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Current Affairs - 29 August 2025

BUILDING HEALTH FOR 1.4 BILLION INDIANS

- India's health-care system faces a dual imperative: **to expand access for millions of underserved citizens while ensuring affordability** in the face of rising costs.
- Meeting this challenge **demands not piecemeal solutions, but a systemic and interconnected approach, strengthening insurance**, embedding prevention in primary care, leveraging digital tools, ensuring regulatory clarity, and attracting sustained investment.
- **If executed with coherence, India has the opportunity to build a health-care model that is inclusive, financially viable, and globally aspirational.**

Efficiency, Scale and The Role of Government Schemes

- **Efficiency and Scale: India's Distinct Strength**
 - Where medical imaging in Western countries may serve a handful of patients daily, **Indian hospitals routinely maximise utilisation without diluting quality.**
 - This **efficiency reflects decades of innovation in workflow design**, doctor-patient ratios, and infrastructure management.
 - The **next frontier is extending this efficiency to underserved regions.** Tier-2 and tier-3 cities, which remain at the margins of India's health-care system, represent the true test of inclusive growth.
- **The Role of Government Schemes**
 - Schemes like **Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY) have already redefined access** by covering nearly 500 million people with benefits of up to ₹5 lakh per family for advanced care.
 - The **program has enabled millions of cashless treatments**, with measurable outcomes such as a 90% increase in timely cancer treatments.
 - Yet **the success of such schemes hinges on greater participation by private hospitals**, anchored in fair reimbursements and transparent processes.



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The Way Forward

- **Prevention as the Most Effective Cost-Saver**
 - Despite progress, **studies reveal that even insured families often face catastrophic out-of-pocket expenses** for chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension.
 - The **solution lies in two complementary strategies**: redesigning insurance to include outpatient and diagnostic care, and launching a nationwide preventive health push.
 - Prevention, **however, requires public participation**. Every rupee spent on **healthier lifestyles saves multiples in future** treatment costs.
- **Digital Transformation and Technological Innovation**
 - India was an early adopter of **telemedicine and continues to advance digital health solutions**.
 - **Artificial Intelligence** tools that detect early signs of illness, triage diagnostic reports, and enable remote consultations are already in use.
 - **These innovations optimise medical resources** and extend care to remote regions.

Regulation and Trust: The Missing Link

- **Innovation alone is insufficient without trust**. Rising health-care costs, such as insurers considering premium hikes due to pollution-driven illnesses, **highlight the urgent need for regulatory safeguards**.
 - **Robust oversight by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) is essential** for fair pricing, transparent claims settlement, and grievance redressal.
 - Without confidence in the system, **households will remain reluctant to prioritise insurance**.
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INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY



- It is the world's leading intergovernmental organisation for **scientific and technical cooperation in the nuclear field.**
- The IAEA Statute was approved on 23 October 1956 and **came into force on 29 July 1957.**
- It is an autonomous organization within the **United Nations system.**
- It reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and the UN Security Council.
- Its primary goal is to ensure that nuclear energy is **not diverted for weapons purposes.**
- **Member Countries:** The agency currently has **180 member states**, reflecting its wide international mandate and credibility.
- **Institutional Structure of the IAEA**
 - **General Conference:** The General Conference, composed of all member states, meets annually to approve budgets and set general policy directions.
 - **Board of Governors:** The **Board of Governors**, comprising 35 members, meets about five times a year to: Approve safeguards agreements, Carry out statutory functions, and Appoint the Director General.
 - **Secretariat:** The Secretariat, led by the Director General, handles the IAEA's daily operations.
- **Functions of the IAEA**
 - The IAEA works to ensure that nuclear technology is used solely for peaceful purposes.
 - It applies comprehensive nuclear safeguards, including: Monitoring, On-site inspections, Information analysis, and Other techniques to verify peaceful use.

Headquarters: Vienna, Austria.



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WHAT ARE PRAIRIES?



