Current Edge: Daily Brief | 18th September 2025

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THE BIG PICTURE

QUOTES OF THE DAY

"The single raindrop never feels responsible for the flood." **– DOUGLAS ADAMS**

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The interim government, inherently weak as it is, cannot provide the long-term stability needed to tackle these challenges. Public confidence in governance in general seems quite low. The cost of a delayed democratic transition has also been evident in rising social unrest." – **THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH**

News / Explained / Explained History / Tracing history of Sarnath: from Buddha's first sermon to emblem of Indian republic

Tracing history of Sarnath: from Buddha's first sermon to emblem of Indian republic

Earlier this year, India officially nominated Sarnath for the UNESCO World Heritage List for the 2025-26 cycle. We take a brief look at its history

IE Explained; By Arjun Sengupta;
Syllabus: Pre/Mains – History Link

EXPRESS explained.
HISTORY

Why in News?
India nominated **Sarnath** for **UNESCO World Heritage List (2025-26 cycle)**; ASI to install corrected plaque crediting **Babu Jagat Singh (1787-88)** for rediscovery.

Origins & Early History
- **Buddha's first sermon**: c. 528 BCE, Mrigadava/Rishipatana
- **Formation of Sangha** (first Buddhist community)
- **Ashoka (268–232 BCE)**: lion capital pillar (now Indian emblem), Dhamek Stupa, monasteries, pilgrimage centre
- Pre-Ashokan habitation evidence

Later Patronage & Decline
- **Kushana (1st–4th CE)** & **Gupta (3rd–6th CE)**: refurbishments, new structures
- Flourishing monastic centre till 12th CE
- **Destruction (12th CE)**:
  - Likely 1193, Qutb-ud-din Aibek invasion → temples destroyed, monks fled
  - Alternative theory: mid-12th CE Saivite temple project (unfinished) → later Muslim invasion
- Site abandoned ~7 centuries; Buddhism declined in India

Sarnath
The Ancient Buddhist Site, Moves Closer to UNESCO World Heritage Status

Rediscovery & Excavations
- **1787-88**: Jagat Singh's workers uncover relics while digging for Jagatganj market
- **1799**: Jonathan Duncan reports findings
- **1835–36**: Alexander Cunningham excavations, statues removed, site identified as Buddha's first sermon location
- **1904–05**: Friedrich Oertel systematic excavation → 476 relics, 41 inscriptions
- Sarnath established as major archaeological & religious site

Modern Importance
- Among **four holiest Buddhist sites** (with Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Kushinagar)
- **National emblem**: Lion Capital of Ashoka
- **Tourism & Pilgrimage**: ~8.4 lakh visitors (2024–25)

- Pending **World Heritage status** (27 years on tentative list)

Test Your Knowledge 01

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Sarnath:
1) It is the place where the Buddha delivered his first sermon and the Sangha was formed.
2) The Lion Capital of Ashoka at Sarnath is the National Emblem of India.
3) The Dhamek Stupa at Sarnath is believed to mark the exact spot of Buddha's Mahaparinirvana.
4) Sarnath remained a thriving monastery until the 12th century CE.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Hint: Mahaparinirvana took place at Kushinagar, not Sarnath.

Shashi Tharoor writes: Rethinking capitalism and socialism in India and beyond

When young people in Noida or New York question capitalism, they are not necessarily calling for collectivised farms or five-year plans. They are expressing a yearning for fairness, for dignity, for a system that does not leave them behind

IE Explained; By Sashi Tharoor;
Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Society Link

Why in News?
Shashi Tharoor writes on capitalism vs socialism in India and globally, amid rising youth dissatisfaction with capitalism.

Global Debate
- **Gallup Poll (US)**: Only 54% positive on capitalism (lowest ever); rising support for socialism, esp. youth.
- **Zohran Mamdani**: Democratic Socialist, NY mayoral front-runner, immigrant & underclass appeal.
- **Generational divide**: Republicans → capitalism; Democrats/young → socialism.
- **Youth discontent**: Capitalism = rigged for rich; socialism = fairness, dignity, security.

