



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 20-03-2026

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Cuba

Syllabus: Prelims Bits – Mapping.

Context:

- Cuba's **national electricity grid collapsed**, leaving ~10 million people without power.
- Highlights **fuel shortages, aging infrastructure, and economic stress** in Cuba.

Background/Context

- Cuba is a **socialist island nation** in the Caribbean; capital: **Havana**.
- Located at the **junction of Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Sea**.
- Part of the **Greater Antilles**; consists of ~1,600 islands, islets, and cays.
- Strategic position near **major maritime routes**.



Key Features/Provisions/Data

- **Political System:** Unitary socialist republic.
- **Physiography:**
 - *Mountains:* Sierra Maestra (highest peak: Turquino, 1,974 m)
 - *Plains:* ~2/3rd area; supports sugarcane & tobacco
 - *Karst Topography:* Mogotes (limestone hills)
 - *Wetlands:* Zapata Swamp (largest in Caribbean)

- **Coastline:** ~5,745 km with coral reefs, mangroves.
- **Energy Crisis Data:** Heavy reliance on **imported fossil fuels**.

Significance/Implications

- **Geopolitical:** Proximity to US & major sea lanes enhances strategic importance.
- **Economic:** Power outages disrupt industry, tourism, and agriculture.
- **Humanitarian:** Large-scale blackouts affect healthcare, water supply, and daily life.
- **Environmental:** Reliance on fossil fuels delays clean energy transition.

Challenges/Issues

- **Aging Power Infrastructure** and limited modernization.
- **Fuel shortages** due to economic sanctions and financial constraints.
- **Overdependence on thermal power plants**.
- **Climate vulnerabilities** (hurricanes damaging grid systems).

Way Forward

- Diversify into **renewable energy** (solar, wind, biomass).
- Upgrade **grid resilience and storage systems**.
- Enhance **international cooperation** for energy investments.
- Promote **energy efficiency and decentralised power systems**.

Performance of IndiaAI Mission

Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity - Parliamentary Standing Committee

Context:

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and IT flagged **persistent underutilisation of funds** and **implementation delays** in flagship tech initiatives, including the **IndiaAI Mission** and the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)**.
- The report was presented in March 2026 during the review of MeitY's Demands for Grants for FY 2026-27.

Background / Context

- **Strategic Shift:** India is pivoting from being a service-oriented IT hub to a "product-nation" focusing on **Sovereign AI** and domestic hardware.

- **The IndiaAI Mission:** Approved in March 2024 with an outlay of **₹10,372 crore** over five years.
- **The Semiconductor Mission:** A **₹76,000 crore** program aimed at making India a global hub for chip manufacturing and design.
- **Current Fiscal Landscape:** MeitY's budget estimate for 2026-27 saw a reduction to **₹21,632.96 crore** (from ₹26,026.25 crore in 2025-26), partly due to the closure of early PLI components.

Key Findings & Data

- **Fund Underutilisation (IndiaAI):** * In 2024-25, actual spending was only **₹19.24 crore** against an allocation of ₹551.75 crore.
 - As of December 31, 2025, only **₹256.86 crore** was spent out of the ₹2,000 crore budgeted for 2025-26.
- **Semiconductor Delays:** Disbursement of fiscal support is lagging because projects are "technology-intensive" and require complex legal agreements and milestone-based conditions.
- **R&D Expenditure:** The panel noted India's R&D spend remains "**abysmal**" at **0.64% of GDP**, far below the US and China (2.5%–5%).
- **Hardware Dependency:** Integrated circuits (ICs) have become India's **third-largest import item**, trailing only crude oil and gold.

Significance / Implications

- **Technological Sovereignty:** Delays in developing a sovereign AI model and indigenous GPU clusters could increase dependency on foreign tech giants.
- **Economic Impact:** AI is projected to add **\$1.7 trillion** to India's economy by 2035; slow implementation may delay these gains.
- **Global Competitiveness:** With the global chip race intensifying, delays in "taping out" (finalizing design for manufacturing) could lead to India losing its early-mover advantage in the Global South.

