FORTUNE IAS ACADEMY
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FINDER

FORTUNE IAS NEWS DAILY EXPLAINER

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THE HINDU

PM in Manila: Giving new momentum to Act East Policy

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Why in Focus?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in the **ASEAN-India Summit** and **East Asia Summit** in Manila on November 16-17, 2026.
- The summits aim to reaffirm **ASEAN centrality** and consolidate results from the **2026 ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation**.

ASEAN Centrality: The principle that ASEAN should play the leading role in regional cooperation and decision-making in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key Highlights:

- **India-ASEAN relations have evolved from trade and cultural exchanges** in **1992** into a **multidimensional partnership**.
- In 2027, the **Dialogue Partnership** completes **35 years** and the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership completes **5 years**.
- **Maritime cooperation** is a key focus in 2026, with initiatives such as the **ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise, MILAN 2026, International Fleet Review** and **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium**.

MILAN 2026: The 13th edition of the Indian Navy's biennial multilateral naval exercise, held at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, from 15–25 February 2026, with participation from 74 countries.

- **Future cooperation** includes **maritime domain awareness, search and rescue and submarine cable protection**.
- **Economic cooperation** remains a challenge as bilateral trade stood at around **$128 billion**
- The review of the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** remains incomplete, needing attention on market access and non-tariff barriers.
- **Digital cooperation** offers **new opportunities through India's digital public infrastructure** and fintech expertise.
- **Project Nexus** can connect instant-payment systems and improve cross-border transactions.

Project Nexus: A Bank for International Settlements initiative that connects different countries' instant payment systems to enable faster, cheaper and more efficient cross-border payments.

- India's participation in the **Quad** and **other international platforms supports dialogue across geopolitical divides**, advocating for a rules-based Indo-Pacific.

- The summits will seek to convert recent progress into a 2027 agenda under the **ASEAN-India Plan of Action 2026–2030**.

Implications:

- Strategic tensions in the **South China Sea and Taiwan** highlight the need for inclusive regional dialogue.
- Delays in reviewing **AITIGA** restrict the potential for greater trade.
- Regional rivalries may challenge **ASEAN unity and strategic autonomy**.
- **Weak digital and payment connectivity** can slow regional economic integration.
- **Lack of concrete outcomes may limit the benefits of the partnership** for people.

Way Forward:

- Conclude the review of the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** to address market access and non-tariff barriers.
- **Strengthen maritime cooperation through continued exercises and symposiums** to build regional capabilities.
- **Enhance digital connectivity and economic cooperation** by leveraging India's digital infrastructure and fintech experience.
- **Promote people-to-people exchanges and educational collaborations** to deepen cultural and strategic ties.

Mains Question:

Discuss the significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Manila in revitalizing India's Act East Policy, focusing on maritime cooperation and economic engagement with ASEAN. (250 Words,15 marks).

Rebalancing India's rice economy

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3

Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Why in Focus?

- India is the world's largest **rice exporter** since 2012, commanding around **30-35%** of global rice exports.
- However, rising exports raise concerns over **groundwater depletion and greenhouse gas emissions**, highlighting the **need to balance export earnings with environmental sustainability**.

Key Highlights:

- India produced an **estimated** 154.02 million tonnes **of rice in 2025-26**, with **leading producers** being **Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu**.
- Rice exports increased from **17.73 million tonnes** in 2020-21 to **21.57 million tonnes** in 2025-26, with export value rising from **$8.82 billion** to **$11.54 billion**.
- In 2025-26, **non-Basmati rice exports** stood at **15.04 million tonnes ($5.86 billion)**, while **Basmati exports** were **6.52 million tonnes ($5.67 billion)**, showing the higher export value of Basmati rice.
- **When a country exports rice, it indirectly exports the water used to cultivate that rice**, even though the water itself is not physically transported: this is known as **Virtual Water Trade**.
- Using **groundwater and river water (blue water)** for rice cultivation puts more pressure on water resources than using **rainwater (green water)**.
- **Groundwater depletion is particularly concerning** in **Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh**, along with several other rice-growing states.
- Flooded rice fields release **methane**, while **excessive fertiliser use contributes to greenhouse gas emissions**.
- Practices such as **Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD)** and **Direct-Seeded Rice (DSR)** can reduce water consumption and emissions, though their effectiveness varies across regions.

Alternate Wetting and Drying: A method of rice farming in which fields are allowed to dry between watering cycles, reducing water use.

Direct-Seeded Rice: A method in which rice seeds are sown directly in the field instead of first growing seedlings in a nursery and transplanting them.

Implications:

- **Rice exports based on groundwater irrigation increase pressure** on already stressed aquifers.
- **High export volumes make rice exports appear economically successful** but these figures do not account for the **hidden environmental costs, such as groundwater depletion, excessive irrigation and freshwater consumption**.
- **When large quantities of rice are exported at relatively low prices**, the country earns limited revenue **despite consuming huge amounts of water**.

