

Five crore Indians wait when the courts take a break

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries

1. What is the issue?

- The **Supreme Court** observes its **summer vacation** from **June 1 to July 12**, during which only **3-4 Vacation Benches** hear urgent matters.
- The issue has raised concerns over **judicial delays** amid the growing **pendency of cases**.
- As of **December 2025**, over **5.39 crore cases** were pending across Indian courts, including **4.76 crore** in **District Courts**, **63.6 lakh** in **High Courts**, and over **92,000** in the **Supreme Court**.
- A **government study** estimated that, at the current disposal rate, clearing the backlog could take **around three centuries**.

2. Why are court vacations being debated?

- Courts function with **limited Benches** during vacations, slowing the disposal of pending cases.
- Around **three-fourths of India's prisoners** are **undertrials**, many of whom remain in jail while their trials continue.
- Critics argue that the practice of **long court vacations** originated during the **colonial period** and may no longer be suitable.

3. What are the suggested reforms?

- Stagger judicial vacations** so that courts function throughout the year instead of all judges taking leave together.

- Fill **judicial vacancies** to improve the **judge-to-case ratio** and speed up case disposal.
- Promote **Lok Adalats**, **mediation**, and **arbitration** to reduce the burden on courts.

4. What more can be done to reduce judicial delays?

- Use the expertise of **retired judges** to help identify and reduce **case backlogs**.
- Strengthen **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** mechanisms to settle disputes outside courts.
- Improve **judicial administration** and ensure **continuous court functioning** to deliver **speedy justice**.

The making of Israel's retreat into isolation

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. What is the issue?

- Israel** is facing growing **international isolation** due to its recent **military actions** and **West Bank settlement expansion**.
- Its actions in **Gaza**, **Lebanon**, **Syria**, and **Iran** have drawn increasing international criticism.
- This marks a shift from Israel's earlier efforts to strengthen ties with **Arab countries** through initiatives such as the **Abraham Accords**.

The **Abraham Accords** are a set of **normalisation agreements** brokered by **U.S. President Donald Trump** in **2020**, establishing **diplomatic relations** between **Israel** and several **Arab countries**.

The **United States**, **Israel**, **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, **Bahrain**, **Sudan**, and **Morocco** have **signed the Abraham Accords**.

2. Why is Israel facing increasing international isolation?

- The **Gaza conflict** has led to widespread criticism over the **humanitarian situation** and **civilian casualties**.
- Israel's military operations beyond its borders have increased **regional instability** and strained relations with several countries.
- The continued expansion of **Israeli settlements** in the **West Bank** has further weakened international support.

3. How has it affected Israel's relations with other countries?

- **Arab countries**, including those that normalised relations under the **Abraham Accords**, face increasing domestic pressure over ties with Israel.
- Israel's actions have also created differences with the **United States**, particularly over developments involving **Iran**.
- Greater reliance on **military measures** has made Israel's diplomatic engagement more challenging.

4. What are the major concerns?

- The continued expansion of **Israeli settlements** has reduced the prospects for a **two-State solution**.
- Relying mainly on **military strength** instead of **political dialogue** could further increase Israel's international isolation.
- Achieving **long-term peace and stability** in **West Asia** requires greater emphasis on **diplomacy** and a **political resolution** to the conflict.

Why has China banned helium exports?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2

Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent)

1. Why has China's helium export ban raised global concerns?

- China **imposed an immediate temporary ban on helium exports on July 10**.
- China **produces only around 1.6% of global helium and imports over 80% of its domestic requirement**.
- Global supplies are already strained by Russian export restrictions and tensions in West Asia.
- The **U.S. accounts for around 43% of global helium supply, while Qatar is a major supplier**, particularly to Asia.
- The **restriction may help China conserve helium** for its semiconductor and medical sectors.

2. How is helium naturally formed and commercially obtained?

- Helium is the **second-lightest element after hydrogen and is a non-renewable resource**.
- It **forms in the Earth's crust through the radioactive decay of uranium and thorium**.
- Helium gradually migrates into natural gas reservoirs and is extracted along with natural gas.
- Commercial isolation is generally undertaken when helium constitutes at least 0.3% of natural gas by volume.
- **Commercial-grade helium** is usually at least **99.997% pure**.

