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Current Affairs - 23 August 2025

UGC DRAFT CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS ANCIENT WISDOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has unveiled a draft **Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (LOCF)** for undergraduate courses in disciplines such as anthropology, chemistry, commerce, economics, geography, home science, mathematics, physical education, and political science.
- A striking feature of this framework is the emphasis on **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)**, with provisions to embed traditional wisdom, philosophies, and practices into modern pedagogy.

Focus on Indian Knowledge Systems

- The LOCF outlines an approach that seeks to contextualise higher education within India's cultural and intellectual traditions.
- This aligns with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which encouraged decolonisation of education and promotion of indigenous systems of knowledge.

Subject-wise Integration of Ancient Wisdom

- **Mathematics**
 - The draft proposes modules on mandala geometry, yantras, rangoli and kolam as algorithmic art forms, and the study of temple architecture through āyādi ratios.
 - It highlights contributions of Indian mathematicians in arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and calculus, and their influence on global mathematical traditions.
- **Commerce**
 - Kautilya's Arthashastra will be taught as a classical text offering insights into trade regulation and financial management.
 - Concepts such as Ram Rajya in governance, CSR, ESG frameworks, and the Shubh-labh philosophy on profit with responsibility will also find space in the curriculum.



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- **Economics**
 - Students will study indigenous exchange systems, agrarian values, principles of dana (charity), and the role of the king in the economy, contextualising economics within cultural and moral traditions.
- **Chemistry**
 - In chemistry, traditional Indian fermented beverages like kanji, mahua, toddy will be included in a module on alcoholic beverages.
 - The course also introduces ancient Indian concepts of the parmanu (atom) alongside modern atomic theory. This integration aims to balance modern scientific education with historical Indian perspectives.
- **Anthropology**
 - The draft anthropology curriculum draws from thinkers such as Charaka, Sushruta, Buddha, and Mahavira.
 - Their reflections on the relationship between nature and culture are presented as indigenous perspectives that enrich anthropological studies.

Criticism and Challenges

- Opposition-ruled states have criticised the framework, alleging attempts at “saffronisation.”
- The challenge lies in balancing respect for indigenous traditions with ensuring global competitiveness and academic rigour in higher education.

Significance of the Draft Curriculum

- The draft curriculum signals a paradigm shift in India’s educational philosophy. By embedding Indian Knowledge Systems into mainstream education, UGC seeks to:
 - Decolonise curricula and promote indigenous heritage.
 - Provide culturally rooted yet globally relevant education.
 - Encourage ethical and sustainable practices in professional fields.
 - Revive the historical contributions of India to mathematics, economics, medicine, and governance.
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AI AND THE FUTURE OF WORK IN INDIA - TOWARDS INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Context:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly **reshaping global economies**.
- For **India**, the **challenge** lies in ensuring that AI **enhances productivity** and generates **inclusive employment** rather than deepening inequalities.

AI's Potential Impact on Jobs and Economy:

- **ServiceNow–Pearson AI Skills Research 2025 report:** AI could reshape over 10.35 million jobs and create 3 million new tech roles in India by 2030, placing the country ahead of Singapore and Australia in AI transformation.
- **International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2025 study:**
 - **Jobs may evolve** with AI, rather than disappear.
 - **Structural challenges** like low skilling levels and informal workforce vulnerabilities remain key hurdles.
- **Sectoral impact:**
 - **Agriculture:** Limited exposure to AI.
 - **Labour-intensive sectors:** Especially services, which contributed 55% to GDP and 31% to employment in FY24, are highly vulnerable.

AI Pathways - Automation vs. Augmentation:

- **Automation:**
 - **Replaces** workers, increases efficiency.
 - Risks large-scale job losses.
- **Augmentation:**
 - **Complements** human effort.
 - Enhances productivity while preserving employment.
- **Key argument (by Economist and Nobel Laureate Daron Acemoglu):**
 - AI's impact is a policy choice, not destiny.
 - **India must avoid the automation trap.**

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Policy Priorities for Inclusive AI:

- **Skilling and lifelong learning:**
 - Embed digital and AI competencies across schools, ITIs, universities, and vocational centres.
 - **Large-scale reskilling initiatives** by firms like Infosys, Tata Steel, and Siemens show positive pathways.
- **Reducing inequality:**
 - **Build inclusive infrastructure.**
 - Programs like **Atal Innovation Mission**, Startup India, Future Skills PRIME, and Youth for Unnati and Vikas with AI must be scaled up.
- **Fostering entrepreneurship:**
 - Support MSMEs through access to digital tools, computing, and tailored skilling.
 - **Focus on sustainable enterprises**, not just unicorns.

