



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 16-02-2026

Mapping Perspective

1. Caribbean Sea

Mains Perspective

2. The Constitution enters the sanctum
3. SEVA Teerth
4. Lead Bank Scheme
5. Centre Approves Wheat Export

Caribbean Sea

Syllabus: Prelims Bits

Context:

US Military's Lethal Kinetic Strike on Narcos Boat in the Caribbean.

Caribbean Region

- The **Caribbean** is a **geographic and cultural region** centered on the **Caribbean Sea**, its islands, and adjacent mainland coasts.
- The term “**West Indies**” is often used interchangeably with the Caribbean islands.
- It includes **thousands of islands, islets, reefs, and cays** — collectively numbering over **7,000**.

Geographic Location

- The Caribbean lies **southeast of the Gulf of Mexico, east of Central America and Mexico, and north of South America**, forming a tropical maritime region.
- It is bounded by the **Atlantic Ocean to the north and east** and the **Caribbean Sea to the south**.
- Major island groupings include:
 - **Greater Antilles:** Cuba, Hispaniola (Haiti + Dominican Republic), Jamaica, Puerto Rico.
 - **Lesser Antilles:** A long arc of smaller islands stretching from the Virgin Islands down to Trinidad and Tobago.
 - **Lucayan Archipelago** (includes the Bahamas and Turks & Caicos), culturally linked but geographically outside the Caribbean Sea proper.



Territorial Composition

- The region comprises about **33 political entities: 13 independent sovereign states**, plus dependencies and overseas territories of the **USA, UK, France, and the Netherlands**.
- Independent nations include:
 - **Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, Saint Lucia, etc.**
- Colonial-era overseas territories still present include:
 - **Puerto Rico (US), Martinique (France), Aruba (Netherlands)**, among others.

Historical Context

- Before European contact, the Caribbean was inhabited by Indigenous peoples such as the **Taíno, Carib, and Arawak**.
- **Christopher Columbus** arrived in 1492, marking the beginning of extended European exploration and colonization.
- European powers (Spain, Britain, France, the Netherlands) competed for control of islands, using **African slave labour** primarily on **sugar and tobacco plantations**.
- The region's history is shaped by:
 - **Colonial rivalry and conflict**
 - The **Atlantic slave trade**
 - Plantation economies and associated social hierarchies
 - Later movements towards national independence.

Cultural and Demographic Features

- Contemporary Caribbean society reflects deep **cultural fusion** — African, European, indigenous, and Asian influences.
- Languages spoken include **Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and various Creoles**.
- The region has diverse musical, culinary, religious, and artistic traditions rooted in this mixture of cultures.

Strategic and Geopolitical Importance

- The Caribbean's **location at the crossroads** of major maritime routes — between the **Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Panama Canal** — makes it important for global trade and naval strategy.

- Historically, it was a centre of colonial competition; in the modern era, it has been strategic in international politics (e.g., Cold War dynamics).
- Contemporary geopolitics includes **regional diplomacy, economic partnerships, and negotiations with larger powers.**

Regional Cooperation

- **Caribbean Community (CARICOM):** A key regional institution promoting **economic integration, foreign policy coordination, and development planning** among member states and associates.
 - Established by the **Treaty of Chaguaramas (1973).**

Key Physical and Environmental Features

- The region's islands vary from **volcanic highlands** to **flat coral islands**, affecting climate, ecosystems, and human settlement.
- Caribbean waters and coral reefs (including large reef systems) are significant for **marine biodiversity and tourism.**
- Tropical climate brings **wet and dry seasons** and a hurricane season, shaping agriculture and habitation.

Contemporary Challenges

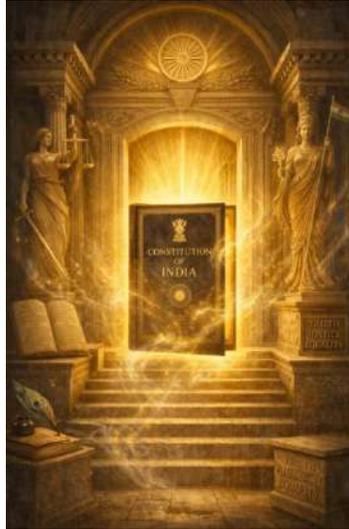
- The Caribbean faces:
 - **Climate vulnerabilities** (hurricanes, rising sea levels)
 - **Economic dependence on tourism and external markets**
 - **Organised crime and drug trafficking routes**
 - Ongoing development and security concerns in some territories.

The Constitution enters the sanctum

Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Constitution – Philosophy of Constitution.

Context:

- Traditionally, the "sanctum sanctorum" (the innermost shrine) was considered a space of pure faith, governed by custom and religious tradition.
- The article argues that the Constitution is no longer just a document for governance and public administration; it has "entered the sanctum," meaning its principles (Equality, Liberty, Dignity) are now being applied to resolve internal religious disputes and customs.



