



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 02-03-2026

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Sulawesi island

Syllabus: Prelims Bits – Mapping.

Context:

- In a limestone cave in **Sulawesi**, a **hand stencil** has been dated to **at least 67,800 years ago**.
- It is currently regarded as the **oldest known rock art** discovered anywhere in the world.
- The dating was done using advanced uranium-series techniques on calcium carbonate deposits.

Significance:

- Challenges Eurocentric view that early art originated primarily in Europe.
- Demonstrates **early cognitive and symbolic behaviour** in Southeast Asia.
- Adds to evidence that Indonesia was a major centre of prehistoric human activity.

About Sulawesi Island



Location & Geographical Position

- Located in **Southeast Asia**, part of the **Indonesian archipelago**.
- Centrally positioned within Indonesia.
- Belongs to the **Greater Sunda Islands** group.
- Formerly known as **Celebes**.
- Surrounded by: **Borneo** (West); **Philippines** (North); **Maluku Islands** (East); **Flores** and **Timor** (South)

Physical Features

- **11th largest island in the world**.
- Area: **180,680.7 sq. km**.
- Unique shape: Four long **interconnecting peninsulas**.
- Separated by three major gulfs: Gulf of Tomini; Gulf of Tolo; Bone Gulf
- Highly mountainous terrain.
- Highest peak: **Mount Rantemario** (also called Mario).
- Presence of **active volcanoes**.

Biodiversity

- Once entirely covered by **tropical rainforests** (now reduced due to deforestation).
- Home to **127 native mammal species**.
- About **62% (79 species)** are **endemic**.
- Contains **13 freshwater lakes**, including:
 - **Lake Matano** – deepest lake in Southeast Asia.
- Famous for **prehistoric cave paintings** depicting:
 - Hunting scenes
 - Ancient fauna
 - Symbolic art

Major City

- Largest city: **Makassar**
 - Important port city.
 - Historical trading hub in Eastern Indonesia.

Ethnic Groups

Seven major ethnic communities:Toala; Toraja; Buginese; Makassarese; Minahasan; Mori; Gorontaloese

Controller General of Accounts

Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity – Non - Statutory bodies.

Context:

Recently, the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) launched two major initiatives i.e. the Government Bank Dashboard and the Government Bank Manual in New Delhi.

Controller General of Accounts (CGA)

- **Government Bank Dashboard** – Real-time monitoring, **Receipts & Payments, Cash Management, Transparency.**
- **Government Bank Manual** – Standardised Procedures, **Government Banking, Compliance, Efficiency.**

About:

- **Principal Accounting Adviser** to GoI.
- **Established: October 1975** – Departmentalisation of Union Accounts.
- Nodal: Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance.
- **Apex Accounting Authority** of Central Government.

Core Functions:

- **Compilation of Union Govt Accounts** – Consolidates monthly & annual data on **Revenue, Expenditure, Borrowings, Fiscal Deficit**; basis for fiscal analysis and Budget management.
- **Accounting Policy Formulation** – Prescribes **Accounting Principles, Classification Systems, Formats & Procedures** under Art. 150; ensures uniformity across Union ministries.
- **Payments & Receipts Administration** – Supervises **disbursement, collection, and accounting** in Central Civil Ministries through accredited banks; maintains **exchequer control.**
- **Audit Monitoring (APMS)** – Tracks **Action Taken Notes (ATNs)** on reports of Public Accounts Committee and Comptroller and Auditor General of India; ensures corrective compliance.
- **Pension Accounting** – Manages accounting framework for **Central Government pensions**; supports timely authorization and fiscal tracking.

Forest Owlets

Syllabus: Prelims Bits – Species in News

Context:

- **Recently spotted in:** Kuno National Park
- **Significance:** Sighted **113 years after it was last seen** in the region.
- Highlights revival of rare endemic species in central Indian forests.



About Forest Owlet

- **Common Name:** Forest Owlet
- **Scientific Name:** Athene (Heteroglaux) blewitti
- **Family:** Strigidae (Typical owls)
- **First Described:** 1873
- **Historical Timeline:**
 - Not sighted after **1884** → presumed extinct.
 - **Rediscovered in 1997** in Maharashtra.

Taxonomic Position

- Kingdom – Animalia
- Phylum – Chordata

- Class – Aves
- Order – Strigiformes
- Family – Strigidae

Habitat

- Tropical & subtropical **moist lowland forests**
- Dense **deciduous woodlands**
- Open **dry deciduous teak forests**
- Tropical & subtropical **dry forests**

Prefers **fragmented forests with old trees** (for nesting cavities).