Ensuring Competitive and Open AI Ecosystems:

- **Prevent monopolisation** by vertically integrated firms.
- Ensure contestability in AI markets:
 - **Open APIs** - A publicly available application programming interface that provides developers with programmatic access.
 - **Interoperable systems.**
 - Indigenous Small Language Models (SLMs) and vernacular AI tools.
- Treat computing, storage, and datasets as **public goods** under India's Digital Public Infrastructure model.

Way Forward:

- AI should be seen as **saarathi** (charioteer), not vinashak (destroyer).
 - With **right policies, infrastructure, and skilling**, India can transform AI into a driver of inclusive growth.
 - Policy choices today will determine whether AI bridges or widens India's employment and productivity gaps.
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NITI AAYOG PROPOSES MODEL FRAMEWORK FOR HOMESTAYS

- India's travel and tourism sector has shown remarkable post-pandemic recovery, driven largely by domestic tourism.
- According to WTTC's 2024 Economic Impact Research, the **sector contributed ₹21.15 lakh crore to the economy in 2024**, marking a 21% rise from 2019, and is projected to reach ₹43.25 lakh crore by 2034, accounting for 7.6% of GDP.
- It currently employs **4.325 crore people**—one in every eleven jobs in India—with employment expected to grow to 6.3 crore by 2034.
- Domestic tourist spending in 2024 stood at ₹16 lakh crore, 25% higher than 2019, and may nearly double by 2034, while international tourist spending reached ₹2.85 lakh crore and is expected to touch ₹4.07 lakh crore.
- The **Draft National Tourism Policy 2022** envisions **India as a top five global destination by 2030**, with goals to boost tourist arrivals, foreign exchange earnings, and employment.
- To support this, the government has raised the Ministry of Tourism's budget to ₹2,541 crore and is focusing on developing 50 top destinations, promoting PPP projects, supporting homestays through MUDRA loans, and incentivising hotel investments under the Harmonised Master List.

NITI Aayog's Report on Homestays: Rethinking Homestays – Navigating Policy Pathways

- NITI Aayog released its report proposing a model policy framework to help States harmonise regulations and create an inclusive homestay ecosystem.
- The report emphasises the economic and cultural potential of homestays and BnBs in driving sustainable tourism growth.
- **Key Insights and Objectives**
 - **Economic Potential:** Homestays can promote sustainable growth, generate local employment, and foster entrepreneurship, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.



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- **Cultural Value:** They offer travellers culturally immersive experiences, blending authenticity with livelihood creation.
 - **Policy Goal:** To provide a strategic roadmap for States to strengthen homestays as an integral part of India's tourism landscape.
 - **Core Recommendations**
 - **Light-Touch Regulatory Framework**
 - Regulations should remain simple, transparent, and flexible.
 - Focus on **safety, heritage protection, and inclusivity** while avoiding over-regulation.
 - **Digital Empowerment**
 - Creation of a centralised digital portal for registration, compliance, renewals, and policy updates.
 - Ensures convenience for hosts and improves consumer trust.
 - **Capacity Building and Local Empowerment**
 - Training and skill development for hosts.
 - Use of digital platforms to expand outreach and strengthen credibility.
 - **Financial Incentives**
 - Move from focusing on individual amenities to destination-level incentives.
 - Promote tourism in underserved regions through tiered incentive structures.
 - **Strategic Roadmap**
 - The model policy framework aims to:
 - Simplify processes and encourage broader participation.
 - Integrate technology for greater efficiency.
 - Strengthen cultural authenticity while promoting sustainable tourism.
 - Position homestays as a tool for regional development, not just accommodation.
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MIGRATION INTEGRAL TO GLOBALISATION, SAYS AMARTYA SEN

- Migration is both a cause and consequence of globalisation. It represents the mobility of people across and within borders in search of opportunities shaped by global economic changes.
- While often portrayed as problematic, migration contributes significantly to sustainable development.