3. What are the major properties and uses of helium?

- Helium **has an extremely low boiling point of -269°C** and is chemically inert.
- It is used to **cool superconducting magnets in MRI machines** and equipment in semiconductor fabrication and quantum computing.
- Its **small atomic size makes it useful for detecting leaks** through extremely small gaps.

- Helium is used in optical-fibre production to cool molten glass and prevent gas bubbles.
- Space agencies like NASA & ISRO use helium to pressurise rocket fuel tanks, while it is also used as a lifting gas.

4. Why is helium expensive to store and transport?

- Helium prices reached \$150–205 per thousand cubic feet in June 2026.
- It liquefies only at -269°C , requiring advanced cryogenic systems.
- Purification and liquefaction plants can cost over \$100 million.
- Rare salt-cavern storage may cost over \$200 million.
- Special vacuum-jacketed vessels are needed to prevent helium boil-off.

5. How could the global helium supply crisis impact India?

- India is fully dependent on imports for helium, making it highly vulnerable to global supply disruptions.
- More than 50% of India's helium supply comes from Qatar, exposing it to West Asian geopolitical risks.
- Higher prices and shortages could affect MRI services and other medical applications.
- Supply constraints may challenge India's growing semiconductor and quantum technology ambitions.
- The crisis highlights the need to diversify import sources and develop helium recovery and recycling capabilities.

How DDCs changed local governance in J&K?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.

1. Why are District Development Councils (DDCs) under debate?

- District Development Councils were constituted in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 2021 as directly elected district-level bodies.

The District Development Councils (DDCs) are elected district-level local governance institutions in Jammu and Kashmir that replaced the erstwhile District Planning and Development Boards (DPDBs). They prepare and approve district development plans and capital expenditure and have a five-year term.

- Their five-year term ended on February 24, 2026, with fresh elections yet to be held.
- Supporters view DDCs as instruments of grassroots democracy and direct representation.
- Critics argue that they have weakened existing local institutions and impeded democratic decentralisation.

2. What do the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provide?

- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provide a constitutional framework for elected rural and urban local governments.
- Rural governance follows a three-tier system : Gram Panchayats, Block-level bodies and Zila Parishads.
- Urban local bodies include Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Nagar Panchayats.
- Article 243ZD provides for a District Planning Committee (DPC) to consolidate plans prepared by panchayats and municipalities.
- DPCs promote bottom-up planning by integrating priorities generated by elected local bodies.

3. How do DDCs differ from District Planning Committees (DPCs)?

- DDCs in J&K were established through an executive order rather than a legislative process.
- Unlike DPCs, DDCs possess executive and developmental powers and operate as parallel district authorities.
- Critics argue that DDCs bypass Zila Panchayats and urban local bodies.
- DPCs aggregate mandates from lower tiers, while DDCs are criticised as a top-down governance structure.

- The DDC model may blur accountability between elected representatives and the authorities exercising actual power.

4. What are the major concerns regarding the DDC model?

- **Equal DDC seat allocation across districts fails to adequately account for population differences.**
- For example, Srinagar (around 12 lakh people) and Kishtwar (around 2.5 lakh) have the same number of DDC members.
- The **280 DDC members across J&K are described by critics as creating a parallel political structure.**
- The **framework is alleged to concentrate key administrative and financial powers** under Union administration control.

5. What is the way forward for local democracy in J&K?

- Genuine decentralisation **requires politically empowered and accountable local governments.**
- **Restoring the District Planning Committee (DPC) model** envisaged under the 73rd and 74th Amendments.
- **Local institutions should receive adequate financial and functional powers.**
- **District planning should emerge from elected panchayats** and municipalities through a bottom-up process.
- **Local governance should remain accountable to the electorate** rather than function as an instrument of centralised bureaucratic control.