Distribution (Endemic Species)

- **Endemic to Central India**
- Recorded in: Odisha; Chhattisgarh; Madhya Pradesh; Maharashtra; Gujarat
- Notable stronghold: Melghat Tiger Reserve

Key Identification Features (Prelims Important)

- Unspotted crown
- Prominent **full throat collar**
- Thickly feathered legs
- Heavily banded wings and tail
- Medium-sized owlet

Behavioural Traits

- **Diurnal** (active during daytime) – unlike most owls.
- Hunts from perches.

Diet - Rodents; Reptiles (lizards, skinks); Large insects

Conservation Status

- **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
- **CITES:** Appendix I (Highest level of trade protection)

Threats

- Habitat loss due to: Deforestation; Agricultural expansion; Fragmentation of teak forests
- Limited distribution → highly vulnerable

Judiciary and Public Trust

Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity – Judiciary.

Context:

The relationship between the **Judiciary and Public Trust** is a cornerstone of any democracy. In the Indian context, the judiciary often acts as the "final resort" for citizens, making public confidence its primary source of legitimacy.

However, systemic delays, lack of transparency in appointments, and recent controversies around judicial conduct have brought this trust under intense scrutiny.

Background and Context

Public trust is the "moral capital" of the judiciary. Unlike the Executive (which has the power of the sword) or the Legislature (which has the power of the purse), the Judiciary relies on the **power of the pen** and the willingness of the public to accept its mandates.

- **The Social Contract:** Citizens surrender the right to self-adjudication to the state, expecting impartial justice in return.
- **The Paradox:** While the Indian judiciary is one of the most powerful in the world, it faces a "crisis of credibility" due to nearly **5 crore (50 million)** pending cases and an opaque selection process.

Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- **Article 124 & 217:** Govern the appointment of Supreme Court and High Court judges.
- **Article 129 & 215:** Power of the SC and HC to punish for "Contempt of Court"—often used to protect the dignity of the institution, though sometimes criticized for stifling healthy criticism.
- **Article 14 & 21:** The "Right to Access Justice" and "Right to a Fair Trial" are intrinsic to public trust.
- **Public Trust Doctrine:** Originally an environmental principle (e.g., *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*), the SC has expanded this to include the State's duty to manage all public resources and institutions (including the judiciary) for the public good.

Recent Developments (2025–2026)

- **Expansion of Live Streaming:** Following the *Swapnil Tripathi* (2018) mandate, the SC and several HCs (Gujarat, Karnataka, Patna) have institutionalized live streaming. By early 2026, over 10 High Courts have integrated real-time broadcasting.
- **Swacch Association v. State of Maharashtra (2025):** The SC reaffirmed the **Public Trust Doctrine**, applying it to man-made ecological assets and emphasizing that "public accountability" is a constitutional mandate for all state organs.

- **Focus on Judicial Diversity:** In late 2025, discussions intensified regarding the **NJAC 2.0** or a modified memorandum of procedure (MoP) to increase representation of women, SCs, and STs to bolster public faith.
- **Digitization (e-Courts Phase III):** A massive push toward AI-assisted translation of judgments into regional languages to make the law accessible to the "common man."

Data, Reports, and Indices

- **India Justice Report (IJR) 2025:**
 - **Vacancies:** High Courts still face a **33% vacancy rate**; District Courts are short by **21%**.
 - **Judge-to-Population Ratio:** India has roughly **15-20 judges per million** people, far below the Law Commission’s recommendation of **50**.
 - **Diversity:** Women constitute only **14%** of High Court judges as of late 2025.
- **Rule of Law Index (World Justice Project):** India consistently struggles in the "Civil Justice" and "Speed of Adjudication" parameters, affecting global perceptions of public trust.

Arguments: Transparency vs. Independence

For Greater Transparency (Public Trust)	For Judicial Secrecy (Independence)
Accountability: "Sunlight is the best disinfectant." Public scrutiny reduces nepotism (" <i>Uncle Judge</i> " syndrome).	Protection from Pressure: Judges must be free from "Trial by Media" and populist sentiment.
Democratic Legitimacy: In a democracy, no institution can be a "black box."	Privacy of Deliberation: Secrecy in the Collegium ensures frank discussions about candidate suitability.
Education: Live streaming demystifies the law for the 1.4 billion citizens.	Risk of Sensationalism: Fear that lawyers might "play to the gallery" rather than the law.

Challenges to Public Trust

- **Pendency and "Date-Pe-Date":** Inordinate delays lead to the perception that "Justice delayed is justice denied."
- **Opaque Appointments:** The Collegium system remains a point of friction between the Executive and Judiciary, often leading to stalemates in appointments.
- **Judicial Conduct:** Recent instances of "In-house procedures" for investigating judges (e.g., the 2025 case involving discovery of unexplained assets in a judge's residence) have raised calls for a more formal **Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill**.

- **Language Barrier:** Most proceedings in higher courts are in English, alienating a majority of the population.