Key Theme: Constitutional Morality vs. Popular/Religious Morality

- **Constitutional Morality:** Refers to the adherence to the core values of the Constitution (Justice, Equality, Fraternity) over traditional or social norms.
- **The Shift:** Courts are increasingly prioritizing Constitutional Morality when religious practices conflict with Fundamental Rights.
- **Core Principle:** No religious practice, however ancient, can supersede the "Basic Structure" or the fundamental rights of individuals (especially Articles 14, 15, and 21).

Critical Constitutional Articles Involved

- **Article 14:** Equality before the law.
- **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
- **Article 21:** Right to life and personal dignity.
- **Articles 25-28 (Freedom of Religion):** * **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion. *Crucially, this is subject to public order, morality, and health.*
 - **Article 26:** Right of religious denominations to manage their own affairs in "matters of religion."

Judicial Tests & Doctrines

- **Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Test:** The judiciary often uses this to determine if a practice is "essential" to the religion. If it is not essential, it can be regulated by the State for social reform.

- **Anti-Exclusion Principle:** A modern judicial approach where the court looks at whether a religious practice results in the exclusion or subordination of a specific group (e.g., women or Dalits), thereby violating their dignity.

Significant Case Studies Mentioned/Relevant

- **Sabarimala Case (2018):** The Supreme Court ruled that the exclusion of women (age 10–50) from the temple was unconstitutional. It asserted that "patriarchy cannot trump freedom of religion."
- **Haji Ali Dargah Case:** The Bombay High Court allowed women entry into the *sanctum sanctorum*, stating that the trust had no power to alter the right of women to visit the grave of a saint.
- **Thiruparankundram Deepathoon Case:** Recent judicial interventions regarding the placement of religious symbols and the balancing of customary traditions with public order and fundamental rights.

Challenges & Arguments

- **Judicial Overreach:** Critics argue that judges (who may not be theologians) should not decide what is "essential" to a faith.
- **Religious Autonomy (Article 26):** Religious denominations claim the right to manage their own internal rituals without State "interference."
- **Secularism (Indian Model):** Unlike the Western model of total separation of Church and State, Indian secularism is "principled distance," where the State can intervene to bring about social reform.

Conclusion: Way Forward

- The "entry of the Constitution into the sanctum" is seen as a step toward **substantive equality**.
- **Balancing Act:** The judiciary must strike a balance between preserving the rich diversity of religious traditions and ensuring that these traditions do not violate the modern ethical standards of the Constitution.
- **Civic Education:** For Constitutional Morality to truly take root, it must move from the courtrooms to the conscience of the citizens.

Practice Qs:

Q. "Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated." Discuss this in light of the recent judicial interventions in religious practices. (15 marks, 250 words)

SEVA Teerth

Syllabus: GS-2: Governance – Infrastrure

Context:

- Inaugurated by **Narendra Modi** on **13 February 2026**.
- Located in the **Central Vista** redevelopment zone, New Delhi.
- Marks a **structural transformation in India's administrative governance architecture**.



Seva Teerth

Key Institutions Housed

- Prime Minister's Office (PMO)
- National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)
- Cabinet Secretariat

These offices were earlier dispersed across multiple buildings in the Central Vista area.

Significance

- Consolidation of apex executive decision-making bodies.
- Enhanced inter-ministerial coordination.
- Improved strategic policy integration and national security management.

Kartavya Bhavan-1 & 2

Ministries Accommodated

- Ministry of Finance

- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
- Ministry of Corporate Affairs
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Law & Justice
- Ministry of Information & Broadcasting
- Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
- Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs

Governance Rationale

- Addresses fragmentation and logistical inefficiencies.
- Reduces administrative delays due to physical separation.
- Enables faster policy convergence and file movement.

Need for the New Complexes

Issues with Earlier Infrastructure

- Dispersed and ageing buildings.
- Rising maintenance costs.
- Operational inefficiencies.
- Coordination challenges among ministries.
- Sub-optimal work environment.

Architectural & Administrative Features

Digital & Functional Features

- Digitally integrated offices.
- Structured public interface zones.
- Centralized reception facilities.
- Smart access control systems.
- Integrated surveillance networks.
- Advanced emergency response infrastructure.

Governance Impact

- Seamless coordination.
- Faster administrative processing.
- Citizen-centric service delivery.
- Improved employee well-being.

Environmental Sustainability

- Designed as per **4-Star GRIHA standards**.
- Renewable energy integration.
- Water conservation mechanisms.
- Scientific waste management.
- High-performance building envelopes.

Aligns with India's climate commitments and green building norms.

Broader Significance

- Symbolic shift from colonial-era infrastructure to modern governance spaces.
- Strengthens executive capacity.
- Enhances administrative efficiency and transparency.
- Part of long-term institutional reform under the Central Vista Redevelopment Project.

Lead Bank Scheme

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy –Banking Sector – Financial Inclusion.

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released draft revised guidelines to comprehensively overhaul the **Lead Bank Scheme (LBS)**.

Background: What is the Lead Bank Scheme?

