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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

THE REAL CRISIS IN INDIA'S FISHERIES

In February 2026, the Government of India released its latest report on the country's ocean fisheries. The government claimed that most of India's marine fish stocks are sustainable. This sounded like good news. But experts argue that this claim hides a bigger, more serious problem — the continuing destruction of India's inshore fishing grounds, the waters closest to the coast.

The Real Problem: Inshore Waters Are Dying

- Catches have been falling steadily, and many fish species once common are now gone.
- But the bigger issue isn't overfishing itself — it's the **destruction of the inshore benthic environment** (the seabed and its ecosystem near the coast). Many fisheries scientists now describe this zone as "destroyed."
- India has a **narrow continental shelf** around most of its coastline (except in Gujarat and parts of Maharashtra, where it's wider).
- This shelf area overlaps with what's called the territorial sea — the waters within 12 nautical miles (22 km) of the shore.
- This zone is naturally the most fertile, ideal for species like shrimp to breed and grow. But this ecosystem is now badly damaged.
- **What's Causing the Damage?**
 - Several factors are responsible:
 - **Dams on major rivers** block nutrients from reaching the sea.
 - **Mangrove destruction** removes natural breeding grounds for fish.
 - **Pollution** from industries, agriculture, and growing cities is entering coastal waters.

The Trawling Problem

- One major driver of this damage is **mechanised trawling**. These trawlers **continuously scrape the inshore seabed**. This destroys plant and animal life living there.
- It has also created serious conflict with small-scale, traditional fishers.

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Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

Why Aren't Rules Enough?

- There is a rule that **mechanised trawlers cannot fish within 5 nautical miles of the coast.**
- But this rule is poorly enforced, for two reasons:
 - Coastal states don't have enough staff or patrol boats to monitor inshore waters properly.
 - Governments have kept fishers themselves out of the management process, even though they could help enforce rules.

Is Deep-Sea Fishing the Solution?

- The government is encouraging fishers to shift toward deep-sea fishing, seeing it as a solution. But the FAO is doubtful.
- It says that deep-sea fishing can offer, at best, only a marginal increase in output — not a real solution to the crisis.
- This approach also adds a burden on fishers. They now need more fuel and better technology just to travel farther out to sea.
- Meanwhile, the real problem — a poorly managed inshore zone — remains unaddressed.

The Way Forward

- The core message here is this: better numbers for fish stocks don't mean fisheries are actually sustainable. What India truly needs is stronger governance of its coastal waters.
- This means:
 - Addressing marine pollution seriously
 - Better management and control of mechanised trawling
 - Involving small-scale fishers in decision-making
- The FAO has echoed this, stating that India needs stronger efforts at both the federal and state level to properly manage its marine fisheries.
- Analysts also suggest that CMFRI should study the actual health of the seabed ecosystem itself, not just catch data — this would give India a much better foundation for future policy.

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INDIA NEEDS A SECOND HOME FOR ASIATIC LIONS

- India's Asiatic lion conservation story is often praised as a success. Their population has grown from just a few dozen in the early 20th century to about **891 today**.
- But there is a hidden problem behind this success. All these **lions live in just one place** — the Gir forest landscape in Gujarat.
- The Wildlife Institute of India has studied this issue since the 1980s. Its reports have consistently said the same thing: keeping an entire species in one location is risky.
- Threats like epidemics, forest fires, or other disasters could destroy the whole population if it stays concentrated in a single area.
- This concern was formally accepted by the Supreme Court in a landmark judgment on April 15, 2013.
- The Court ordered that Asiatic lions be moved from Gir (Gujarat) to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh.

Why the Translocation Never Happened?

- Despite this clear court order, nothing has moved forward for over a decade.
- Gujarat has resisted sending its lions to another state. It argues that it has done a good job conserving the species, and questions whether Kuno's habitat is even suitable for lions.
- Interestingly, Kuno National Park was actually prepared for this move. Villages were relocated and habitat restoration work was done there.
- Yet, no lions have ever been introduced to Kuno. This shows a clear gap between scientific recommendations, judicial orders, and political will at the state level.

The Growing Risk

- While this delay continues, the danger to the lions has only grown. Since the **entire global population of Asiatic lions lives in one place**, they are extremely vulnerable to disease.
- This danger became real in 2018, when a Canine Distemper Virus outbreak killed several lions and infected many more.