Indian Context
- **Nehruvian socialism**: State-led dev., PSUs, planned economy, foreign investment cautious. Goal = self-reliance + equity.
- **1991 reforms**: Crisis-driven liberalisation; market growth, FDI, tech boom, middle-class rise.
- **Post-reforms issues**: Inequality, jobless growth, corporate concentration, farmers' protests, gig workers, youth unemployment.
- **Hybrid model**: Private hospitals + Ayushman Bharat, MNCs + PDS, billionaires + MGNREGA, welfare + startups.

Key Arguments
- **Not binary**: Most nations = hybrids (markets + welfare).
- **Pragmatism**: State provides public goods (edu, health, food) out of necessity, not ideology.
- **Discontent = fairness demand**: Youth seek opportunity, dignity, protection from misfortune.
- **Historic parallels**: Post-WWII welfare states; NHS (Bevan: healthcare not commodity). India → public edu, cooperatives, rural dev.
- **Modern framing**: Outcomes > ideology. Questions: Does system deliver, protect vulnerable, reward effort fairly?
- **Right-wing critique**: Socialism → dictatorship (Venezuela, Stalin).
- **Left critique**: Capitalism = exploitative; ignores welfare, regulation, redistribution already present.

India-Specific Complexities
- **Identity politics**: Caste, region, religion shape opportunity, social justice.
- **Colonial legacy**: Institutional scars persist.
- **Regional variations**: Different meanings of social justice across states.

Way Forward
- **Balance, not purity**: Efficiency + empathy, innovation + inclusion.
- **Dissatisfaction = engagement**: Demand for change, not rejection of system.
- **Continuum, not binary**: India to find middle path on capitalism–socialism spectrum.
- **Moral complexity**: Economic choices guided by lived realities, not dogma.

Why in News?
SC (15 Sept 2025) stayed select provisions of **Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025**, citing risk to property rights & minority autonomy.

Waqf Law & 2025 Amendments
- **Waqf**: Permanent charitable endowment under Islamic law.
- **Key amendments**:
  - Collector power to decide govt vs waqf land.
  - Only property owner + practising Muslim (≥5 yrs) can create waqf.
  - Abolition of "waqf by user."
  - Non-Muslim representation on Waqf Boards/Council; CEO need not be Muslim.
  - Central digital registration of properties.
  - Limitation Act applicability.

Grounds of Challenge
- **Article 26**: Right to manage religious affairs.
- **Article 30**: Minority right to manage institutions.
- Arbitrary 5-yr practising Islam clause.
- Collector powers violate separation of powers.
- Non-Muslim inclusion undermines autonomy.
- Deletion of waqf by user → loss of traditional recognition.

SC Interim Order
Stayed
- Collector's unilateral inquiry into waqf property (Sec 3C).
- Automatic loss of waqf status once inquiry begins.
- 5-yr practising Islam requirement → suspended till rules framed.
- Cap on non-Muslims: max 4 in Central Council, 3 in State Boards.
- Advisory: CEO of Waqf Board preferably Muslim.

- Waqf cannot cover ST land, protected monuments.

The Interim Order at a Glance

No Blanket Stay: The bench, headed by CJI B R Gavai, refused to stay the entire Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

Presumption of Constitutionality: The court cited the legal principle that a law passed by Parliament is presumed to be constitutional and can only be stayed in the "rarest of rare cases."

However, the court found that a "prima facie" case was made to put some specific, contentious sections on hold to provide protection.

FILE PHOTO

What Has Been Stayed?

PTI

'Practicing Muslim' Clause: The requirement for a person to be a "practicing Muslim for the last five years" to dedicate a property as Waqf. The court noted the lack of a mechanism to determine this could lead to arbitrary decisions.

Collector's Power to Adjudicate: The power given to a government officer (Collector) to declare a property as government land and alter revenue records. The court said this violates the separation of powers.

Waqf Status Pending Report: The clause stating a property would not be deemed Waqf until an officer's report confirmed there was no encroachment.

FILE PHOTO

Upheld
- Abolition of waqf by user (prospective).
- Central digital registration of properties.

- Limitation Act, 1963, applies to waqf properties.
- Dedication allowed only from one's own property.

Limitations on Non-Muslim Participation

While not staying the provisions, the court imposed limitations on the composition of Waqf bodies:

- **Central Waqf Council:** Should not have more than four non-Muslim members out of a total of 20.
- **State Waqf Boards:** Should not have more than three non-Muslim members out of a total of 11.
- **CEO Appointment:** The court said that "as far as possible," efforts should be made to appoint a CEO from the Muslim community.