Migration and Global Economic Changes

- **International Migration:** Driven by global restructuring of labour markets, especially demand for semi-skilled and unskilled workers in developed countries.
 - Migrants often find employment in informal sectors such as textiles, construction, and agriculture.
- **Internal Migration:** Linked to relocation of industries and tourism growth in the Global South, where rural workers, especially women, migrate for low-paying but vital jobs.
 - Migration is also a path for youth to gain independence and exposure.
- **Contributions of Migrants**
 - **Economic Support:** Remittances are critical for household survival, investment in agriculture, housing, and local enterprises.
 - **Skill Transfer:** Returning migrants bring new skills and open non-farm opportunities if adequate infrastructure exists.
 - **Social Impact:** Migration fosters cultural exchange and reshapes community expectations, especially for women and youth seeking autonomy.
- **Key Challenges**
 - **Restrictive Policies:** Immigration controls often strengthen illegal smuggling networks and exploitative employers, rather than addressing underlying labour market needs.



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- **Exclusion from Urban Services:** Internal migrants face difficulties in accessing housing, healthcare, and education due to restrictive policies.
- **Informal Labour Exploitation:** Many undocumented migrants work under poor conditions with limited rights and protections.
- **Unequal Benefits:** Skilled migrants earn more and invest productively, while unskilled migrants face lower incomes and limited capacity to send remittances.
- **Gender Disparities:** Women migrants often face social pressures but can be strong agents of change where they have access to land and resources.
- **Policy Imperatives**
 - The report stresses that migration should be recognised as both a choice and a contributor to development, not merely a problem to be controlled.
 - Policies must:
 - Protect migrants' rights and improve working conditions.
 - Support productive use of remittances through training and infrastructure.
 - Ensure equitable access to resources, especially for women.
 - Reduce structural constraints that force people into migration as the only survival strategy.

Amartya Sen on Migration and Diversity

- During an interaction with students in Kolkata, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen underscored that **migration is fundamental to globalisation and has historically driven human progress.**
 - He explained that cultural, linguistic, scientific, and artistic advancements—such as the repeated **Arabic translations of Brahmagupta's mathematical works**—reflect migration's role in collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
 - Stressing that “almost nothing would happen” without the movement of people, Sen noted that migration enriches societies through food, music, culture, and ideas.
 - He also highlighted that **diversity forms the bedrock of Indian society**, enabling true growth of the nation and its people.
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EUGLENA



• Euglena is a unicellular, flagellated microorganism belonging to the group Euglenophyta.

- **Habitat:** These are commonly found in **stagnant or slow-moving freshwater ponds, ditches, and urban lakes.**
- **Characteristics:** These protists are **highly adaptable, capable of both photosynthesis** (like plants) and feeding on organic matter (like animals).
- This flexibility helps them **thrive in nutrient-rich, oxygen-poor environments.**
- Three of the most **common euglenoid genera** observed in Indian water bodies are: **Euglena, Phacus, Trachelomonas sp.** These species often dominate surface waters, especially during warmer months.
- The striking red or pink colour seen during blooms is due to a **pigment called astaxanthin**, produced by many euglenoids.
 - **Astaxanthin is a fat-soluble xanthophyll** that gives these organisms their bright red colour.
- **Impact of Euglena on Biodiversity:**
- **Oxygen depletion:** Euglena photosynthesises, but at night it consumes oxygen, leading to diurnal oxygen fluctuations. This can result in hypoxia (low oxygen levels), which is dangerous for fish and other aquatic life.
- **Dense surface scums:** Euglenoid blooms form **thick mats on the water surface**, which block sunlight from reaching submerged plants. This reduces the lake's productivity and **alters its ecological balance.**
- **Fish mortality:** Euglenophyte blooms can stick to fish gills, making it hard for them to breathe. Some species also produce **toxins like euglenophycin**, which directly kill fish or indirectly affect them by disrupting the food chain and oxygen levels.