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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

- Diseases spread faster in populations that live close together and have low genetic diversity — exactly the situation with Gir's lions today.

Attempts at a Solution

- The government launched **Project Lion** in 2020 to revive this discussion. One proposal was to develop **Barda Wildlife Sanctuary**, also in Gujarat, as an alternative lion habitat.
- However, experts point out a key flaw: Barda is too close to Gir. A second home needs to be far enough away that a single disease or disaster cannot affect both populations together. Being close by defeats the very purpose of having a second home.

A Bigger Governance Question

- This delay reflects a larger tension in India's **environmental governance**. Wildlife is constitutionally a shared responsibility between the Centre and states.
- But in practice, it often gets tangled in state pride and political interests. The Supreme Court has been clear that **Asiatic lions are a national heritage** — not the property of one state alone. Yet, this principle remains only partly implemented on the ground.

From Success to Security

- The bigger question India faces is whether it can move beyond just counting numbers, to actually securing the species' future.
- Right now, the situation is a paradox: a lion population that looks thriving on paper, but remains ecologically fragile in reality.
- As the article stresses, mere numbers do not guarantee survival — resilience does.
- Without a second home, decades of conservation work remain at risk of being undone by a single unfortunate event.

Conclusion

- Asiatic lions symbolise conservation triumph, yet remain trapped in a single landscape's vulnerability. True success demands resilience, not just rising numbers. Establishing a second home isn't optional — it's an ecological necessity.
- Continued delay risks converting India's proudest wildlife achievement into an entirely preventable tragedy.

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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

AGNIPATH SCHEME - ARMED FORCES SEEK HIGHER RETENTION OF AGNIVEERS TO STRENGTHEN COMBAT READINESS

- As the first batch of Agniveers recruited under the Agnipath scheme completes its four-year tenure later in 2026, the Indian Armed Forces are considering **increasing the proportion** of Agniveers retained as regular personnel.

The Agnipath Scheme:

- It is the Indian government's short-term military recruitment model (launched in **2022**) for personnel below officer ranks.
- Under this scheme, recruits/ "Agniveers" (between 17.5 and 23 years) serve for 4 years (including a 6 month training period).
- It **aims** to lower the military's average age (from 32 currently to around 26).
- An attractive, tax-exempt severance (**Seva Nidhi Package**) of roughly ₹11.71 lakh is provided upon completion (no pension), funded by the recruit's contributions and matching government funds.
- Compensation for **disability** (up to Rs 44 lakh, depending on the severity of the disability) and **death** on duty (a total of Rs 1 crore, including the Seva Nidhi package and the soldier's unserved salary).
- Current retention framework:**
 - The 25% retention is based on **merit and willingness** to continue.
 - The first batches, inducted in early 2023, will complete their tenure later this year.
 - All Agniveers are initially released, and only the selected candidates are re-enrolled as regular soldiers, sailors or airmen.
- Employment opportunities for Agniveers:** After completion of 4 year service -
 - The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has earmarked 10% of vacancies in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and the Assam Rifles for eligible Agniveers.

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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has introduced initiatives to facilitate the smooth induction of former Agniveers into the **merchant navy**.
- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) will provide **10% reservation** for former Agniveers in recruitment to the Indian Coast Guard, all 16 Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), etc.

Proposal for Higher Retention:

- The three services are reportedly examining an increase in retention. For example,
 - **Indian Navy**: Around 75% retention.
 - **Indian Army and Indian Air Force**: Around 50% retention.

Alternative Approach Under Consideration:

- Even if the overall retention ceiling remains at 25%, the services may adopt **differential deployment**.
- For example,
 - Specialised units requiring higher technical expertise could have a greater proportion of retained Agniveers.
 - Regular infantry or conventional units could continue with larger numbers of Agniveers serving their initial four-year tenure.
 - Newly raised **Bhairav battalions** are cited as a possible example of such a model.

Significance for Defence Reforms:

- The debate reflects the challenge of **balancing two objectives**:
 - Maintaining a young military profile, one of the core goals of Agnipath.
 - Ensuring adequate availability of experienced, technically skilled and combat-ready personnel amid evolving security challenges and rapid military modernisation.
- The eventual decision on retention percentages is likely to shape India's long-term military manpower policy, operational preparedness and defence reforms.