Way Forward:

- Promote **crop diversification** in **water-stressed areas to reduce water strain** and improve irrigation efficiency.
- **Enhance the value of rice exports through quality, branding, and geographical indications** rather than increasing physical volumes.
- **Track metrics like export value per tonne, groundwater used per tonne, and emissions per kilogramme of rice** to measure policy success.

Mains Question:

Discuss the challenges and strategies for rebalancing India's rice economy to ensure sustainability in production and exports, considering water and environmental resource constraints. (250 Words,15 words)

India's green law needs baselines, not snapshots

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in Focus?

- The **Supreme Court** set aside **the NGT's 2017 judgment holding the organisers** of the **2016 World Culture Festival** responsible for **damaging the Yamuna floodplain** and ordered the refund of **₹5 crore** deposited as environmental compensation.
- The **World Culture Festival** took place from March 11 to 13, 2016, on 25 hectares of the Yamuna floodplain.

National Green Tribunal (NGT): Established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 to address cases related to environmental protection and conservation in India. It provides relief and compensation for environmental damages.

Key Highlights:

- The **Delhi Development Authority** allotted the land for the festival upstream of the **Delhi–Noida Direct Flyway** in Delhi.
- The Court held that the **Polluter Pays Principle** requires proof of responsibility; **liability cannot be imposed merely because a party occupied the land**.

Polluter pays principle: A principle where the polluter is responsible for paying for the damage caused to the environment.

- It noted that the floodplain was **already degraded before the festival**, making it **difficult to establish the additional damage** caused by the organisers.
- The Court criticised the **NGT for relying on inconsistent committee reports and failing to properly assess** the impact of construction activities.
- It also did not adequately examine **Section 17(2) of the NGT Act, 2010**, which **allows liability to be divided among parties responsible for combined environmental damage**.
- The **Delhi Development Authority** must refund the ₹5 crore deposited by the organisers as environmental compensation.
- The Court distinguished between **restoration** (repairing a damaged structure to its original condition) and **upgradation** (making it bigger or better) and **clarified that repair work cannot be used as an excuse** to undertake

new development.

Implications:

- It becomes **difficult to impose compensation when the person responsible for the damage is not clearly identified**.
- **Without records of the original condition**, it is difficult to measure the additional damage caused.
- Poor monitoring can **lead to further damage to already degraded ecosystems**

Way Forward:

- **Implement administrative measures to ensure baseline data collection** before land allotment.
- **Share responsibility among all parties involved in causing environmental damage** under **Section 17(2)** of the National Green Tribunal Act
- **Encourage the use of engineering assessments** over photographic evidence to determine ecological impact.

Mains Question:

Critically examine the importance of establishing environmental baselines before the allocation of public land for events, and discuss how this can improve accountability in India's green laws. (250 Words,15marks)

Privacy vs press freedom: where should the line be drawn?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Why in Focus?

- On October 27, the **Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA)** approached the **Supreme Court** seeking an interim stay on provisions of the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.**
- The **DNPA** challenged certain provisions of the **DPDP Act, 2023**, arguing that **it could restrict journalism** and lead to **self-censorship**.

Key Highlights:

- The DNPA argued that the Act could affect **investigative journalism**, expose **confidential sources**, and deter **whistleblowers**.
- The **Constitution** protects press freedom under **Article 19(1)(a)**.

Article 19(1)(a): Guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression.

- DNPA **challenged Sections of the DPDP Act, 2023** arguing that the **absence of a specific exemption for journalism could**:
  - **Force journalists to seek consent from individuals before using their personal data** in investigations.
  - **Enable the government to block access to information**, potentially restricting press freedom.
- The **Right to Privacy** is recognized as a **Fundamental Right** under **Article 21** in the **K.S. Puttaswamy judgment (2017)**.
- In **R. Rajagopal v. State of Tamil Nadu (1994)**, the **Supreme Court held that public officials cannot claim privacy to avoid scrutiny of official acts**, and the **State cannot impose prior restraint on publication** on privacy grounds.
- In **Sahara v. SEBI (2012)**, the Court **permitted temporary postponement of reporting** where it poses a real and substantial risk to a fair trial and In **Manu Sharma Case (2010)**, it **cautioned against media trials**.
- Countries such as the **UK, Brazil and Kenya** provide journalistic exemptions under their data protection laws.
- The **State cannot impose prior restraint or prohibition of publication** on privacy grounds.
- The court has listed the case for further hearing on **17th November 2026**.

Implications:

- **Consent requirements may restrict investigative journalism** and create pre-

censorship.

- **Exposure of confidential sources may discourage whistleblowers** from sharing information.
- **Lack of journalistic exemptions** may lead to removal of published reports.
- **Unrestricted media coverage can affect fair trials** and the presumption of innocence.

Way Forward:

- Consider a specific **journalistic exemption** in the Act to protect press freedom.
- **Establishing clear guidelines for balancing privacy rights** with the public's right to know.
- **Ensuring that legal provisions do not lead to pre-censorship** or hinder investigative journalism.
- **Allow postponement of reporting only where there is a real and substantial risk** to a fair trial.

