem, or **causing a disturbance** to any assembly engaged in such singing, is a **criminal offence** punishable with imprisonment of up to **three years**, a fine, or both.
- The Bill proposes to bring the national song within the scope of this same provision, effectively criminalising disruption of its singing as well.

Current Legal Status of the National Song

- Earlier this year, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs issued guidelines on the singing and playing of the national song.
- These "orders relating to the National Song of India":
 - Specified the authorised lyrics, written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.
 - Identified occasions for mass singing, such as during the unfurling of the National Flag, cultural occasions, or ceremonial functions.
 - Stated that the audience must "**stand to attention**" whenever the official version is sung or played.
 - Suggested that school days could begin with community singing of the national song.
- Following the government's order, a petition was filed challenging the directives, with the petitioner's counsel questioning whether people could be "compelled to sing the song in the garb of an advisory."

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How Courts Have Interpreted the Existing Anthem Law?

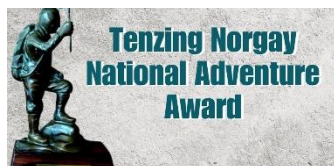
- **Salman v. State of Kerala (2014)**
 - The Kerala High Court clarified what constitutes a "disturbance" under the Act.
 - It refused to quash an FIR against a petitioner accused of "making noise and hue and cry" during the singing of the national anthem.
 - It held that "causing obstruction or prevention... by making loud or contemptuous noise" falls within the offence defined under Section 3, warranting police investigation.
- **The Right to Respectful Silence: A Key Precedent**
 - A landmark distinction exists between **actively disrupting** the anthem's singing (an offence) and **simply choosing not to sing** (not an offence), established in **Bijoe Emmanuel & Ors v. State of Kerala (1986)**.
 - **The case:** Three children belonging to the **Jehovah's Witnesses** Christian sect were expelled from school for refusing to sing the national anthem during morning assembly, despite standing respectfully in silence. Their refusal stemmed from religious belief that did not permit singing praises to anyone except in prayer to God.
 - **The ruling:** The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the students, holding that their expulsion violated:
 - **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression
 - **Article 25(1):** Freedom of religion
 - The Court held there is **no legal provision obliging anyone to sing the national anthem**.
 - It stated: "Proper respect is shown to the National Anthem by standing up when the National Anthem is sung... It will not be right to say that disrespect is shown by not joining in the singing."
 - The bench also emphasised the constitutional value of religious freedom.

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TENZING NORGAY NATIONAL ADVENTURE AWARD



- It is **India's highest national honour** for outstanding achievements in the **field of adventure**.
- The **objectives of the award** are:
 - To **recognize the achievements of the person** in the field of adventure.
 - To encourage young people to **develop the spirit of endurance**, risk-taking, cooperative teamwork, and quick, ready, and effective reflexes in challenging situations.
 - To provide incentives to the young people for getting exposed to the adventure activities.
- **Award:** The Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award carries a **bronze statuette**, a **certificate**, a **blazer with a silken tie** (or saree), and **cash prize of ₹15 lakh**.
- The award enjoys a **status equivalent to the Arjuna Awards** and is presented by the **Government of India along with the National Sports Awards**.
- **Number of Awardees:**
 - Awards can be given in **four categories** namely, **Land Adventure**, **Water (Sea) Adventure**, **Air Adventure** and **Life Time Achievement** for adventure activities on Land, Sea and Air.
 - **Ordinarily not more than one Award** will be made in each category.

SMILE SCHEME

- The SMILE (Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) is an umbrella programme of the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.
 - It is a **central sector scheme**.
 - It aims to realise the vision of a **“Bhiksha Vritti Mukh Bharat”** (Begging-Free India) by adopting a convergence-based approach involving



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- the Central Govt., State Governments, Union Territories, district administrations, urban local bodies, municipal corporations and implementing agencies.
- **Target:** It will cover **295 cities by the financial year 2030-31**, with a special focus on metropolitan centres as well as religious, tourist and historical destinations.
- The larger **scheme includes the:**
 - ‘Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons’
 - Central Sector Scheme for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Persons Engaged in the Act of Begging
- These two schemes provide **comprehensive welfare and rehabilitation measures** to the transgender community and the people engaged in the act of begging.
- To strengthen implementation and transparency, the Ministry has **introduced the SMILE-Beggary National Portal**, which enables digital registration, monitoring and tracking of rehabilitation centres and shelter homes.

MISSION GOLDEN SPICE



- It is an integrated **Lakadong Turmeric Value Chain Enhancement Project**.
- It is a **convergence-led initiative for turmeric cultivation** and value-chain development in the **State of Meghalaya**.
- **Time Period:** Five-year roadmap (2025–2030)
- **Phases:** It is to be implemented in **two phases** namely **Value Chain Strengthening** (Phase 1) followed by **Expansion & Scale-up** (Phase 2).
- It is anchored by **MDoNER and the North Eastern Council (NEC)**.
- The Mission builds upon convergence with schemes and interventions of the **Ministries of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare**, Food Processing Industries and Commerce, along with **APEDA**, the **Spices Board**, the **National Turmeric Board**, **ICAR**, **MeitY**, **NABARD**, **SFAC** and the Government of Meghalaya.