Way Forward

- **Institutionalizing Diversity:** Establishing a written diversity policy for appointments.
- **Regional Benches:** Utilizing **Article 130** to set up regional benches of the Supreme Court to reduce the "geographical barrier" to justice.
- **All India Judicial Service (AIJS):** To create a meritocratic, diverse, and professional lower judiciary.
- **Open Justice:** Extending live-streaming to all trial courts for cases of public importance while ensuring the privacy of victims in sensitive matters.

Practice Qs:

Q. "Public trust is the bedrock of judicial legitimacy." In light of the current pendency levels and the opaque appointment process, suggest measures to enhance the transparency of the Indian Judiciary. (15 Marks, 250 words)

Sixteenth Finance Commission - Misses and Concerns

Syllabus: GS-2: Fiscal Federalism – Finance Commission.

Context:

The Finance Commission (FC) is a **quasi-judicial body** constituted every five years to recommend the distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States.

- **The Shift:** The 14th FC significantly increased the States' share from **32% to 42%**. This was adjusted to **41%** by the 15th FC following the reorganization of Jammu & Kashmir.
- **The 16th FC Mandate:** Formed in December 2023, it was tasked with defining the roadmap for 2026–2031 amidst rising concerns over the Centre's increasing use of non-shareable levies.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Article 280:** Mandates the President to constitute a Finance Commission every five years.
- **Article 281:** Requires the President to lay the FC report and an "Explanatory Memorandum" before each House of Parliament.
- **Article 270:** Defines the "Divisible Pool" of taxes shared between Centre and States. Crucially, it **excludes** Cesses and Surcharges.

- **Article 293(3):** Empowers the Centre to impose conditions on State borrowings if they are indebted to the Union.

Recent Developments (2025-2026)

- **Report Submission:** The 16th FC submitted its report to the President on **November 17, 2025**.
- **Budget 2026-27 Acceptance:** In the February 2026 Union Budget, the Government accepted the recommendation to **retain vertical devolution at 41%**.
- **Grants Allocated:** ₹1.4 lakh crore provided for FY 2026-27 as FC grants (Local bodies and Disaster Management).
- **Discontinuation of RDGs:** The Commission has notably discontinued **Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs)**, sector-specific grants, and state-specific grants.

Data, Reports, and Indices

Parameter	15th FC (2021-26)	16th FC (2026-31)	Change/Concern
Vertical Share	41%	41%	Static; States demanded 50%.
Cess & Surcharge	~10-12% of Gross Tax	~13.5% of Gross Tax	Rising; bypasses the 41% rule.
Effective Transfer	~34.4% of Gross Revenue	~32.7% (Projected)	Declining effective share.
Horizontal Criteria	Income Distance (45%)	Income Distance (45%)	Redefined to 3-state average.
New Criterion	Tax Effort	Contribution to GDP	Replaces tax efficiency with GSDP.

Arguments: For and Against

For the Recommendations

- **Stability:** Retaining 41% provides fiscal predictability for both tiers.
- **Performance Incentives:** The new "**Contribution to GDP**" criterion rewards States that drive national growth.
- **Fiscal Consolidation:** Recommending the Centre reduce fiscal deficit to **3.5% by 2030-31** and capping States at **3%** ensures long-term debt sustainability.
- **Urban Reforms:** Introduction of an "**Urbanisation Premium**" (₹10,000 crore) for merging peri-urban areas into cities.

Against (The "Misses" and Concerns)

- **The Cess Loophole:** The 16th FC failed to cap or include Cesses and Surcharges in the divisible pool. This means the *effective* transfer to states is closer to **30-32%** rather than the headline 41%.
- **Equity vs. Efficiency:** Southern and high-performing States argue the **Income Distance** (Equalisation) still penalizes them, while poorer States face losses due to the removal of **Revenue Deficit Grants**.
- **North-South Divide:** The use of the **2011 Census** continues to disadvantage states that successfully implemented population control.

Challenges

- **Shrinking Fiscal Space:** The Centre's reliance on non-shareable levies reduces the actual pool available for States.
- **Structural Rigidity:** Discontinuing RDGs leaves hilly and special-category states (like HP, Uttarakhand, and NE states) with massive fiscal gaps.
- **Tied Grants:** A higher percentage of local body grants are now "tied" to specific sectors (water, sanitation), limiting the autonomy of Panchayats.

Way Forward

- **Constitutional Amendment:** Amend Article 270 to include a portion of Cesses and Surcharges in the divisible pool.
- **SFC Empowerment:** Strengthening **State Finance Commissions (SFCs)** to ensure the 16th FC's 60:40 rural-urban grant split reaches the grassroots effectively.
- **Dynamic Equalisation:** Moving toward a formula that balances historical backwardness with current fiscal performance and demographic management.

Practice Qs:

Q. "The Sixteenth Finance Commission maintains the 'status quo' on vertical devolution but masks a deeper structural shift in Indian fiscal federalism." Critically analyze. (250 words)