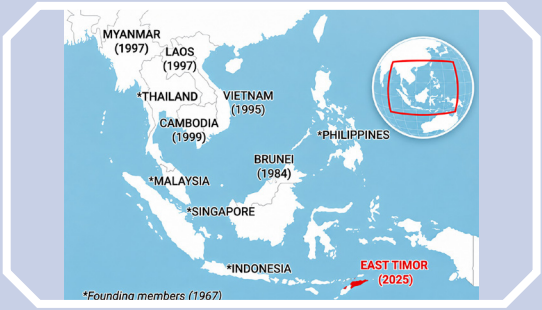
Mains Question:

Critically analyse the balance between privacy and press freedom in India, considering recent legal developments and their implications for investigative journalism. (250 Words,15 marks).

KEYWORDS

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

- **Why in News?:** The **ASEAN-India Summit** and the **21st East Asia Summit** are being held in Manila, Philippines, on **November 16–17, 2026**, under the Philippines' chairmanship.
- ASEAN was established on **8 August 1967** through the **Bangkok Declaration** to promote cooperation among Southeast Asian countries.
- ASEAN has **11 member countries**: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor-Leste.
- **Timor-Leste** became **ASEAN's 11th member in October 2025.**
- The **ASEAN Secretariat** is located in **Jakarta, Indonesia**.
- ASEAN aims to promote **economic growth, regional peace, stability and cooperation** among its member countries.



Protected Area Permit (PAP)

- **Why in News?:** The **Nagaland government** has **sought exemption from the Protected Area Permit (PAP) regime**, citing concerns over its impact on tourism and the movement of foreign visitors.
- The **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** reimposed the **PAP regime in** Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram **in December 2024 due to security concerns** arising from the influx of people from neighbouring countries.
- The PAP is a special permit that **foreign nationals must obtain to visit certain sensitive areas** located near India's international borders.
- The PAP regime is governed by the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958**

INS Vikrant

- **Why in News?:** A French-made **Rafale Marine (Rafale-M)** fighter jet successfully landed on INS Vikrant for the first time recently, **marking a major step towards its induction into the Indian Navy**.
- **INS Vikrant (IAC-1)** is India's **first indigenously built aircraft carrier**, constructed by **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), Kerala**.

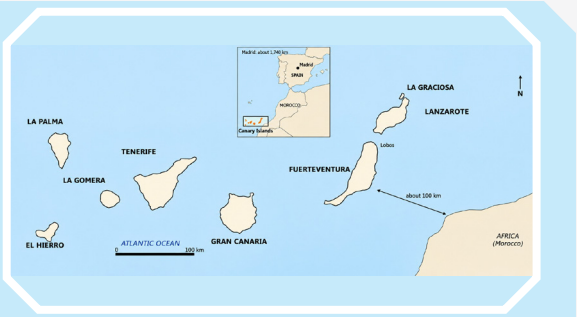
- It was commissioned into the Indian Navy on **2 September 2022** and has an indigenous content of approximately **76%**.
- It is a **45,000-tonne aircraft carrier** capable of carrying around **30 aircraft**, including fighter jets and helicopters.
- It uses **STOBAR (Short Take-Off But Arrested Recovery)** technology, in which aircraft take off using a ski-jump ramp and land using arrestor wires.



Places in News

Canary Islands

- **Why in News?:** The Canary Islands have **witnessed a sharp rise in migrant arrivals from West Africa**, with 1,488 people rescued from 14 boats on 14 November 2026, the highest single-day total since 2020.
- The **Canary Islands** are a Spanish archipelago located in the **Atlantic Ocean**, off the north-western coast of Africa.
- They consist of **eight main islands**, including **Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, La Palma, La Gomera, El Hierro and La Graciosa**.
- **Tenerife** is the largest island, while **Las Palmas de Gran Canaria** and **Santa Cruz de Tenerife** are the two provincial capitals.
- The islands are located close to the **Moroccan and Western Saharan coasts** and are part of Spain, despite their geographical location off Africa.



Species In News

Aerides crispa

- **Why in News?:** Aerides crispa was among the **native orchids rescued and relocated in Kerala** to protect them from destruction due to road-widening projects.
- It belongs to the **Orchidaceae family** and is commonly known as Curled Aerides.
- It is an **epiphytic orchid**, meaning it grows on trees for physical support without taking nutrients from them.
- It is native to India and is mainly found in the **Western Ghats**.
- It produces attractive **pinkish-white, fragrant flowers** and is listed as **Least Concern (LC)** on the IUCN Red List, although its population is declining.



Dendrobium ovatum

- **Why in News:?** Dendrobium ovatum was among **the native orchids rescued and relocated in Kerala to protect them from destruction** due to road-widening projects.
- Belongs to the **Orchidaceae family** and is an epiphytic orchid.
- It is native to the **Western Ghats of India** and is considered an Indian endemic species.

- It has swollen, stem-like structures called **pseudobulbs**, which help store water and nutrients.
- It was identified as one of the **regionally endemic orchid species** in a recent conservation study highlighting the need to protect native orchids from habitat loss.
- It currently lacks a **formal global IUCN Red List Assessment**