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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

BANDIPUR TIGER RESERVE



- It is situated in the Mysore and Chamarajanagar revenue districts of southern Karnataka.
- It is located at the **tri-junction** area of the States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.
- Geographically, it is an “ecological confluence” of the Western and Eastern Ghats.
- It was **once a hunting ground** for the rulers of the neighbouring kingdom of Mysore.
- It is **part of the larger Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve**, which is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Rivers:**
 - It is **surrounded by River Kabini** in its north and **River Moyar** in its south.
 - The **Nugu River** runs through the reserve.
 - **Himavad Gopalaswamy Betta Hill** is the **highest point** in the park.
 - **Climate:** It has a typical **tropical climate** with distinct wet and dry seasons.
 - **Vegetation:** The park has various biomes, including **dry deciduous forests**, **moist deciduous forests**, and **shrublands**.
- **Flora:**
 - It supports a wide range of **timber trees**, including **teak wood**, **rosewood**, **sandalwood**, and a variety of bamboo.
 - There are also several **notable flowering and fruiting trees** and shrubs including **Indian gooseberry**, **kadam tree**, golden shower tree.
- **Fauna:**
 - It is home to mammals such as the **Bengal tiger**, **gaur**, **sloth bear**, **golden jackal**, **dhole**, **four-horned antelope**, etc.
 - It is a shelter for the **largest population of wild Asian elephants in South Asia**.
 - It is home to over 200 species of birds, among which the Indian peafowl is the most commonly spotted

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School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 06 July 2026

WHAT IS THE SIRSA KINNOW?



- It is a **variety of Kinnow** grown in the **Sirsa district of Haryana**.

- It is **Haryana's first fruit to receive a Geographical**

Indication (GI) tag.

What is Kinnow?

- Kinnow is a **hybrid citrus fruit**.
- It is a hybrid between two citrus cultivars, namely 'King' (Citrus nobilis) and 'Willow Leaf' mandarin (Citrus deliciosa).
- The hybrid was developed in 1915 by HB Frost at the University of California Citrus Experimentation Station.
- It is **round, large**, and has **golden-orange skin similar to an orange**.
- It has a **sweet and sour taste**.
- It comprises a **high amount of juice content**, making it **ideal for extracting juice and pulp**.
- It is a **rich source of Vitamin C** and minerals like **calcium and potassium**, which are beneficial for health.
- It contains 0.2 to 0.3% **pectin**, which is **anti-cancerous** and also helps in lowering cholesterol.
- **The peel of the Kinnow fruit contains oil** which is **used in cosmetics**.
- It is a **largely cultivated fruit of North India**, and **Punjab** holds the **major share of the Kinnow-producing area** of the country, with **other states including Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu, and Kashmir**.
- It is popularly known as the **"king of fruits" in Punjab**.
- It has the **ability to withstand soaring temperatures** as high as 40°C during summer and 0°C during winter.

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PANDAVANI



Recently, the legendary Pandavani folk singer Teejan Bai who took Chhattisgarh's traditional storytelling art to audiences across the world passed away.

- Pandavani is one of India's most **distinctive oral storytelling traditions**, originating in **Chhattisgarh**.
- The name **literally means "the story of the Pandavas"** and refers to a musical narration of episodes from the **ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata**.
- **Features:**
 - Unlike classical theatre, Pandavani **relies primarily on a single lead performer**, who narrates the story while singing verses and acting out different characters.
 - The **performance is accompanied** by musicians playing traditional instruments such as the **harmonium, tabla, manjira, and dholak**.
 - The **storyteller often carries a tambura or ektara**, using it not just as a musical instrument but also as a prop that transforms into a weapon, chariot, mace, or bow depending on the scene being enacted.
- There are **two styles of narration in Pandavani**:
 - **Vedamati:** In the Vedamati style, the lead artist narrates the story in a simple manner, **sitting on the floor throughout the performance**.
 - **Kapalik:** In this narrator **enacts the incidents and characters**. Performers move around the stage, adopt different voices, enact battle scenes, and use dramatic gestures to bring the Mahabharata's characters to life.
- **Famous artists of Pandavani:** Teejan Bai and Ritu Verma are renowned singers of Pandvani.