



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 21-02-2026

Mapping Perspective

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5. SC slaps states on freebies

Finland

Syllabus: Prelims Bits - Mapping

Context:

- Finland's Prime Minister emphasised **India-Finland cooperation** for **resilient, sustainable and human-centric technological progress**.

Finland at a Glance

Aspect	Details
Location	Northern Europe (Nordic region)
Borders	Norway (N), Sweden (NW), Russia (E)
Water Bodies	Gulf of Finland (S), Gulf of Bothnia (SW), Baltic Sea
Capital	Helsinki
Membership	European Union (EU), NATO (joined 2023)



Geography & Resources

Feature	Details
Climate	Cold continental–subarctic; long severe winters ($\approx -30^{\circ}\text{C}$ in north)
Terrain	Heavily forested, marshlands, glacial landscape
Lakes	$\sim 56,000$ lakes — “Land of Thousand Lakes”
Largest Lake	Lake Saimaa
Highest Point	Mount Halti (1,328 m)
Natural Resources	Copper, iron ore, nickel, cobalt, chromium

Dibang Multipurpose Project

Syllabus: GS-1 Geography – Water Resource.

Context:

Milestone achieved: Successful **daylighting of Diversion Tunnel-3 (DT-3)** at the under-construction **2,880 MW Dibang Multipurpose Hydrel Project** in Arunachal Pradesh.

Location & Nature

- Located on the **Dibang River**, a tributary of the **Brahmaputra**, in **Arunachal Pradesh**.
- **Flood moderation + hydropower + storage project** with multipurpose benefits.

Capacity & Implementing Agency

- **Installed capacity: 2,880 MW**— **largest hydropower project in India**.
- **Developer:** National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC).

Major Objectives

- Power generation and **energy storage**.
- **Flood control** in downstream Brahmaputra basin.
- Enhancement of regional infrastructure and grid stability.

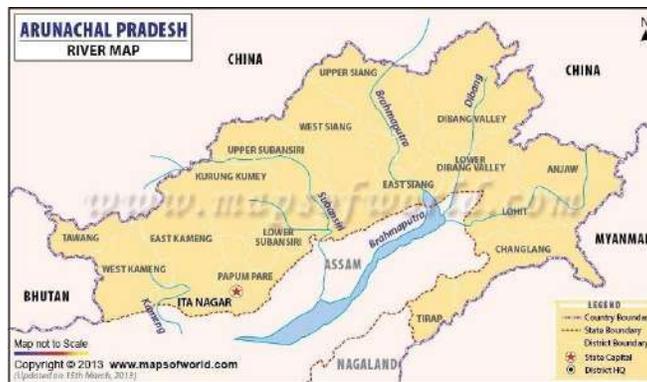
Important Technical Features

- **Dam type:** Concrete gravity dam.
- **Height: 278 m** — highest concrete gravity dam in India.

- **Construction technique: Roller Compacted Concrete (RCC)** — expected to be world's highest RCC dam.
- **Reservoir:**
 - Length — ~43 km
 - Gross storage — 3.85 BCM

Tunnel & Power Infrastructure

- **Six headrace tunnels:** 300–600 m length, ~9 m diameter.
- **Underground powerhouse** with six generating units.
- **Six tailrace tunnels:** 320–470 m length, ~9 m diameter.



Characterising Exoplanet Satellite Cheops

Syllabus: GS-3: Science and Technology –Space Exploration.

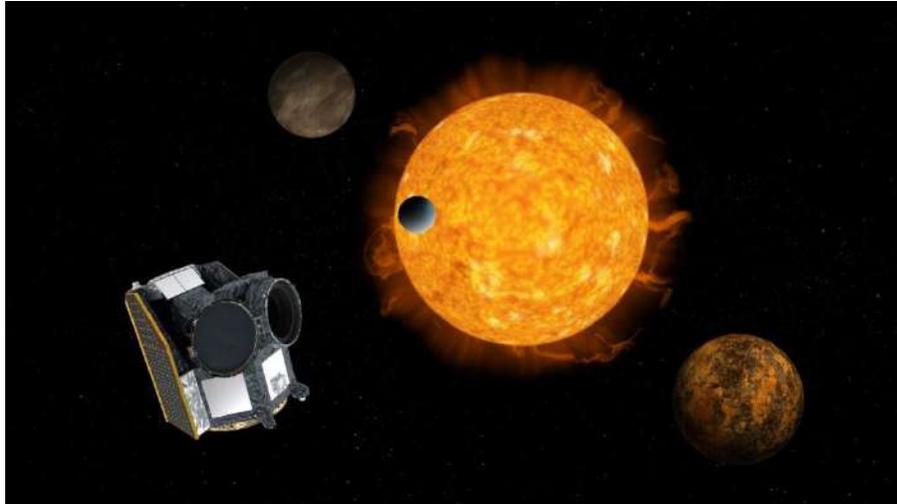
Context:

- ESA's CHEOPS mission has identified a **four-planet system** where the **outermost planet is small and rocky**, challenging the common expectation that outer planets are typically gas giants.
- The discovery improves understanding of **planetary system formation and diversity**.