FILE PHOTO

Broader Implications

- **Minority Rights**: Balancing autonomy vs transparency; intrusion fears remain.
- **Separation of Powers**: Judicial check on executive property adjudication.
- **Religious Freedom**: 5-yr clause risks policing religiosity; subject to future scrutiny.
- **Accountability**: Digital registry, limitation law → transparency, curb misuse.
- **Pluralism**: Limited non-Muslim representation—oversight vs autonomy tension.
- **Property & Tribal Rights**: Protection for ST land, monuments reaffirmed.

Test Your Knowledge 02
Q2. The "Waqf by user" doctrine, recently in news, refers to:
(a) Recognition of land as waqf based solely on continuous religious or charitable use, even without formal deed.
(b) Dedication of property by any Muslim, regardless of ownership, through oral declaration.

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(c) Automatic vesting of any unused land in the Waqf Board.

(d) Government's power to reassign waqf land for public use after prolonged non-use.

Hint: Historical recognition principle, now abolished prospectively.

India's Census delay and the problem of unequal representation

Parliament must introduce legal timelines that make both census and delimitation time-bound and predictable
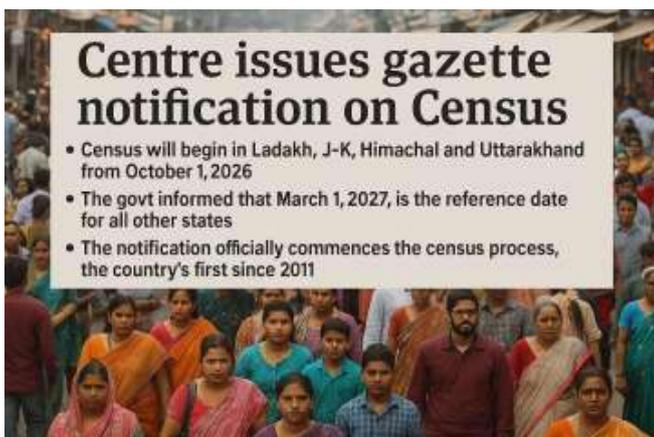
IE Opinion; By Anshul Dalmia and Mayuri Gupta; Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Governance Link

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Why in News?

Census delayed since 2011; next in 2027 → 16-year gap → unequal electoral representation.

Problem

- **Delayed Census**: 2021 postponed (Covid-19); 16 years since 2011.
- **Outdated Constituencies**: Based on 2011 data → mismatch with current population.
- **Political Equality Issue**: Weakens "one person, one vote, one value".
- **No Deadlines**: Census Act, 1948 & Delimitation Acts → vague, no timelines.
- **Representation Crisis**: Fast-growing cities under-represented; slow-growth regions over-represented.

Centre issues gazette notification on Census
- Census will begin in Ladakh, J-K, Himachal and Uttarakhand from October 1, 2026
- The govt informed that March 1, 2027, is the reference date for all other states
- The notification officially commences the census process, the country's first since 2011

Constitutional & Legal Context

- **Art. 82**: Delimitation after every Census.
- **Delimitation Commission**: Ad hoc, no strict time limits.

- **2002 Case**: Initially based on 1991 data; amendment allowed 2001 data → revealed flaw.

Global Best Practices

- **Indonesia**: Census every 10 yrs, timely redistricting.
- **Philippines**: Census every 5 yrs, quick adjustments.
- **Thailand**: Census cycle linked directly to redistricting.

Implications of Delay

- **Urban Under-representation**: Population ↑ but seats unchanged.
- **Rural Over-representation**: Population growth slower but same seat strength.
- **Democratic Deficit**: Electoral map detached from present realities.
- **Cascading Effect**: Delimitation stalled → fair elections undermined.

Reform Measures (Proposed 4 Steps)

1. Amend **Census Act, 1948** → mandatory every 10 yrs.
2. Publish Census data for delimitation **within 1 yr**.
3. Amend **Art. 82** → delimitation to begin within **6 months** of data release.
4. New **Delimitation Act** → hard **2-yr deadline** for completion.