- Prairies are **flat, temperate grasslands** found in North America.
 - Prairie vegetation is maintained by **grazing, fire, drought, and low temperatures.**
 - Although **grasses dominate**, lichens, mosses, forbs, and low- to mid-size shrubs also comprise prairie vegetation.
 - **Taller shrubs and trees, mostly willows and poplars**, including aspen and cottonwoods, are **found in depressions and valleys** where there is sufficient moisture and nutrients.
 - Prairie, like other temperate grasslands, is **among the most productive and diverse of earth's terrestrial ecosystems.**
 - **Grasses**, the predominant cover in prairie vegetation, have the **following adaptations:**
 - **Deep** or extensive **roots.**
 - Growing points at or near the soil surface that are tucked in the crown of the plant.
 - **Narrow leaves.**
 - **Small flowers in dense heads** that are **pollinated by wind.**
 - **Tough stems and leaves** hardened with silica phytoliths (plant stones).
 - Strategies to **optimize photosynthesis without losing moisture.**
 - **Wildlife species** living in prairies have **adapted to a semi-arid, windy, open environment.**
 - Species found here include **elk, deer, coyote, bobcat, Badgers, jackrabbits, ground squirrels, pocket gophers, etc**
 - **Similar temperate grasslands in South America** are called **Pampas**, while in Africa they are described as **velds** and in Asia are known as **steppes.**
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INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND AS A TIME BOMB

- A 2022 survey found that **93% of students between grades 8 and 12 were aware of only seven career options**, mostly traditional professions such as doctor, engineer, or lawyer.
- In reality, **today's economy offers over 20,000 possible career paths**. Shockingly, just 7% of students reported receiving any formal career guidance.
- This **lack of awareness funnels students into degrees misaligned with both their aptitudes and market demands**.
- The **India Skills Report 2024 found that more than 65% of high school graduates pursue degrees incompatible with their interests or abilities**.
- By the time they graduate, **they are neither equipped with job-ready skills nor prepared for the careers of tomorrow**.

Policy Attempts and Their Shortcomings

- Recognising the crisis, the Indian government has launched numerous initiatives, from the **Skill India Mission to Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana and SANKALP**.
- Yet, despite heavy funding, **most of these programs have fallen short of their ambitious targets**.
- **Fragmentation** and lack of coordination among initiatives have diluted their impact.
- What India urgently requires is not more acronyms, **but a cohesive, unified national strategy that aligns education with industry needs**.
- **Collaboration between government, educational institutions, and the private sector** will be key to building a robust skill-development ecosystem.

The Decisive Decade

- **India's aspirations to be a global digital powerhouse hinge on its ability to equip youth with future-ready skills**.
- **The next decade will be decisive. Failure to act risks creating a generation of literate yet unemployable citizens**, a crisis that could destabilize the nation's social fabric.



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- Historical precedents, such as the **youth-led unrest during the Mandal Commission protests**, remind us that disillusioned youth movements can spiral into volatility.
- Yet, **this is not an inevitable trajectory**. The AI revolution, though disruptive, presents immense opportunities.
- The **World Economic Forum estimates that while automation may displace 92 million jobs in India by 2030, it will also create 170 million new ones**.
- The **challenge, therefore, is not one of scarcity but of transition**: preparing youth to seize emerging roles while cushioning the losses from automation.

Conclusion

- India's education crisis is **not merely an academic or employment issue**; it is a national imperative that touches upon economic growth, social stability, and the future of democracy itself.
- The clock is ticking, and the **next decade will determine which path India takes**.



KEY FACTS ABOUT GANGOTRI GLACIER

- It is **one of the largest glaciers in the Himalayas** and is the **primary source of the Ganges**, the largest river in India.
- It is situated in the **Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand** in the **Garhwal Himalayas**.
- It **originates at the northern slope of the Chaukhamba range of peaks**.
- It is **fed by snow and ice from several peaks**, including **Shivling, Thalay Sagar, Meru, and Bhagirathi III**.
- It lies at an altitude of around **4,000 meters bordering Tibet**.
- The glacier is around **30 km in length** and **4 km in width**.
- Popularly known as **Gaumukh**, the **terminus of the glacier resembles a cow's mouth**.
- From its snout at **Gaumukh**, the **Bhagirathi River emerges**, which **later joins the Alaknanda River to form the Ganges at Devprayag**.
- The Gangotri Glacier holds **immense religious significance in Hinduism** and is visited by thousands of **pilgrims every year**, who **trek up to Gaumukh**, source of the Ganges.



