



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 27-03-2026

Mapping Perspective

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Prelims Perspective

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Mains Perspective

4. SC judgment on religious conversion
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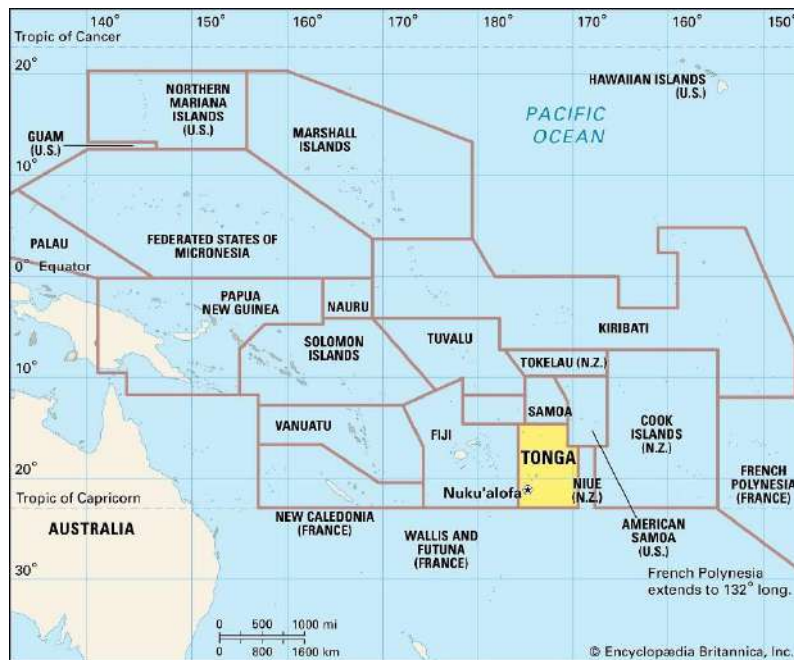
Tonga

Syllabus: Prelims Bits – Mapping.

Context:

- Recently, a **strong preliminary magnitude 7.6 earthquake** struck near **Tonga in the South Pacific Ocean**
- Highlights the **seismic vulnerability of island nations** located along tectonically active zones in the Pacific region

About Tonga



Location and Political Status

- It is a **sovereign country in Polynesia**, composed of an **archipelago of 169 islands** located in the **South Pacific Ocean**
- Neighbouring countries include:
 - **Fiji** to the west
 - **Cook Islands** to the east
 - **Samoa** to the north

Island Groups

- These islands are divided into three main groups:
 - **Tongatapu** in the south

- **Ha'apai** in the center
- **Vava'u** in the north

Geological Composition

- The **western islands** (making up the *Tongan Volcanic Arch*) are **all of volcanic origin**
- The **eastern islands** are **non-volcanic**, composed of **coral limestone and sand**

Capital City

- The capital city of Tonga is **Nuku'alofa**, situated on the **northern shore of Tongatapu Island**

Geographical Features of Tonga

Terrain

- It features **flat terrain with limestone and coral formations**
- Mostly **flat islands with limestone bedrock** formed from **uplifted coral formation**
- Some islands have **limestone overlying volcanic rock**

Highest Point

- The highest point in this region is **Kao Island** in the **Ha'apai group**

Environmental and International Engagement

- Tonga is a member of:
 - Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance
 - Marine Protected Areas Action Groups

Helium

Syllabus: Prelims Bits – General Science.

Context:

- India's semiconductor and printed circuit board (PCB) industry is **bracing for potential disruption in helium supplies**
- Trigger: **Iran's attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG hub**
- Indicates **strategic vulnerability of critical industrial gases** in global geopolitics

About Helium

- It is an **inert gas** and **does not react with other substances or combust**
- Discovered in **1868** by **Jules Janssen and Norman Lockyer**
 - Detection: **Yellow spectral line during a solar eclipse**
- Named after the Greek word '**Helios**' (**Sun**)

Properties of Helium

- **Atomic number: 2**
 - Second lightest element after hydrogen
- **Very low boiling point: -268.9°C**
 - Remains a **gas even in super-cold environments**
- **Non-toxic gas**
 - However, **cannot be breathed alone** as it displaces oxygen required for respiration
- **Unique physical property**
 - Only element that **cannot be solidified by sufficient cooling at normal atmospheric pressure**
- **Global reserves**
 - Largest reserves: **United States, Algeria, Russia**
- **India-specific occurrence**
 - **Rajmahal Volcanic Basin (Jharkhand)**
 - Contains helium **trapped for billions of years**

Applications of Helium

- **Pressurizing Fuel Tanks**
 - Ensures **continuous fuel flow** to rocket engines
- **Cooling Systems**
 - Used in **cooling systems of rockets**