Core Idea – Conclusion

- Predictable, time-bound Census + Delimitation = uphold **political equality** & democratic legitimacy.

Test Your Knowledge 03

Q3. With reference to the Census in India, consider the following statements:

1) The Census Act, 1948 makes it mandatory to conduct a Census every ten years.
2) The Census Commissioner of India functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
3) The Census data must be published within one year of enumeration, as per law.

Which of the above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 2 and 3 only

Hint: The Act does not fix periodicity or publication timeline, only gives framework; administrative control is with MHA.

From Nepal to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, a crisis of democracy that has lessons for India

The recent popular uprisings in our neighbourhood were fueled by youth discontent with rising unemployment, rampant corruption and the shattered promise of democracy

IE Opinion; By Jawhar Sircar;
Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations Link

Why in News?

Recent uprisings in Sri Lanka (2022), Bangladesh (2024) and Nepal (2025) toppled elected governments, raising concerns about democratic crises in South Asia and lessons for India.

Regional Democratic Crises

- **Sri Lanka (2022)**
  - Aragalaya protests → corruption, economic collapse, Rajapaksa misrule
  - Palace stormed, PM's house torched
  - Only 10 deaths, 250 injured
  - New govt 2024 → leftist youth leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake elected
- **Bangladesh (2024)**
  - Sheikh Hasina accused of autocracy, 4th rigged election
  - July Uprising: 21 days, triggered by student Abu Sayed's killing
  - Violence: 834–1,581 dead, including children
  - Hasina fled to India, interim govt under Muhammad Yunus
- **Nepal (2025)**
  - Youth anger: corruption, unemployment, elite "nepo-kids" vs poor masses
  - Oli govt banned social media → triggered protests
  - Mobilisation via Discord, VPNs, Instagram
  - Youth "digitally elected" ex-CJ Sushila Karki as PM

Common Drivers

- Rising youth unemployment
- Rampant corruption across parties
- Autocracy, election rigging, weak institutions
- Social media & digital natives as mobilisation tools
- Disconnect: electoral democracy ≠ real public will

Lessons for India

- **Youth Unemployment**
  - 35.9% (ages 20–24, CMIE July 2025) + underemployment crisis
- **Corruption & Money Power**
  - All parties dependent on corporate, trade, local "goon" funding
  - Quid pro quo politics entrenched
- **Institutional Weakness**
  - No inner-party democracy; parties as "private limited companies"
  - Bureaucracy compromised for posts
  - Judiciary timid/vacillating; some compromised
- **Elections & Trust Deficit**
  - Opposition alleging "vote theft" by Election Commission
  - Growing public disaffection with entire political class

Broader Concerns

- Plato: democracy prone to mob rule, tyranny
- Aristotle: swayed by emotion/demagogues
- Warning signals: collapse of "functional democracies" next door
- Without internal democracy in parties → cannot sustain real democracy

Test Your Knowledge 04

Q4. Which of the following statements best describes the nature of political parties in India?
(a) Parties operate as open, democratic institutions with regular internal elections.
(b) Parties are largely like "private limited companies" tightly controlled by leadership.

(c) Parties are regulated and controlled directly by the Election Commission to ensure transparency.
(d) Parties have successfully reduced dependence on industry and local funding.

Hint: No inner-party democracy; family/leader-centric control.

A future-ready disaster management in the Himalaya requires a massive technology scale-up

This monsoon has revealed both the strength of India's disaster response and the gaps that remain.

IE Opinion; By Syed Ata Hasnain;
Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Disaster Management Link

Why in News

Monsoon 2025 floods across J&K, Himachal, Punjab, Uttarakhand exposed both strengths and gaps in Himalayan disaster management.

Current Response: Strengths

- **Multi-agency action**: Army, IAF, ITBP, NDRF, SDRF, BRO, local police, volunteers.
- **Examples**:
    - Army Bailey bridges (J&K), 36-hr DC trek (Uttarakhand).
    - Pilgrim evacuations: Machail, Vaishno Devi, Manimahesh Yatra.
    - BRO road/bridge restoration.
    - Drone imagery, satcom revival, Chinook heavy lifts, aerial cableway.
    - NDMA–CWC–IMD coordination (Punjab dams).
- **Innovation**: Drones, OneWeb satcom, Doppler radars, IMD nowcasting.