Challenges / Issues

- **Supply Chain Constraints:** Global shortages and high costs of **Graphics Processing Units (GPUs)**.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Data centres for AI consume massive amounts of **power and water**, creating sustainability hurdles.
- **Complex Compliance:** The "pari-passu" (equal footing) disbursement model in semiconductors requires companies to meet strict investment thresholds before receiving incentives.

- **Interoperability:** Gaps in e-governance systems and cybersecurity risks (e.g., in CERT-In and the Data Protection Board).

Way Forward

- **Expert Consultation:** MeitY should consult with environmentalists and budget experts to address GPU costs and data centre energy needs.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Fast-track the creation of additional posts in **CERT-In** and fully operationalise the **Data Protection Board**.
- **SME Inclusion:** Broaden the IT ecosystem to include underperforming states, particularly in the **Northeast**.
- **R&D Boost:** Operationalise the **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)** to bridge the funding gap in deep-tech research.

National Chambal Sanctuary

Syllabus: GS-3: Protected Areas

Context:

- Also called **National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary**
- **Tri-state riverine sanctuary** across:
 - Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan

Why in News?

- Proposal sent by **Deputy Conservator of Forest (Wildlife)** under Chambal project
- Likely related to **enhanced protection / conservation measures**

Ecological Significance

- **Primary objective:**
 - Protection of **Critically Endangered Gharial**
 - Protection of:
 - Red-crowned roof turtle
 - Ganges river dolphin (Endangered)
- **Largest wild population of Gharials globally**
- Declared **Important Bird Area (IBA)**

Physical Features

- **Topography:** Deep ravines, sandy banks, hills
- **Vegetation:** Falls under **Kathiar-Gir dry deciduous forest ecoregion**

Biodiversity

- **Reptiles:**
 - Gharial, Mugger crocodile
 - 8/26 rare turtle species (e.g., narrow-headed softshell)
- **Mammals:**
 - Striped hyena, Indian wolf, smooth-coated otter
 - Nilgai, chinkara, sambar
- **Others:**
 - Rhesus macaque, langur, mongoose, Bengal fox

Chambal River – Key Facts

- **Tributary of Yamuna River**
- Known as **India's least polluted river**
- **Origin:**
 - Singar Chouri peak, Vindhya range
- **Boundaries:**
 - Vindhyas (S, E, W) and Aravallis (NW)
- **Major tributaries:**
 - Banas, Kali Sindh, Shipra, Parbati
- **Major dams:**
 - Gandhi Sagar, Rana Pratap Sagar, Jawahar Sagar

Washington Consensus

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy – Key Terms.

Context:

Recent global developments, such as protectionism, industrial policy revival, supply chain restructuring, and economic nationalism, have revived debates about the relevance of the WC model.

- Growing debate on decline of neoliberal policies and emergence of alternative models (e.g., **Cornwall Consensus, Beijing Consensus**).
- Shift towards **state intervention, industrial policy, and economic nationalism** globally.

Background/Context

- Coined by **John Williamson (1989)**.
- Policy framework advocated by:
 - International Monetary Fund
 - World Bank
 - US Treasury
- Emerged during **1980s–90s debt crises** in developing countries.

Key Features/Provisions/Data

- Core ideology: **LPG Model**
 - Liberalisation
 - Privatisation
 - Globalisation
- Policy prescriptions:
 - Fiscal discipline, tax reforms
 - Trade liberalisation, FDI openness
 - Deregulation, property rights protection
- Based on **“trickle-down growth” hypothesis**
- Influenced **India’s 1991 BoP reforms**

Significance/Implications

- Enabled **macroeconomic stabilisation** in crisis-hit economies
- Promoted **globalisation & supply chains expansion**
- Accelerated growth in **East Asian economies**
- Institutionalised market-led reforms globally

Challenges/Issues

- **One-size-fits-all approach** ignoring local conditions
- Rising **inequality & social costs** (cuts in subsidies, welfare)

- **Financial crises:**
 - Asian Financial Crisis (1997)
 - Argentina Crisis (2001)
- Limited **policy space** due to IMF conditionalities
- Ignored **industrial policy**, unlike success stories (Japan, South Korea)

Way Forward

- **Calibrated industrial policy** (e.g., PLI schemes)
- Strengthen **supply chain resilience** (friend-shoring)
- Boost **public investment** (PM Gati Shakti, DPI)
- Balance **protectionism with FTAs**
- Promote **Global South agenda** via G20, BRICS
- Invest in **green growth** (National Green Hydrogen Mission)

Conclusion

- WC marked a shift to **market fundamentalism**, but its limitations highlight the need for a **hybrid model combining markets with strategic state intervention**.

