

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

A CIVILISATIONAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL MEDIA

- The debate over **banning social media** for minors has become a major policy issue in the digital age. Countries such as Australia and the U.K. are introducing or considering restrictions, while the U.S. follows varied approaches.
- India faces a similar choice. Concerns about addiction, cyberbullying, manipulation, harmful content and privacy risks are genuine, but bans may not provide a lasting solution.
- The larger challenge is **preparing young people** for a world increasingly shaped by social media, artificial intelligence and digital technologies.

Why Fear is Not the Answer?

- **Lessons from Earlier Communication Revolutions**
 - Every major communication revolution has generated anxiety.
 - The **printing press, radio, television and the Internet** were once viewed as threats to established social structures.
 - Yet societies gradually learned that the objective should not be to prevent information from flowing, but to promote its **responsible use**.
- **The Digital Transformation**
 - The smartphone has combined the functions of a **printing press, library, classroom, marketplace and public square**.
 - Social media and AI are accelerating this transformation. Young people are growing up amid **technological disruption, economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and social instability**, making fear a powerful influence on policy.
- **Limits of Technological Restrictions**
 - Fear should not become the principal basis for regulation. Protecting children is essential, but **child safety and technological innovation** need not be opposing goals.
 - Governments should create safeguards without discouraging innovation.

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

- Completely isolating young people from digital platforms is therefore becoming increasingly impractical.
- **Beyond Social Media: The AI Challenge**
 - The debate may soon extend beyond social media. Children will increasingly interact with **AI systems capable of educating, entertaining, advising and influencing them.**
 - The real question is not how to keep young people away from technology, but how to prepare them to use it **safely, intelligently and responsibly.**
- **Regulation with Responsibility**
 - **Government regulation remains necessary**, but **regulation alone cannot solve the problem.** Authorities should ensure platform transparency, child protection and privacy while combating online crime.
 - At the same time, **families, schools and society** must develop the **judgment, self-control and resilience** required to navigate the digital world.

Drawing from One's Roots

- India has a long tradition of transmitting knowledge, values and responsibility across generations. Families, educational institutions and cultural traditions historically helped young people navigate uncertainty.
- The **guru-shishya tradition** emphasised not merely knowledge but also character, discipline, responsibility and ethical development.
- These principles can be adapted to the digital age. Parents should become more digitally literate and actively engage with their children's online lives.
- Schools should teach **digital citizenship**, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, online safety and resilience, alongside technical skills.
- Religious and cultural organisations can contribute by engaging constructively with technology rather than retreating from it.
- Technology companies, educators, parents and civil society should cooperate to promote responsible digital behaviour.

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

FIVE YEARS AFTER KABUL'S FALL: INDIA'S EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TALIBAN

On August 15, the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan embassy in New Delhi celebrated "victory day," marking five years since the Taliban's takeover of Kabul.

The event, attended by Indian and around two dozen foreign diplomats, signalled **how far India-Taliban ties have shifted** — from New Delhi's hurried evacuation of its Kabul embassy on August 17, 2021, to today's open, if still unofficial, engagement.

Indian officials describe this as "cautious engagement," while critics call it "opportunistic."

Why India Is Deepening Engagement?

- India invested heavily in Afghanistan after the Taliban's fall in 2001.
- When the Ashraf Ghani government collapsed in 2021 following the U.S. troop withdrawal announced by President Biden, New Delhi faced the prospect of losing its **\$2-3 billion developmental investment**.
- This pushed India to upgrade engagement with the Taliban — without extending formal diplomatic recognition — both to protect this investment for the Afghan people and to build leverage and influence in the country.
- Three strategic factors accelerated this shift:
 - **Pakistan-Taliban rift:** Pakistan, once the Taliban's principal benefactor, has turned into an adversary, with repeated border clashes between the two. This fracture created a window of opportunity for India.
 - **China's growing footprint:** Beijing has been building infrastructure and pursuing natural resources in Afghanistan, filling the vacuum left by Western withdrawal.
 - **Russia's parallel engagement:** Russia, the only country to have formally established diplomatic ties with the Taliban, has been coordinating with India to monitor Chinese influence in the region.

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

Security Concerns

- India's guiding principle remains that Afghan territory must not be used for anti-India activities or terrorism.
- A **UN Security Council 1267 sanctions committee report** noted that the terrorist threat from Afghanistan remains largely unchanged, with groups like ISIL-K and Al-Qaeda still active despite Taliban efforts to contain them.
- Taliban officials have sought to project Afghanistan as a hub for regional economic connectivity rather than terrorism, framing this as a message to both India and Pakistan.