Gaps & Challenges

- **Tech limits**: Inadequate landslide mapping, sparse doppler network, weak glacial lake monitoring.
- **Human behaviour**: Low awareness despite SMS/Sachet app alerts; continued pilgrim footfall during red alerts.
- **Development risks**: Riverbed construction, slope destabilisation, poor enforcement of building norms.
- **Institutional gaps**: Mock drills tokenistic, NDMA outreach shallow, limited community penetration.

Technology Scale-Up: Future Needs

- **Mapping & monitoring**: GSI slope/soil studies, NRSC 24×7 glacial lake watch.
- **GIS risk mapping**: Valley-wise hazard zoning.
- **Predictive tools**: AI + local hydro-met data → flash flood/cloudburst forecasts.
- **Drone use**: Move beyond damage assessment → predictive slope/glacier surveillance.
- **Dense radar grid**: Valley-specific dopplers, localised warning systems.
- **Urban flood models**: Replicate Gorakhpur model.

Community & Governance

- **Citizen preparedness**: Know evacuation routes, shelters, response steps.
- **Training**: Expand *Aapda Mitra* to schools, panchayats, RWAs.
- **Mock drills**: Regular, mandatory, realistic.
- **Civil society role**: Local knowledge integration in DDMA.
- **Enforcement**: Seismic codes, no-build river zones, regulate mining.

Recovery & Resilience

- **Build Back Better**: Slope-stabilised roads, reinforced embankments.
- **Sustainable practices**: Eco-sensitive construction, resilience-based planning.
- **Professional cadre**: Disaster-tech specialists across states.
- **Armed forces**: Ongoing disaster management training, integration with civilian systems.

Test Your Knowledge 05

Q5. With reference to disaster management in the Himalaya, which of the following technologies are already in use in India's response efforts (2025)?

1) Drone imagery for damage assessment
2) Satellite communication links (OneWeb, satcom)
3) Doppler radars for nowcasting
4) Artificial intelligence–based flash flood prediction

Select the correct answer:
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 2 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Hint: AI forecasts are a "future need," not yet mainstream in 2025.

Q6. The Aapda Mitra programme primarily aims at:
(a) Developing early warning systems using AI and GIS tools.
(b) Training community volunteers in disaster preparedness and response.
(c) Providing insurance cover to disaster-affected households.
(d) Financing resilient infrastructure in fragile Himalayan states.

Hint: Focus is on community-level capacity.

NEWS IN SHORT

What to know about upcoming F1 rule changes in 2026, biggest in a generation?

Why in News?
FIA introducing sweeping F1 rule changes from 2026, termed biggest in a generation.

F1 2026 VS F1 2025 CARS: WHAT IS CHANGING?

Key Changes
- **Car Design & Performance**
  o Lighter, smaller, more agile cars
  o Aerodynamics simplified → closer racing
  o Reduced downforce drag; focus on efficiency
- **Engines (Power Units)**
  o Turbo-hybrid retained (since 2014)
  o 50% power from electric energy (vs ~20% now)
  o 100% sustainable fuels mandated
  o More standardised parts to cut costs
- **Competitiveness & Cost Cap**
  o Possible wider performance gaps (Pirelli: up to 4 sec/lap variance)
  o "107% rule" unlikely to disqualify cars
  o Cost cap strict, but exemptions for struggling manufacturers
  o FIA checks every 6 races → allow limited overspend for engine catch-up
- **Driver Skill & Energy Management**
  o Energy deployment (battery/turbo) key race skill
  o FIA balancing automation vs driver input
  o Goal: avoid "chess-like" over-management
- **Safety & Sustainability**
  o Crash structures reworked → higher safety
  o Cars ~30% more energy-efficient
  o Ban on harmful materials; reduced emissions
- **Rain & Visibility**
  o New floors → less spray
  o Aim to enable proper wet racing (avoid 2021 Belgium GP repeat)
  o Ongoing FIA projects for visibility solutions

Implications
- Mercedes likely engine leader; newcomers (Audi, Ford-Red Bull, Honda return) face learning curve
- Teams prioritising 2026 over 2025 car dev → possible performance disparities
- Regulations seek: closer racing, sustainable tech showcase, financial stability, better fan experience