KEYWORDS

Claude Fable 5

- Claude Fable 5 has been developed by **Anthropic (a U.S.-based artificial intelligence company)** as a frontier AI model with capabilities reportedly comparable to its advanced Claude Mythos series (Anthropic's class of highly capable frontier AI models).
- It **incorporates safety guardrails to restrict potentially harmful queries** in sensitive domains such as cybersecurity, biology and chemistry.
- **High-risk requests identified by the model are automatically redirected to Claude Opus 4.8** (an earlier Anthropic AI model with stricter safety constraints and lower-risk outputs).
- Claude Fable 5 has **been designed primarily as an open-source model allowing unrestricted modification** of its underlying safety mechanisms.

Eärendil-1

- Eärendil-1 is a **test satellite proposed by the U.S.-based startup Reflect Orbital to redirect sunlight towards specific locations on Earth at night.**
- It is **designed to use a thin-film reflector** (an ultra-lightweight reflective membrane that acts like a space-based mirror) **to redirect sunlight towards Earth, particularly ground-based solar farms.**
- The satellite is **proposed to operate in a sun-synchronous orbit**, a type of near-polar orbit in which a satellite passes over a location at roughly the same local solar time.
- The **U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) authorised the satellite, though concerns over the visual impact of reflected sunlight** have highlighted regulatory gaps concerning space-based light pollution.
- **Astronomers and environmental experts have raised concerns about its potential impact on astronomical observations, nocturnal ecosystems, and the natural night sky.**

Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI)

- Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) **was established in 1979 following the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Conference)**, which highlighted the need to conserve plant genetic resources.
- It is an **autonomous research institute under the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE)**, Government of Kerala.
- It is located at Palode near Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, and maintains a 300-acre conservatory garden.
- It **undertakes ex-situ conservation and sustainable utilisation of wild tropical plant genetic resources**, including rare, endemic and threatened plants.
- **Formerly known as the Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI)**, it was renamed JNTBGRI in 2011.
- In 2024, JNTBGRI received the **Global Genome Initiative for Gardens (GGI-Gardens) Award** from Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI). The award recognises botanical gardens for their contributions to plant genomic research and the conservation of global plant genetic diversity.

Places in News

Paizhen Fault



- The Paizhen Fault is an **active tectonic fracture zone located near the Great Bend of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River** in southeastern Tibet.
- It is **part of a network of tectonic faults in the eastern Himalayas formed by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates**.
- Geological evidence indicates that the fault has **remained active since the Early Pleistocene, with movement recorded as recently as about 9,500 years ago during the Holocene**.
- The **magnitude 6.9 earthquake that hit Milin, Tibet, in 2017 occurred right at the northern end of this fault line**, proving its modern seismic threat.
- The **fault intersects the site of China's \$147-billion Yarlung Tsangpo mega-dam project**, raising concerns over weakened rocks, slope instability, seismic damage and downstream flood risks for India and Bangladesh.

Cyprus

- **Cyprus is an island country in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, known for its mineral resources, wines, and natural beauty.**
- It is located about **65 km south of Turkey, 100 km west of Syria, and 770 km southeast of mainland Greece.**
- **Cyprus has a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters.**

"Achieve your Dream"

- Most of its **rivers originate** in the **Troodos Mountains**, with the **Pedieos River** being the longest.
- The rivers are mainly **fed by winter rainfall** and **dry up during summer**.



Species In News

African Catfish (*Clarias gariepinus*)

- **African Catfish** is a **freshwater fish** native to **Africa and the Middle East**, with a natural distribution from the **Nile River** to **West Africa**, and from **Algeria** to **Southern Africa**.
- It was **introduced worldwide** in the **1980s** for **aquaculture** because of its **rapid growth**.
- It is an **alien invasive species** in **India**, where it was **illegally introduced** from **Bangladesh** during the **late 1980s-early 1990s**.
- It is a **voracious predator** that feeds on **fish, invertebrates, dead animal matter**, and even **small birds**.
- It can **survive in shallow mud**, tolerate **low-oxygen water**, and has a **high reproductive capacity**.
- These characteristics give it a **competitive advantage over native fish species**, disrupting **freshwater ecosystems**.

