



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 16-01-2026

Mapping Perspective

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Prelims Perspective

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Mains Perspective

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Gaza Strip

Syllabus: GS-1; Geography – Mapping.

Context:

- The recent escalation of conflict between **Israel** and **Hamas** has brought the **Gaza Strip** into sharp global focus.
- Israel's Defence Minister announced a "**complete siege**" of Gaza, cutting off:
 - Electricity
 - Fuel
 - Food and water supplies
- This has renewed international attention on the **Gaza blockade**, which has existed since **2007**.

Significant Aspects of the Gaza Strip



Location & Geography

- Situated in the **eastern Mediterranean basin**.
- Borders:
 - **Egypt** – southwest
 - **Israel** – north and east
 - **Mediterranean Sea** – west

- Area: ~365 sq km (very small territorial extent).

Demography

- Population: **Over 2 million people.**
- Among the **most densely populated regions in the world.**
- High proportion of:
 - Refugees
 - Youth population
- Frequently described as an “**open-air prison**” due to severe movement restrictions.

Historical Background

- **1967 Six-Day War:**
 - Israel captured Gaza from Egypt.
 - Beginning of Israeli military occupation.
- **2005 Disengagement:**
 - Israel withdrew settlements and permanent ground forces.
 - However, control over borders, airspace, and sea access continued.
- **2007 Onwards:**
 - Hamas took control of Gaza.
 - Israel and Egypt imposed a **permanent land, air, and sea blockade**, citing security concerns.

Gaza Blockade: Key Impacts

- Reported extensively by **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).**
- Major consequences:
 - Chronic humanitarian crisis
 - Extremely high unemployment (especially youth)
 - Food insecurity
 - Heavy dependence on international humanitarian aid
- Severe constraints on:
 - Trade
 - Health infrastructure

- Reconstruction activities

Border Crossings & Access Control

- Gaza is enclosed by **walls/fences on three sides**.
- Maritime access:
 - Controlled by Israel; fishing zone heavily restricted.
- **Three key border crossings:**

Karem Abu Salem (Kerem Shalom) – Israel-controlled (goods)

Erez Crossing – Israel-controlled (people)

Rafah Crossing – Egypt-controlled (people & limited goods)

- All major crossings have been **sealed during recent hostilities**, worsening humanitarian conditions.

Kokborok Language

Syllabus: GS-1; Indian Culture

Context:

Kokborok language has gained attention in the context of preserving indigenous languages and the cultural identity of Tripura's tribal communities.

About Kokborok Language

- **Kokborok** is the language of the **Borok people**, geographically known as **Tripuris**.
- It is **one of the official languages of Tripura**, notified on **19 January 1979**.
- Kokborok belongs to the **Sino-Tibetan language family**.

Historical Background

- The language can be traced back to at least the **1st century AD**, when the history of Tripuri kings was recorded in the chronicle **Raj Ratnakar**.
- The term '**Kokborok**' first appeared as '**Kok-boro**' in **1897-98** in an early language primer titled *Kokboroma* by **Daulat Ahmed**.
- In **1900**, **Thakur Radhamohan Debbarma** used the spelling *Kokborok* in a published grammar of the language.

- During British rule, officials referred to the language as **Tipperh, Tipura, or Tipra language**.

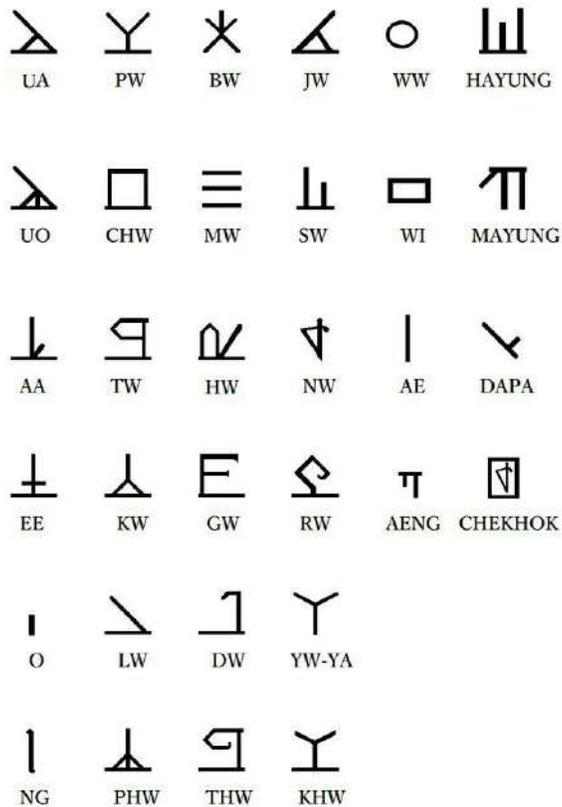
Etymology

- **Kok** - 'verbal' or 'speech'
- **Borok** - 'people' or 'human beings'
- **Kokborok** thus means "*language of the people*".

Demographic Profile

- As per **Census 2011**:
 - Kokborok speakers: **8,80,537**
 - Constitutes **23.97%** of Tripura's total population.

Nangpwrai :



NPS Vatsalya Scheme

Syllabus: GS-3; Indian Economy (Inclusive Growth, Financial Inclusion, Social Security)

Context:

The **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)** has issued the **NPS Vatsalya Scheme Guidelines, 2025**.