Significance

- **Strategic Resource**
 - Critical for **semiconductor manufacturing, space technology, and defence**

- **Supply Chain Risk**
 - Concentrated reserves + geopolitical tensions → **potential supply disruptions**
- **India's Opportunity**
 - Exploration of **domestic reserves (Rajmahal Basin)** can enhance **self-reliance**
- **Linkages**
 - Important for topics: **Critical minerals, semiconductor ecosystem, energy geopolitics**

National Biodiversity Authority

Syllabus: GS-3: Environmental Institutes

Context:

- The **National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)** launched a **short-term Internship Programme (up to 3 months)**
- Target group:
 - Students undergoing **graduation / post-graduation**

About National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)

- It is a **statutory body** established under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**
- It was formally set up in **2003**
- **Headquarters:** Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Core Functions

- The NBA performs:
 - Facilitative functions
 - Regulatory functions
 - Advisory functions
- Key areas of work:
 - Conservation of biodiversity
 - Sustainable use of biological resources

- Fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from biological resources

Composition of National Biodiversity Authority

Chairperson

- An **eminent person** with:
 - Proven knowledge and experience in:
 - Biodiversity conservation
 - Sustainable use of biological resources
 - Equitable sharing of benefits

Ex-officio Members (10)

- Senior representatives from the **Government of India**
- Nominated to:
 - Provide **policy insights**
 - Ensure **inter-ministerial coordination**

Non-Official Members (5)

- Experts and professionals from diverse fields related to biodiversity management
- Nominated to:
 - Contribute **independent perspectives**
 - Provide **specialized expertise**

Administrative Structure of NBA

State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs)

- Function at the **state level**
- Role:
 - **Regulate access** to biological resources within their jurisdiction

Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)

- Established at the **local (village / panchayat) level**
- Role:
 - Promote **grassroots-level biodiversity conservation**
 - Facilitate **documentation of biodiversity**

SC judgment on religious conversion

Syllabus: GS-2: SC judgements.

Context:

- The Supreme Court ruled that a person who has converted to Christianity **cannot continue to claim Scheduled Caste (SC) protections.**
- The Court upheld the Andhra Pradesh High Court's order in this regard.
- The issue lies at the intersection of:
 - **Constitutional Design** – SC status is a legal-social identity tied to specific religions under the 1950 Order
 - **Ground Reality** – Caste-based discrimination persists even after conversion, particularly among Dalit Christians

Supreme Court's Key Observations

- A person cannot simultaneously:
 - Profess and practice a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism
 - Claim membership of a Scheduled Caste
- The restriction is:
 - **"Absolute" with "no exceptions"**
 - The two positions are **mutually exclusive and contrary to the Constitutional scheme**

Nature of SC Status Loss

- Loss of SC status upon conversion is:
 - **Instant (not gradual)**
 - "Caste status... stood eclipsed in the eyes of law"

Meaning of "Profess" (Constitutional Interpretation)

- "Profess" does not mean:
 - Mere private belief or personal conviction
- It requires:
 - **Outward, public manifestation of faith**
- Example:
 - Acting as a pastor (leading prayers, organising gatherings) is **conclusive proof of religious identity**

Legal Basis of the Judgment

Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950

- Issued under **Article 341**
- Paragraph 3 states:
 - No person professing a religion other than **Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist** shall be deemed SC
- Conversion acts as:
 - **Legal cut-off point for SC status**

Constitutional Provisions

- **Article 366(24):**
 - Defines SCs as groups notified by the President
- **Article 341:**
 - Empowers President to specify SCs
- Together:
 - Create a **self-reinforcing framework limiting SC status to specific religions**

SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act

- Adopts same definition as Constitution
- Therefore:
 - Religious restriction on SC status extends to:
 - **Protections and remedies under the Act**

Distinction: Scheduled Castes vs Scheduled Tribes

Scheduled Castes (SC)

- Identity is:
 - **Religion-linked**
- Conversion:
 - Leads to **loss of legal status**

Scheduled Tribes (ST)

- Identity is based on:
 - **Community, customs, and social recognition**

- Religion:
 - **Not a determining factor**
- Hence:
 - Conversion does **not automatically remove ST status**

Case Study: Pastor Chintada Anand Paul vs State

Facts of the Case

- Complaint filed alleging:
 - Caste-based abuse and related offences
- Case registered under:
 - SC/ST Act + IPC provisions

Argument of the Accused

- Complainant:
 - Had converted to Christianity
 - Was functioning as a pastor
- Therefore:
 - **Not eligible for SC status or SC/ST Act protection**

Core Legal Question

- Whether SC protections:
 - Continue after voluntary religious conversion

Andhra Pradesh High Court Ruling (April 2025)