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UMEED PORTAL



- The 'Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development (UMEED) Portal is a centralised digital platform to register Waqf properties across the country.

- It aims to promote better **management and enhance transparency**.
- The portal is being launched against the backdrop of the **Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025**.
- Registrations will be facilitated by respective **State Waqf Boards**.
- **Legal Support:** Rule 8(2) of the **Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Rules, 2025**, framed under Section 3(r)(iv) of the **Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act, 1995**.
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Minority Affairs

Key Features of UMEED Portal

- Under the new plan, all Waqf properties must be registered on the portal **within six months of its launch**.
- Each registration must include full details **such as measurements** (length and width) and **geotagged locations**.
- Properties that are registered under **women's names will not be eligible** to be classified as Waqf properties.
- Properties not registered within the stipulated timeframe due to technical or other significant reasons may be granted an extension of one to two months.
- However, properties that remain unregistered beyond the permitted period will be considered disputed and referred to the Waqf Tribunal for resolution.
- **Key features of the module** include **Aadhaar-based authentication** of beneficiary details, online application and approval process managed by respective State/UT Waqf Boards and **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** of maintenance support to beneficiaries' bank accounts.



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INDIA'S AQUANAUTS TO LEAD DEEP-SEA EXPLORATION UNDER SAMUDRAYAAN

Two Indian aquanauts, Cdr (Retd) Jatinder Pal Singh and R Ramesh, undertook training dives aboard the French vessel Nautille, reaching depths of 5,002 and 4,025 metres in the Atlantic Ocean earlier this month.

These preparatory missions are crucial for India's ambitious **Samudrayaan project**, which aims to send three humans 6,000 metres deep into the ocean by 2027.

Samudrayaan Mission: India's Deep Ocean Exploration Plan

- The **Samudrayaan Mission**, part of India's **Deep Ocean Mission** approved in 2021 with an outlay of ₹4,077 crore over five years, aims to explore and sustainably utilise deep ocean resources.
- Its objectives include developing technologies for **deep-sea mining, underwater vehicles, robotics, and a crewed submersible** to carry three humans up to 6,000 metres below sea level.

Matsya-6000: India's Crewed Deep-Sea Submersible

- **Matsya-6000** is the specialised vehicle being developed under India's **Samudrayaan Mission** to carry three aquanauts to a depth of **6,000 metres** in the ocean.
- Shaped like a large fish, it houses a **2.1-metre diameter personal sphere** designed to safely accommodate the crew.
- The submersible will support human life for **12-hour missions**, with backup systems ensuring survival for up to **96 hours in emergencies**.
- For the full-scale mission planned for **2027**, the personal sphere will be constructed from a **titanium alloy with 80 mm thickness**, offering the required strength and durability for deep-sea exploration.

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Challenges of India's Crewed Deep-Sea Mission under Samudrayaan

- **Developing a Pressure-Resistant Vessel**
 - The foremost challenge is building a submersible strong enough to withstand extreme ocean pressure — nearly 600 times atmospheric pressure at 6,000 metres.
 - A titanium alloy personal sphere (2.1 m diameter, 80 mm thick) is being developed by ISRO.
 - The challenge lies in **sourcing titanium** (a rare and strategically controlled material) and achieving precise electron beam welding, as even a 0.2 mm deviation in thickness could cause catastrophic collapse.
 - **Maintaining a Livable Environment**
 - Inside the confined personal sphere, aquanauts will require a controlled atmosphere with 20% oxygen levels and regulated carbon dioxide scrubbing.
 - Emergency backup systems include packed re-breather oxygen units that recycle exhaled air, similar to diving systems.
 - **Ensuring Aquanaut Health and Safety**
 - Aquanauts must be in peak physical condition to endure long hours under extreme pressure and respond effectively to emergencies.
 - With no access to washrooms, food and water intake is minimised before and during the mission.
 - For instance, during a nine-hour test dive to 5,002 metres, Cdr (Retd) Jatinder Pal Singh consumed only a few dry fruits.
 - **Overcoming Communication Barriers**
 - **Radio waves cannot penetrate deep waters**, making conventional communication impossible.
 - Early harbour tests failed due to factors like temperature and salinity, but the system later worked successfully in open sea trials.
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