

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

GOVERNMENT SCHOOL CLOSURES IN INDIA - IMPLICATIONS FOR EQUITY, ACCESS AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

- A recent NITI Aayog report highlights that around **94,000** government schools have been closed over the last decade—an average of 25 schools per day.
- During the same period, government school **enrolment declined** by 2.26 crore students, with their share in total enrolment falling from 71% (2005) to 49.24% (2024-25).

Extent and Reasons for School Closures:

- **Rationalisation under NEP 2020:**
 - Most closures are justified by States as school **rationalisation**, aimed at consolidating institutions with low enrolment.
- **National trend:**
 - Government schools declined from 11.07 lakh (2014-15) to 10.17 lakh (2023-24).
 - During the same period, **private** schools **increased** from 2.88 lakh to 3.31 lakh, indicating a gradual shift towards private schooling.

Impact of Government School Closures:

- **Educational inequality:**
 - Government schools primarily serve economically weaker sections, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other disadvantaged communities.
 - Closure of nearby schools disproportionately affects children who lack access to private education or transportation.
- **Rise in dropouts:**
 - Increased travel distances and reduced accessibility contribute to higher dropout rates, especially in rural and tribal regions.
 - Migration, displacement and poverty further weaken educational continuity.
- **Gender impact:** Girls are more vulnerable, as families are more likely to withdraw them from education when schools become distant due to safety and mobility concerns.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

Key Initiatives Related to Education in India:

- **NEP 2020:**
 - It replaces the older 1986 policy with a comprehensive framework for education from age 3 to higher education.
 - It introduces the 5+3+3+4 curricular and pedagogical school structure, and extends the focus to early childhood care and education (ECCE).
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:**
 - Enacted on August 4, 2009, it guarantees free and compulsory elementary education for children aged 6 to 14 under **Article 21A**.
 - It mandates 25% reservation for disadvantaged groups in private schools.
 - Prohibits physical punishment, detention, and screening procedures during admission.
- **UDISE+ (Unified District Information System for Education Plus):**
 - Launched in **2018-2019** by the Ministry of Education as a real-time online management information system.
 - It collects comprehensive data on school infrastructure, teacher profiles, and student enrollment.
 - Tracks parameters across government and private schools to measure progress and policy execution.

Way Forward:

- School rationalisation should prioritise educational access, equity and learning outcomes rather than administrative efficiency alone.
 - Strengthening neighbourhood schools, filling teacher vacancies, revitalising SMCs, improving monitoring of out-of-school children and ensuring cooperative Centre-State action.
 - These steps are essential to uphold the **constitutional vision** of universal, inclusive and quality education.
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Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

NASHA MUKT YUVA CAMPAIGN - PM MODI'S VISION FOR A DRUG-FREE INDIA

- PM Modi has launched the nationwide "Nasha Mukta Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan" campaign, calling a drug-free youth population essential for building a developed India by 2047.
 - India has a large youth population, making it a major target for drug traffickers.
 - Commonly abused substances include cannabis, opioids, heroin, and increasingly, synthetic drugs.
 - Border states are particularly vulnerable due to proximity to drug production regions.
 - The "**Golden Crescent**" (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran) and "**Golden Triangle**" (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand) are major sources of drugs entering India.
- **Impact of Drug Abuse**
 - Individual level: Physical and mental health deterioration, loss of productivity, and diminished career prospects.
 - Family level: Emotional distress, financial burden, and often family breakdown.
 - Society level: Rising crime, loss of human capital, and weakening of social fabric.
 - National security: Drug trafficking is often linked to terror financing and cross-border conspiracies to weaken the country.