About CHEOPS

- **Mission:** A space telescope of the European Space Agency dedicated to **precision characterization of known exoplanets**.
- **Objective:** Study **bright, nearby stars already hosting exoplanets** to determine accurate planetary sizes through transit photometry.

- **Launch: 18 December 2019.**
- **Orbit: Sun-synchronous dusk-dawn orbit (~700 km altitude)** enabling continuous observation and thermal stability.



Key Scientific Features

- **Target range:** Focuses on planets in the **super-Earth to Neptune size category**.
- **Instrument:**
 - Single high-precision **photometer camera** for transit observations.
- **Methodology:**
 - Measures the **dip in starlight** when a planet transits its host star.
 - Determines **planetary radius with ~10% accuracy**.

Scientific Significance

- When CHEOPS radius data is combined with **mass measurements from ground-based telescopes**, scientists can compute **planetary density**.
- Density helps infer:
 - Rocky vs gaseous composition
 - Presence of thick atmospheres
 - Possibility of water-rich or ocean worlds
- Contributes to understanding **planetary interiors, migration, and system architecture**.

Sabarimala Verdict Review: Supreme Court to Revisit 2018 Women's Entry Judgment

Syllabus: GS-2: Judiciary – Judgements.

Context:

- The Supreme Court will hear **review petitions from April 7** before a **nine-judge Constitution Bench** against the **2018 judgment permitting entry of women of all ages** into Sabarimala.
- The 2018 verdict triggered **large-scale protests** during the 41-day pilgrimage season in Kerala.
- The issue remains **politically sensitive**, particularly with upcoming Assembly elections.
- The **Kerala government supports women's entry** (2017 affidavit) but awaits the Court's final determination.

Location & Significance of Temple

- Located in **Periyar Tiger Reserve, Western Ghats, Kerala**.
- Among the **largest annual pilgrimages in the world**.

Deity

- Dedicated to **Lord Ayyappa** — believed to be the son of **Lord Shiva and Mohini (Vishnu's female avatar)**.

Unique Religious Practices

- Devotees undertake **41-day penance (Vratham)** involving:
 - Celibacy, austerity, and vegetarianism
 - Renunciation of material comforts
- Ayyappa is worshipped as a **Naishtika Brahmachari (eternal celibate)**.

Traditional Entry Restriction

- Women aged **10–50 years** were traditionally barred to preserve the deity's celibate nature.

Judicial & Legal Timeline

1990–91: Kerala High Court Judgment

- Petition challenged the entry of women violating temple custom.
- **1991 HC verdict upheld the ban**, declaring it a valid religious practice.
- Directed **Travancore Devaswom Board** to strictly enforce the restriction.

2006: Supreme Court Challenge

- **Indian Young Lawyers Association** filed petition under **Article 32**.
- Challenged **Rule 3(b), Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship Rules, 1965**.

Grounds of Challenge

- **Article 14** – Equality before law
- **Article 15** – Non-discrimination on grounds of sex
- **Article 25** – Freedom of religion
- **Article 51A(e)** – Fundamental duty to renounce practices derogatory to women

2018: Landmark Constitution Bench Verdict (4:1 Majority)

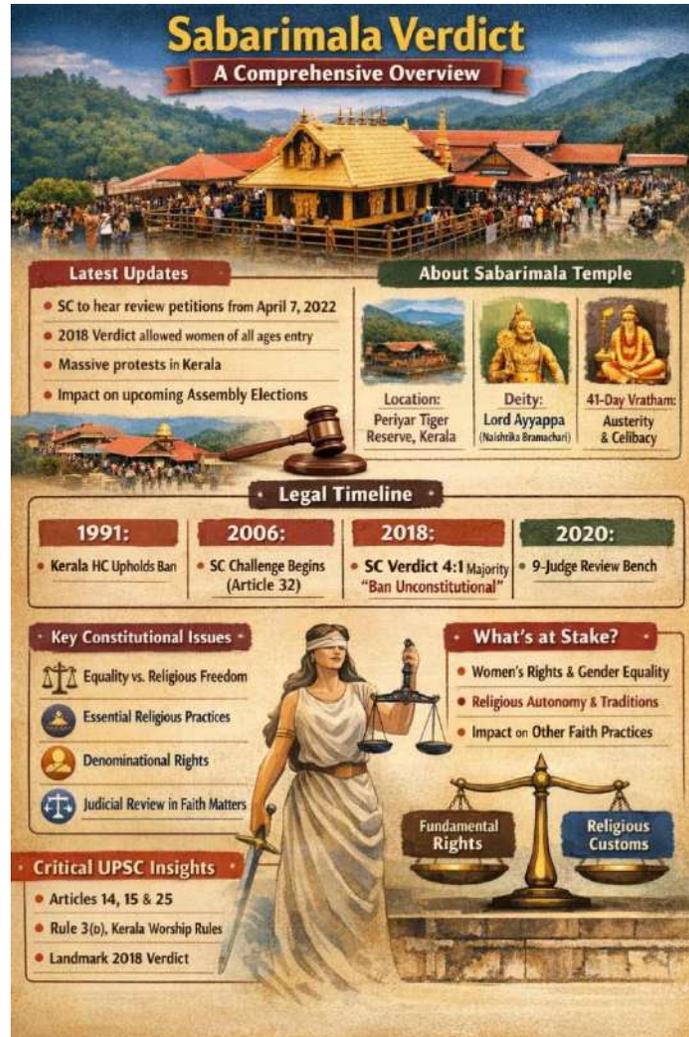
- Declared exclusion of women **unconstitutional**.
- **Rule 3(b) struck down**.
- Key principle: **Custom cannot override Fundamental Rights**.
- Led to **widespread protests and review petitions**.