The Human Rights Question

- India has delivered **substantial humanitarian aid** since 2021, including 50,000 metric tons of wheat and over 445 tons of medicines and disaster relief material.
- However, human rights, women's rights, and minority rights — once part of India's stated concerns — are no longer publicly emphasised.
- India had earlier voiced concern — including in December 2022 over university bans on women — and had backed a UN Security Council resolution (adopted August 30, 2021, under India's presidency) calling for inclusive governance and equal rights for women and girls.
- India has since **dropped insistence on these red lines**, instead moving forward with development cooperation and visas for Afghans for medical treatment, business, and education.

Current Status

- Afghan missions in Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad are now staffed by Taliban-appointed diplomats, though formal diplomatic recognition remains withheld.
- This is symbolised by the Delhi embassy's flagpole still flying the former Afghan Republic's tricolour rather than the Taliban's flag.

Conclusion

- India's Taliban engagement reflects pragmatic recalibration driven by strategic competition with Pakistan and China, rather than ideological alignment.

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

ELEPHANT CORRIDORS IN INDIA: WHY THEY MATTER AND WHY THE SUPREME COURT HAS INTERVENED

Recently, a Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India directed the Union government to **conduct** a fresh survey of elephant corridors, ruling that these corridors cannot be blocked over fears of crop damage since elephant herds naturally travel long distances.

The bench was hearing an ongoing writ petition on managing human-elephant conflict, which had earlier also sought a ban on using fireballs, spikes, and similar methods to drive elephants away. The Court asked the Centre to report on steps taken to prohibit such "coercive measures" that divert elephants' natural movement.

Why Do Elephants Move Long Distances?

- Asian elephants are highly mobile, social mammals. A male elephant's **home range** — the area used for food, water, and shelter — typically spans 50 to 300 square kilometres, expanding further depending on resource availability.
- Elephants move through their range either in herds or individually, with home ranges varying by habitat type, food and water availability, population density, and human disturbance.
- Corridors are essential to this movement, enabling elephants to find food, disperse naturally, and move seasonally. But these routes are increasingly disrupted by infrastructure, mining, and farmland expansion.

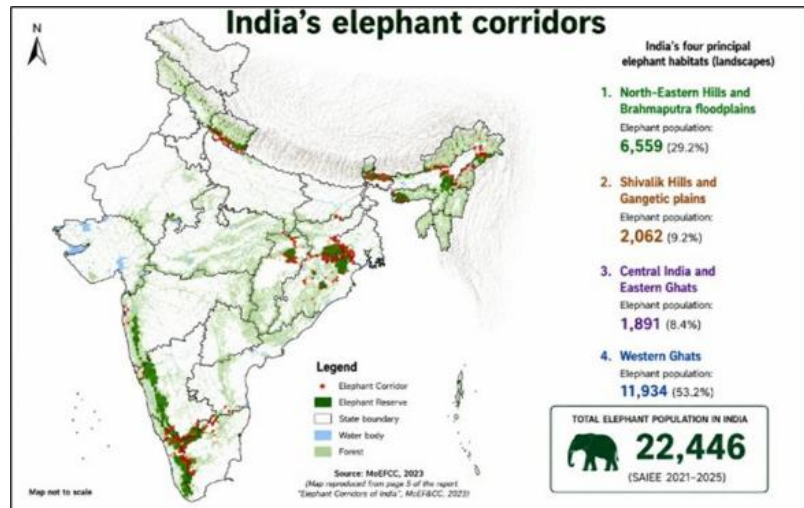
India's Elephant Landscapes and Population

- India has four principal elephant landscapes:
 - **Western Ghats** — 11,934 elephants (53.2%), across Karnataka (6,013), Tamil Nadu (3,136), and Kerala (2,785)
 - **North-Eastern Hills and Brahmaputra floodplains** — 6,559 elephants (29.2%)
 - **Shivalik Hills and Gangetic plains** — 2,062 elephants (9.2%)
 - **Central India and Eastern Ghats** — 1,891 elephants (8.4%)
- India's total elephant population stands at 22,446 (SAIEE 2021-25).

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

Why Corridors Matter?

- Corridors provide more than physical connectivity — they enable genetic exchange between fragmented elephant populations, maintaining genetic diversity.
- They also give elephants access to food and water during seasonal changes, reducing the likelihood of crop raiding and human-elephant conflict.



Corridor Mapping and Key Findings

- The government's last major corridor-mapping exercise in 2023 documented **150 elephant corridors** across 15 States within the four major landscapes.
- West Bengal** recorded the **highest number** of corridors — 26 across its northern and southern regions.

Corridor sizes vary widely; the Charmar-Jingol corridor, largely in Chhattisgarh, is a notable example at 20 km long and 2.5 km wide, facilitating movement of an estimated 80-100 elephants from Odisha into Chhattisgarh's interior.