- It is mainly cultivated in the **Lakadong area of Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya.**
- It is distinguished by its **remarkable curcumin content**, ranging from 7 to 12%.
- It is darker in colour and is grown organically without the use of fertilisers.
- It has been awarded the **Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2024.**
- **Benefits:** It has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and neuroprotective properties.

WHAT INDIA'S YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT FAMILIES

- India is undergoing a profound **demographic transition**, marked by declining **fertility rates**, rising educational attainment, greater participation of women in higher education, and changing aspirations among young people.
- India's **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** has declined to **2.0** children per woman, below the replacement level of 2.1.
- While concerns are often raised about fertility falling below the **replacement level**, the real issue is not a declining desire for families but the socio-economic conditions that shape family decisions.
- India's demographic future depends on creating an environment where young people can confidently pursue both careers and family life.

Youth Aspirations and Changing Family Choices

- Contrary to common assumptions, young Indians have not abandoned the institution of family.
- Most continue to prefer **two-child families**, reflecting continuity in social values. However, many postpone marriage or childbirth due to practical challenges rather than changing preferences.
- Major factors influencing family decisions include:
 - **Financial insecurity** Rising **housing costs**
 - Lack of **stable employment** High cost of **raising children**
 - Limited access to quality childcare

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Gender Inequality and the Burden of Care

- Young women spend over **five hours daily** performing **unpaid care work** and household responsibilities, while men contribute only a fraction of that time.
- This unequal distribution of caregiving forces many women to choose between professional aspirations and motherhood.
- The absence of adequate childcare facilities, flexible employment, and shared household responsibilities discourages early family formation.
- Creating **gender-equal households** is therefore essential not only for women's empowerment but also for ensuring sustainable demographic growth.

Regional Variations in India's Demographic Transition

- States such as **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and Sikkim** have fertility rates well below replacement levels, reflecting advanced socio-economic development.
- Conversely, **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand** continue to record relatively higher fertility rates.
- These variations arise due to differences in:
 - Education levels Healthcare access
 - Women's empowerment Urbanisation Economic development

Way Forward

- India's demographic transition should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a crisis.
- Policies must shift from merely influencing fertility rates to expanding people's ability to make informed reproductive choices.
- Governments, employers, communities, and families must jointly create conditions that enable young people to pursue education, meaningful employment, financial security, and parenthood without sacrificing one for the other.
- A comprehensive approach **integrating** women's empowerment, employment generation, social protection, childcare, mental health, and climate resilience will strengthen both families and national development.

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CHABAHAR PORT: INDIA'S STRATEGIC GATEWAY UNDER THREAT

A dramatic image posted by the US Secretary of War showing the maritime control tower at Iran's Chabahar port collapsing after US military strikes has sparked fresh concern in India.

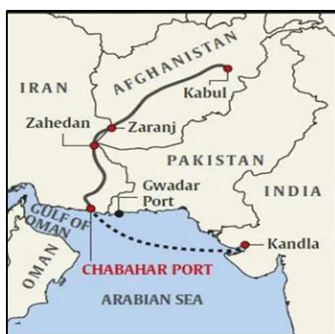
This comes even as New Delhi already grapples with the impact of US sanctions on the strategically vital port project, in which it has invested billions.

Was the Indian Terminal Damaged?

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) clarified that the terminal India operates at Chabahar Port, Shahid Beheshti, was not damaged in the US strikes.
- It stated that while there were reports of damage, the terminal itself remained unaffected.
- India reiterated its position that civilian infrastructure should not be targeted during conflicts.

Strategic Importance for India and Iran

• For India:



- Chabahar provides secure, direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- It serves as a **counterweight** to China's Gwadar Port in Pakistan, located just 140 km away.
- It forms part of the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, a multi-modal transport network connecting India with Iran, Russia, Europe, and Central Asia.

• For Iran:

- Chabahar is a crucial economic hub for the **Sistan-Baluchistan province**, serving as a gateway connecting Iran to landlocked Central Asian states, Afghanistan, and Russia.

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India's Investment So Far

- In 2021, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar informed Parliament that:
 - Grant assistance for equipment supply to Chabahar had been enhanced to \$120 million.
 - India committed a Line of Credit of \$250 million (in rupee equivalent) for the port's development.
 - Since 2018, the port had handled over 450 vessels, 1,34,082 TEUs of containerised cargo, and more than 8.7 million tonnes of bulk and general cargo.
 - India had already supplied port equipment worth about \$24 million, with procurement of remaining equipment underway.

Future Hangs in the Balance

- Chabahar received an allocation of **₹400 crore** in the previous financial year, but the Union Budget for 2026-27 made no allocation for the port, raising questions about the future of this strategic trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Why this matters?
 - Without Chabahar, India loses its primary non-Pakistani corridor to landlocked markets, undoing decades of connectivity planning.
 - The port had reduced transit times by 40% and costs by nearly a third.
 - The situation raises strategic concerns for India if China, via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Gwadar, expands its geopolitical footprint in Iran.
 - The lapse of the Chabahar waiver by default tilts the regional balance toward China and Pakistan.

Conclusion

Chabahar embodies India's long-term vision of connectivity beyond Pakistan, but its fate remains entangled in the broader US-Iran standoff.

With sanctions waivers lapsed and budgetary support withdrawn, India risks losing not just an infrastructure investment, but strategic ground to China and Pakistan in a critical geopolitical space.