- Held that:
 - **“Caste system is alien to Christianity”**
 - SC/ST Act is:
 - Protective legislation exclusively for SC/ST members
- Therefore:
 - Converted Christian:
 - **Falls outside SC definition**
 - **Cannot invoke SC/ST Act**

Overall Legal Conclusion

- SC identity is:
 - **Inseparable from religious identity (as per law)**
- Conversion results in:
 - Termination of:
 - SC status
 - Associated legal protections
- Framework establishes:
 - Strict constitutional linkage between caste status and religion

Practice Qs:

Q. Critically examine whether denial of Scheduled Caste status after religious conversion aligns with constitutional principles of equality and social justice. (15 marks, 250 words)

CJI recusal and judicial ethics

Syllabus: GS-2: Judiciary & GS-4: Ethics and Integrity - Conflict of interest

Context:

- Recently, **CJI Surya Kant recused himself** from hearing petitions challenging the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023**.
- The Act replaced the **CJI with a Union Minister** in the appointment panel, superseding the **Supreme Court's 2023 interim arrangement**.
- The case: **Dr. Jaya Thakur v. Union of India (2024)**.
- Reason cited: **Potential conflict of interest**.
- Directed listing before a bench **not in the line of succession to CJI**.
- Notably:
 - **Second consecutive recusal** in same case
 - Earlier, **CJI Sanjiv Khanna also recused (2024)**

Doctrine of Recusal: Foundations

- Rooted in **natural justice principle**:
 - *Nemo judex in causa sua* → “No one shall be a judge in their own cause”
- Objective:

- Ensure **absence of bias/conflict of interest**
- Justice must **not only be done but seen to be done**

Evolution of Recusal Standards in India

- **Manak Lal v. Dr. Prem Chand (1957)**
 - Established **strict disqualification** for pecuniary interest
- **Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India (1987)**
 - Introduced **reasonable apprehension of bias** test
 - Not mere possibility, but **reasonable perception** matters
- **Overall Evolution**
 - From **rigid financial interest test** → **perception-based standard**
 - Focus on what a **reasonable person would think**

Who Decides Recusal?

- Key feature of Indian system:
 - Decision rests on **judge's own conscience**
- Implications:
 - No party can **compel recusal**
 - No statutory framework governing it

NJAC Case (2015): Key Precedent

- Case: **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (2015)**
- Issue: Challenge to **NJAC Act, 2014** (replacement of Collegium)

Recusal Demand

- Against **Justice J.S. Khehar**
- Ground: Future CJI → **institutional stake**

Refusal Grounds

- **Universal Conflict**
 - Conflict affects **all judges equally**
- **Doctrine of Necessity**
 - When entire institution is conflicted:
 - Court must still decide

- **Institutional obligation overrides conflict**

Transparency Principle

- Justice Kurian Joseph:
 - Judges must **state reasons for recusal**
 - Linked to **constitutional oath (Third Schedule)**

Present Case: Critical Analysis

- Under **Second Judges Case (seniority convention)**:
 - Every SC judge is a **potential future CJI**
- Therefore:
 - **Conflict is universal**, not individual

Implication

- As per NJAC precedent:
 - **Doctrine of Necessity should apply**
 - Court must hear the case despite conflict

Conclusion

- CJI Surya Kant's recusal:
 - Seen as **departure from NJAC principle**
 - Universal conflict ≠ valid ground for recusal

Problematic Aspects of Current Approach

- Direction to exclude judges in line to become CJI:
 - **Violates principle of individual judicial conscience**
- Institutional inconsistency:
 - If CJI recuses due to conflict:
 - How can he **decide bench composition as Master of Roster?**

Structural Gaps in India

- No:
 - Statute governing recusal
 - Binding code of conduct
 - Mechanism to review recusal decisions

- Result:
 - Recusal remains **subjective and discretionary**

Comparative Perspective (USA)

- **Section 455, Title 28 (US Code):**
 - Provides **codified and objective standards** for recusal

Significance of Current Case

- Two successive CJIs recusing:
 - Highlights **institutional vacuum**
- Critical issue:
 - **Appointment of Election Commissioners** (core to democracy)
- Risk:
 - Decisions shaped by **informal practices rather than rules**

Way Forward

- Need to:
 - Transform **judicial discretion** → **enforceable framework**
- Essential elements:
 - Codification of recusal standards
 - Transparency in decisions
 - Consistency across benches
 - Accountability mechanisms

Conclusion

- While judicial conscience is vital, **institutional integrity requires structured norms.**
- A codified recusal framework is essential for **credibility, impartiality, and constitutional governance.**

Practice Qs:

Q. Discuss challenges of judicial recusal in India, analysing absence of statutory framework, scope for subjectivity, and implications for judicial independence and institutional integrity. (15 marks, 250 words)