- **Introduced in 1969** on the recommendations of the Gadgil Study Group.
- Each district is assigned to a specific commercial bank (Lead Bank).
- The Lead Bank coordinates the activities of:
 - Commercial banks

- Cooperative banks
- Government departments
- Development agencies

Core Objective:

To ensure **adequate and timely flow of credit**, especially to:

- Priority sectors
- Agriculture
- MSMEs
- Weaker sections
- Rural and semi-urban areas

Three-Tier Institutional Structure



Block Level – BLBC

- Block Level Bankers' Committees.
- Identify grassroots credit gaps.
- Discuss local issues like KCC, SHG financing, PM schemes.

District Level – DCC & DLRC

- District Consultative Committee (DCC)
- District Level Review Committee (DLRC)
- Prepare and monitor District Credit Plans.
- Review performance under priority sector lending.

State Level – SLBC

- State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) – Apex body.
- Consolidates district plans into State Credit Plan.
- Coordinates with state government on policy issues.

Key Functionaries Under LBS

- **Lead Bank:** Designated by RBI for each district.
- **Lead District Manager (LDM):** Appointed by Lead Bank; coordinates district-level implementation.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD): Appoints District Development Managers (DDMs) to support rural credit and agriculture financing.
- RBI appoints Lead District Officers (LDOs) for regulatory oversight.

What is Changing in the Revised Framework?

Clearer Roles & Accountability

The draft seeks to:

- Clearly define responsibilities of LDMs, SLBC convenor banks, and government officials.
- Strengthen institutional functioning at district and state levels.
- Standardise meeting frequency and agenda structure.

This reduces duplication and improves accountability.

Unified Digital Reporting Portal

- Currently, LBS data is fragmented across platforms.
- RBI proposes a **single unified portal** for reporting bank-wise LBS data.

Expected Benefits:

- Improved data reliability
- Real-time monitoring
- Better identification of low-credit districts

- Evidence-based policy decisions

Credit-Deposit (CD) Ratio Monitoring

- Banks must maintain a **minimum 60% CD ratio** for rural and semi-urban branches (All-India basis).
- Districts with low CD ratios will:
 - Be closely monitored
 - Have special sub-committees
 - Implement time-bound action plans

Why CD Ratio Matters?

- Indicates how much of local deposits are converted into local credit.
- Low CD ratio implies capital outflow and weak local development.

Strengthening Financial Inclusion

The revised LBS aligns with:

- National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI) 2025–30

Key Focus Areas:

- Banking access in unbanked rural centres
- Digital payments adoption
- Sustainable agriculture financing
- MSME credit deepening
- Financial literacy campaigns
- Capacity building of officials

Bottom-Up Credit Planning

The framework emphasizes:

Block-level inputs → District Credit Plan → State Credit Plan

This ensures:

- Local needs are reflected in state and national credit strategies.
- Targeted intervention in low-performing districts.

Significance of the Reform

- Moves LBS from a **procedural committee system** to a **data-driven accountability framework**.

- Enhances coordination between Centre, States, RBI, NABARD, and banks.
- Strengthens rural credit architecture.
- Supports inclusive growth and balanced regional development.
- Improves transparency in credit planning and monitoring.

Centre Approves Wheat Export

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Agriculture

Context:

- **25 LMT** of wheat approved for export.
- **Additional 5 LMT** of wheat products permitted for export.
- Decision described as **calibrated and farmer-centric**.



Stock & Availability Position

- **Private wheat stocks (2025–26): ~75 LMT**
 - ~**32 LMT higher** than corresponding period last year.
- **Projected Central Pool Stock (1 April 2026): ~182 LMT** with Food Corporation of India (FCI).
- Indicates **comfortable supply position** and no threat to food security.

Production Outlook

- **Rabi 2026 wheat acreage: 334.17 lakh hectares**
 - Previous year: 328.04 lakh hectares.

- Higher acreage reflects:
 - Assured **MSP regime**.
 - Strong procurement support.
 - Likely **robust harvest**.

Rationale for Export

- High stock availability.
- Softening domestic prices.
- Prevent distress sale during peak arrivals.
- Ensure stock rotation & liquidity.
- Improve farmer income without compromising food security.

Additional Sugar Export (2025–26 Sugar Season)

Export Policy Update

- Additional **5 LMT sugar export** allowed.
- Earlier approval (14 Nov 2025): **15 LMT** export permitted.
- Total permissible export now: **20 LMT**.

Export Performance (as on 31 Jan 2026)

- Actual exports: **1.97 LMT**
- Contracted exports: **2.72 LMT**

Conditions

- At least **70% of allocated quantity** must be exported by **30 June 2026**.
- Allocation on **pro-rata basis** among willing mills.
- Willingness to be submitted within **15 days**.
- No swapping/exchange of quota among mills.

Objective

- Manage surplus sugar stocks.
- Support sugar mills' liquidity.
- Stabilise domestic sugar prices.

Economic Perspective

- Reflects **counter-cyclical export policy**.
- Balances **price stability + farmer welfare + food security**.
- Demonstrates active use of trade policy as a price management tool.

Institutional Role

- Central pool stocks managed by Food Corporation of India.
- Decisions taken based on buffer norms and market assessment.

Policy Themes

- Market stabilisation through calibrated exports.
- Prevention of distress sale.
- Efficient stock rotation.
- Integration of agriculture with global trade dynamics.