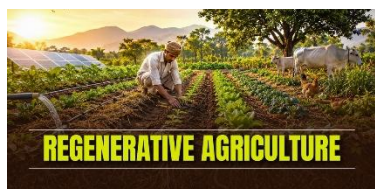
Conclusion

Elephant corridors are vital lifelines connecting fragmented habitats, enabling seasonal movement, genetic exchange, and reduced human-elephant conflict.

With infrastructure, mining, and land-use change increasingly obstructing these pathways, the Supreme Court's intervention signals growing judicial recognition that safeguarding corridors is essential — not just for elephant conservation, but for long-term conflict mitigation between humans and India's largest terrestrial mammal.

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE



- It is a holistic farming approach centred on **restoring soil health and enhancing biodiversity**.
- It focuses not merely on sustaining existing farming conditions, but on actively **restoring soil health, improving biodiversity and strengthening farms** against climate-related stresses.
- **It is based on the following principles:**
 - Minimizing soil disturbance,
 - Protecting the living roots of perennial crops,
 - Maintaining soil cover, Integrating Livestock,
 - Limiting the use of chemical inputs, Enhancing biodiversity.
- **Popular Regenerative agricultural practices in India:**
 - **Micro-irrigation:** Drip and sprinkler systems deliver water closer to plant roots, reducing wastage and improving water-use efficiency.
 - **Natural farming:** It uses **on-farm biological** inputs such as Beejamrut, Jeevamrut, GhanJeevamrut, Neemastra and Dashparni. It also encourages multi-cropping, mulching, cover cropping, minimal soil disturbance and livestock integration.
 - **Soil health management:** Green manuring, cover cropping and mulching can add organic matter, protect soil from erosion, conserve moisture and support nutrient cycling.
 - **Integrated Farming Systems:** Crops can be **combined with livestock, fisheries, horticulture, agroforestry** and apiculture. This diversification can reduce the risk of crop failure and create additional livelihood opportunities.
 - **Agroforestry:** Integrating trees with crops can provide additional income while improving soil moisture, regulating local temperatures and storing carbon.

CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK

School of Research Based Learning & Competition

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE



- **Location:** It is located in the Nilgiri Mountains of the Western Ghats.
- It encompasses parts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka.
- It was the first biosphere reserve in India, established in 1986.
- **Protected areas within this Reserve:** Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Wyanaad Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Mukurthi National Park, and Silent Valley are the
- **Vegetation:** It has tropical evergreen forests, Montane sholas and grasslands, semi-evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests, and thorn forests.
- It is India's first biosphere reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme.
- **Flora:** It mainly includes species of Adenoon, Calacanthus, Baeolepis, Frerea, Jarodina, Wagatea, Poeciloneuron, etc.
- **Fauna:** It mainly has namely the Nilgiri Tahr and the Lion-tailed macaque and the largest South Indian population of elephant, tiger, gaur, sambar, and chital.

CLOUD AND AI SKILLING INITIATIVE



- It aims to provide foundational AI and cloud literacy through Amazon Web Services (AWS) digital training content.
- It offers intensive, job-ready training to participants through the AWS re/Start program.
 - AWS re/Start program is a structured training programme covering cloud infrastructure, networking, security, programming, databases and AI fundamentals.

Current Affairs - 24 August 2026

- It was launched by the **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** and **Cultus Education** in collaboration with **Amazon Web Services (AWS)**.
- It will be **delivered entirely online** through Cultus Education, NSDC's selected delivery partner.
- It is supported by the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)**.
- **Focus:** It will **focus on youth in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities** across all states and Union Territories.
 - It address the challenges faced by youth including limited **access to globally recognised technical training**, few connections to technology employers, and an absence of credentials needed to compete for cloud and AI roles.
- The initiative is designed to **create meaningful social and economic impact** by expanding **access to high-quality technology training** and employment opportunities for youth across India, particularly in underserved and emerging talent hubs.

PERIYAR COW



- It is also locally known as '**Periyar Kullam**' (Periyar dwarf), is only the **second native cattle breed** from Keralam to receive national recognition,
 - First was **Vechur cow**, which was recognised in 1996.
- **Other names:** It is locally known as **Kuttampuzha cattle** and **Andukanni**,
- It is traditionally **found across Periyar River basin** and adjoining plantation and forest landscapes regions of Ernakulam and Thrissur.
- **Characteristics:**
 - It has distinctive ability to thrive **under semi-feral, low-input management and agroforestry conditions**, with extensive grazing on naturally available vegetation.
 - It has remarkable adaptation, resilience and ecological fitness.