Steps Taken by the Government

- **Legal and Institutional Framework**
 - Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985: The principal law governing drug control, prohibiting production, sale, and consumption of narcotics.
 - Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB): The apex agency for coordinating anti-drug efforts and enforcement.
 - Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in NDPS Act, 1988: Provides for preventive detention of drug traffickers.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

- Exclusive Courts for Narcotic-related Cases: With about 3.96 lakh cases under the NDPS Act pending across the country, the Ministry of Home Affairs has asked all states and Union Territories to set up exclusive courts for narcotics-related cases.
- **Key Programmes and Campaigns**
 - Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA): Launched in 2020, focusing on awareness generation, community outreach, and rehabilitation in vulnerable districts.
 - National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR): Aimed at reducing both demand and supply through education, treatment, and rehabilitation.
 - De-addiction and rehabilitation centres: Set up across the country to help those struggling with addiction recover.
 - Awareness campaigns: In schools, colleges, and communities to educate youth about the dangers of drugs.
- **Enforcement Measures**
 - Increased seizures of drugs worth thousands of crores of rupees.
 - Significant rise in arrests of traffickers and dealers.
 - Strengthened border surveillance and coordination among agencies.
 - Use of technology and intelligence to track drug networks.

Significance of the Campaign

- Youth-centric approach: Recognises the youth as both the most vulnerable group and the key to India's future.
- Community participation: Involves spiritual organisations, educational institutions, and industry for a whole-of-society effort.
- Sustained engagement: The 100-week roadmap ensures continuous action rather than a one-time event.
- Rehabilitation focus: Emphasises treatment and second chances alongside prevention and enforcement.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

STRONG HEALTH SYSTEMS FOR ALL WITH BETTER PUBLIC SPENDING

- Strong public health systems are essential for **human development**, economic productivity and social stability.
- Yet low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) face persistent health-financing gaps.
- While inadequate funding remains a fundamental challenge, declining international assistance, rising public debt and growing healthcare needs make it difficult to rely solely on higher expenditure.
- The priority must therefore shift from merely **spending more to spending better**, while ensuring adequate investment in health.

Steps to Maximise the Health Impact of Every Unit of Public Expenditure

- **Spend What Is Allocated**
 - The first priority is improving **budget execution**. Allocations that remain unspent cannot translate into medicines, infrastructure, equipment or healthcare services.
 - Governments should consequently assess not only how much is allocated but also how efficiently allocations are converted into actual services and outcomes.
- **Spend on the Right Things**
 - The second priority is **allocative efficiency**, directing scarce resources towards interventions generating the greatest health and social returns.
 - Health budgets often adequately fund salaries while underfunding medicines, equipment and operational supplies.
 - Healthcare workers without adequate resources cannot deliver quality care.
- **Better Governance, Better Health**
 - The third priority is **good governance**. The impact of public expenditure depends heavily on institutional quality. Corruption, inefficiency and weak administrative capacity can significantly reduce the benefits of additional spending.
 - Stronger bureaucracies, transparent institutions and effective accountability can improve health outcomes without proportionately increasing expenditure.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

- **Strengthening Public Finance Management**

- Effective health financing requires more than a well-formulated budget.
- Governments must strengthen budget credibility, timely cash disbursement, procurement and expenditure monitoring.

Conclusion

- In an era of shrinking development assistance, rising debt and expanding healthcare needs, the crucial question is **how effectively resources are transformed** into health outcomes.
- Greater investment in prevention and primary healthcare, better public finance management, efficient procurement and responsive institutions can make scarce resources go further.
- Ultimately, every unit of public health expenditure should generate the **maximum possible improvement in population health**, strengthening resilience, reducing inequalities and ensuring sustainable progress towards universal health coverage.

BREWING TROUBLE: WHY INDIA'S TEA GIANTS FACE RISING COMPETITION FROM CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

Why the Tea Market Is Slowing Down

- **Adverse Weather**
 - Summer **heatwaves** led to prolonged dry spells, causing higher **pest infestations** and affecting crop quality, while extreme heat also dampened consumer demand.
 - **Erratic monsoon rainfall** over recent years caused both shortages and landslides in hilly tea-growing regions, lowering yields of high-quality tea and affecting auction prices where companies like HUL and Tata Consumer source leaf.
- **Cheaper Imports and Commodity Nature of Tea**
 - A rise in **cheaper tea imports** from countries like **Nepal and Kenya** has pushed down domestic prices.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

- Since tea is largely a **commodity business** with relatively low brand loyalty, falling prices have fuelled growth in the **unorganised sector**, forcing larger companies to cut prices and accept lower realisations.
- **LPG Shortage Impact**
 - A temporary **LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) shortage**, linked to the **West Asia conflict**, led households to cut back on fuel use — and consequently, tea purchases, according to Tata Consumer's management.