War and Its Impact on Environment

Syllabus: GS-3: Environmental Pollution.

Context:

- **The Event:** Following military strikes (attributed to US/Israel) on Iranian oil warehouses and refineries, vast clouds of toxic smoke have triggered "Black Rain" over Tehran and surrounding regions.
- **Nature of the Crisis:** A transboundary environmental disaster that transitions into a long-term public health emergency.

Scientific Dimensions

- **What is Black Rain?** * It is a form of highly acidic precipitation (pH < 5.6).
 - **Formation:** Toxic smoke from burning oil contains **Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)**, **Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x)**, **Hydrocarbons**, and **Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)**. When these combine with atmospheric water vapor, they form sulphuric and nitric acids.

- **Particulate Matter (PM 2.5):** The smoke is rich in fine particles (≤ 2.5 microns) that can bypass the body's natural filters, entering the deep lungs and bloodstream.
- **Bioaccumulation:** Heavy metals like **lead and mercury** from the explosions enter the food chain, leading to long-term issues like DNA damage, cancer, and infertility.

Environmental Impact

- **Soil Degradation:** Acid rain leaches essential nutrients (Calcium, Magnesium) from the soil, weakening vegetation and destroying forest biodiversity.
- **Aquatic Ecosystems:** Acidification of lakes and rivers makes them "lifeless," killing fish and aquatic flora.
- **Historical Precedents: * 1991 Kuwait Oil Fires:** Caused massive land barrenness.
 - **Vietnam War:** Use of **Agent Orange** (chemical defoliant) by US forces, causing multi-generational health defects.

Public Health Crisis

- **Target Population:** 9 million residents of Tehran, already burdened by chronic smog.
- **Health Risks: * Significant increase in asthma and bronchitis.**
 - Doubling the risk of heart attacks.
 - Increased incidence of low birth weight in newborns.
 - Long-term risk of lung cancer.

Global & Regional Implications (GS II: IR)

- **Transboundary Pollution:** Wind knows no borders. Pollutants can travel thousands of kilometers.
 - **Impact on India:** Strong **Jet Streams** can carry fine toxic particles toward Indian states like **Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Punjab**. Middle Eastern dust and pollutants have historically traversed the Arabian Sea to hit India.
 - **Immediate Neighbors:** Direct spillover to Balochistan (Pakistan), Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan.
- **Energy Security:** The conflict has disrupted LPG and fuel supplies, leading to "inflation shocks" in countries like India.

Legal & Policy Gaps

- **Geneva Conventions:** Currently focus on humanitarian treatment of people. There is a "legal void" regarding **environmental safeguards** during warfare.
- **Ecocide:** The article highlights the need for international prosecution of environmental crimes (Ecocide).

Way Forward / Recommendations

- **International Intervention:** Urgent air surveillance and soil remediation by **UNEP (UN Environment Programme)** and **WHO (World Health Organization)**.
- **Legal Reform:** Extension of the Geneva Conventions to include eco-safeguards.
- **Climate Peace Fund:** Proposed for green reconstruction of war-torn areas.
- **India's Strategy:** * Improve border vigilance and early warning systems before the monsoon.
 - Address energy security/LPG anxiety through strategic reserves and diplomacy.

Mains Practice Question

"Modern warfare is no longer limited to territorial gains but extends to 'Ecocide' with transboundary consequences. Discuss the environmental and health impacts of the 'Black Rain' crisis in Iran and suggest international legal measures to prevent such ecological disasters." (250 Words)