2019: Reference to Larger Bench

- Supreme Court noted **wider implications for other religious practices**.
- Referred constitutional issues to a **larger bench (≥7 judges)**.
- **2018 verdict not stayed**.

2020: Maintainability of Review Petitions

- Nine-judge bench held **review petitions maintainable**.
- Framed **seven constitutional questions** concerning:
 - Essential religious practices
 - Scope of judicial review in religious matters
 - Balance between equality and religious freedom



SC slaps states on freebies

Syllabus: GS-2: Freebies vs Welfare measures.

Context:

- The Supreme Court delivered strong observations against indiscriminate distribution of **universal subsidies/freebies** by states.
- Remarks came during hearing of a petition linked to **free electricity proposal by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Ltd** and challenge to provisions of the **Electricity Amendment Rules, 2024**.
- The Court highlighted concerns of **fiscal stress, declining work incentives, and impact on long-term economic development**.

Key Observations of the Supreme Court

- **Distinction between welfare and freebies**
 - Welfare support for **economically vulnerable groups** is legitimate.
 - However, **universal benefits without income differentiation** raise concerns of equity and fiscal prudence.
- **Fiscal sustainability concerns**
 - Many Indian states are **revenue-deficit** yet continue large-scale subsidy commitments.
 - Excessive subsidies may crowd out **capital expenditure and development spending**.
- **Impact on work culture and productivity**
 - Continuous unconditional benefits may weaken **labour participation incentives**.
 - Court emphasised need for **employment generation over entitlement expansion**.
- **Populism and electoral politics**
 - Court indirectly cautioned against **competitive populism and appeasement politics** influencing fiscal decisions.
- **State expenditure pattern**
 - Observation that state finances often get dominated by:
 - Salaries and pensions
 - Subsidies and transfers
 - → leaving limited space for infrastructure and growth-oriented investment.

Case-specific Issues

- Tamil Nadu power utility proposed **free electricity to all consumers irrespective of paying capacity**.
- The utility challenged certain provisions under the **Electricity Amendment Rules, 2024**.
- Supreme Court issued notice to the Centre and questioned the **timing of subsidy expansion after tariff notification**.

Supreme Court on 'Freebies' Culture in India
Warning Against Indiscriminate Subsidies & Their Impact

Key Concerns

- Fiscal Stress
- Weakened Work Incentives
- Populism & Politics
- Reduced Development Spending
- Development Spending

Case in Focus: Tamil Nadu Power Subsidy

- Free Electricity to All Consumers
- Challenge to Electricity Amendment Rules 2024

Constitutional & Economic Dimensions

DPSPs & Welfare Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none">Article 38, 39, 41	Fiscal Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none">Revenue Deficits & Debts	Work vs. Welfare Balance <ul style="list-style-type: none">Employment vs. Handouts?
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Way Forward

Targeted Welfare Schemes	Boost Job Creation
Improve Fiscal Discipline	Enhance Transparency

Constitutional & Governance Dimensions

➤ **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs)**

- Article 38 — Social order based on justice.
- Article 39 — Reduction of inequalities.
- Article 41 & 47 — Public assistance and welfare obligations.

➤ **Fiscal federalism concerns**

- State autonomy in welfare spending vs need for **macroeconomic stability**.
- Role of **Finance Commission and FRBM norms** in ensuring fiscal discipline.

➤ **Judicial restraint vs policy domain**

- Courts generally avoid interfering in economic policy but may intervene where **arbitrariness, fiscal irresponsibility, or constitutional concerns** arise.

Economic Implications of Freebies

Positive aspects

- Poverty alleviation and social protection.
- Human capital support (education, food, health).
- Political inclusion of marginalised groups.

Negative aspects

- Fiscal stress and rising public debt.
- Reduced capital expenditure.
- Distortion of market pricing and resource allocation.
- Risk of dependency and reduced work incentives.

Way Forward

- Shift from **universal subsidies** → **targeted, DBT-based welfare**.
- Strengthening **means-testing and beneficiary identification**.
- Balancing **welfare commitments with fiscal responsibility**.
- Greater transparency in **subsidy accounting and off-budget borrowing**.
- Focus on **job creation, skilling, and productivity-enhancing expenditure**.