Strategic Response: Premiumisation

- Companies like Tata Consumer and HUL are struggling because regular, everyday tea sales are weak. So instead of just competing on price, they're pushing their **fancier, more expensive tea products** — like Tetley Premium, Tata Tea Gold, and premium versions of Brooke Bond.
- The idea is: if cheap tea isn't making much money, sell more expensive tea instead.
- **Challenge:** Tea consumers have rigid taste habits, making it far easier for them to trade down to cheaper, unorganised alternatives than to trade up. Experts believe premiumisation may unlock value, but results could take considerable time.
- With limited scope in a commodity-linked segment, major players are diversifying:
 - Tata Consumer: revenue from "growth businesses" (Tata Sampann, Soulful, cold beverages) surpassed tea/coffee revenue for the first time in Q1, making it the fastest-growing segment.
 - Goodricke: expanding into dairy, alternative crops, solar energy, and select hospitality ventures.

Conclusion

India's tea industry is navigating a difficult phase shaped by climate volatility, rising cheap imports, and a structurally price-sensitive consumer base.

While premiumisation and diversification offer partial relief for major players, the commodity nature of tea and consumers' resistance to trading up mean recovery is likely to be gradual, with future shocks like El Niño posing continued risk to price stability.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

WHAT IS POWERBANK-50?



PowerBank-50

- It is an indigenously built satellite battery pack developed by Hyderabad-based spacetechnology startup TakeMe2Space.
- It is India's first indigenously developed satellite battery to earn the coveted 'flight heritage' status.
- The recognition comes after the battery pack has successfully completed its first mission aboard Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 on its maiden flight -- Mission 'Aagaman'.
 - Vikram-1 became the first privately developed Indian rocket to reach orbit, making India only the third country in the world, after the United States and China, where a private company has achieved orbital launch capability.
- **PowerBank-50 Features:**
 - It is a compact lithium-ion battery pack designed specifically for small satellites.
 - It stores over 50 Wh (Watt Hours) of energy and is equipped with an intelligent battery management system, onboard heaters, and an aluminium flight enclosure.
 - Multiple PowerBank-50 units can be stacked together to power CubeSats and microsatellites, with an operational life of up to five years in low-Earth orbit.

Why 'flight heritage' Matter?

- In the satellite industry, 'flight heritage' is the hardest credential to earn.
- Satellite builders, launch providers, and insurers are deeply reluctant to fly components that have never flown, because a single subsystem failure can end a multi-crore mission. This creates a well-known barrier for new suppliers: you cannot get 'heritage' without flying, and you cannot fly without that tag.

Current Affairs - 03 August 2026

- The bar is highest of all for batteries that are among the most safety scrutinised components on any rocket.
- Batteries must survive intense launch vibration and shock, then operate reliably in vacuum through extreme hot and cold cycles every orbit.

ASIATIC WILD BUFFALO



- It is the largest **wild bovine in the world**.
- **Other Names:** Asiatic buffalo, Wild water buffalo, Asian buffalo, Wild Asian buffalo

- **Habitat:** It includes swamps, flooded grasslands, other wetlands, alluvial plains, and densely vegetated river valleys.

Distribution: It is found in **Southern Nepal, eastern and central India**, southern Bhutan and western Thailand. India is home to more than 90% of the global wild water buffalo population, with **most found in Assam** and smaller populations in **Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra's Kolamarka forests**.

- These are **diurnal and nocturnal animals**.

Diet: These are **herbivorous** (folivorous, graminivorous) animals and regular diet includes aquatic plants, crops, grasses, herbs, leaves, and bark of trees.

Threats: Parasites and diseases, hunting, loss of habitat, interbreeding of wild buffaloes with domestic.

Conservation Status:

- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I