About NPS Vatsalya Scheme

- NPS Vatsalya is a **contributory savings and long-term financial security scheme** designed **exclusively for minors**.
- It aims to promote **early financial planning** and ensure long-term pension security.

Key Features

- **Eligibility:**
 - All Indian citizens, including **NRI/OCI**, below **18 years of age**.
- **Account Operation:**
 - Account opened in the **name of the minor**.
 - Operated by a **guardian** until the minor attains majority.
- **Contribution:**
 - Minimum initial and annual contribution: **₹250**
 - **No maximum limit** on contributions.
 - Contributions can also be **gifted by relatives and friends**.
- **Pension Fund Selection:**
 - Guardian may choose **any Pension Fund registered with PFRDA**.
- **Partial Withdrawal:**
 - Allowed after **three years** from account opening.
 - Up to **25% of own contributions** (excluding returns) permitted for:
 - Education
 - Medical treatment
 - Specified disabilities
 - Withdrawal frequency:
 - **Twice before 18 years**
 - **Twice between 18–21 years**, subject to conditions.

Significance of NPS Vatsalya Scheme

- **Strengthens Social Security Architecture:**
 - Expands India's pension coverage by integrating **children into the formal retirement system** at an early stage.
- **Promotes Financial Inclusion:**
 - Low entry barrier (₹250 minimum contribution) ensures participation of **low- and middle-income households**.
- **Encourages Long-term Savings Culture:**
 - Early account opening allows **longer compounding period**, leading to higher retirement corpus.
- **Supports Demographic Dividend Management:**
 - Prepares the future workforce for **ageing-related financial risks**, reducing long-term dependency on the State.
- **Flexibility with Safeguards:**
 - Partial withdrawals permitted for **education and health needs**, balancing long-term savings with short-term contingencies.
- **Complements Existing Pension Schemes:**
 - Acts as a feeder mechanism to **regular NPS accounts** once the beneficiary attains majority.
- **Reduces Old-Age Poverty Risks:**
 - Ensures continuity of pension savings, helping mitigate **inter-generational poverty**.

Section 17A

Syllabus: GS-2: Supreme Court Judgement.

Context:

- A **two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India** delivered a **split verdict** on the **constitutionality of Section 17A**.
- Matter referred to the **Chief Justice of India** for constitution of a **larger Bench**.

About Section 17A (Inserted in 2018)

- Mandates **prior government approval** before police can:
 - Conduct enquiry, or
 - Initiate investigation
- Applies to **public servants** for acts involving:

- “Recommendations” or
- “Decisions” taken in discharge of official duties.



The requirement of obtaining prior approval before an investigation hampers the probe. Instead of safeguarding honest officers, it protects the corrupt. Section 17A is unconstitutional and should be removed. Prior permission should not be required before initiating any investigation.

Justice BV Nagarathna
Supreme Court

Rationale Behind Section 17A

Addressing Policy Paralysis

- Introduced to prevent “**policy paralysis**” caused by:
 - Fear of investigation
 - Reluctance in taking bold administrative decisions

Protection of Honest Officers

- Intended to safeguard **bona fide decision-making** in governance.
- Aimed at preserving administrative efficiency.

View of Justice K. V. Viswanathan (Upholding Section 17A with Safeguards)

Key Arguments

- Civil servants are the “**Steel Frame of India**” (term coined by **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**).
- Absence of protection may lead to:
 - Risk-averse bureaucracy
 - “Play-it-safe” culture
 - Harm to national interest

Acknowledged Constitutional Defect

- **Conflict of interest:**
 - Government deciding approval for investigation against its own officials.

- Threatens **independence of anti-corruption probes.**

Constructive Interpretation to Save the Law

- Prior approval retained, but **not exclusively with Government.**
- Approval process must involve **independent institutions:**
 - **Lokpal** (Centre)
 - Lokayuktas (States)

Proposed Mechanism

- Police seek approval → Government forwards request to Lokpal
- Lokpal's Inquiry Wing conducts **preliminary scrutiny**
- If **prima facie case** exists:
 - Government is **bound to grant approval**
- Balances:
 - Protection of honest officers
 - Accountability and independence

View of Justice B. V. Nagarathna (Striking Down Section 17A)

Section 17A as Shield for the Corrupt

- Contrary to the **objective of the Prevention of Corruption Act.**
- Blocks investigation **at the threshold.**

Conflict of Interest

- Government cannot be an **impartial approving authority:**
 - Especially in cases involving ministers or senior officials.
- Subordinate officers unlikely to act independently.

Violation of Article 14 (Right to Equality)

- Protection limited to officials making:
 - "Recommendations" or "decisions"
- Discriminates against:
 - Clerical staff
 - Officers recording file notings

Rejection of Judicial Reconstruction

- Routing approvals via Lokpal amounts to **judicial legislation**.
- Courts cannot substitute “Government” with “Lokpal” in statute.

‘Cart Before the Horse’ Argument

- Without even a **preliminary police enquiry**, genuineness of complaint cannot be assessed.
- Approval requirement becomes arbitrary.

Tool of Executive Control

- Section 17A allows government to keep a “**Damocles’ sword**” over public servants.
- Enables selective approvals to enforce political conformity.

Divergent Interpretation of Supreme Court Precedents

Key Judgments Involved

- Vineet Narain v. Union of India
- Subramanian Swamy v. CBI

Justice Nagarathna’s View

- Section 17A = “**Old wine in a new bottle**”
- Revives prior approval regimes already struck down.
- Any fetter on **even preliminary enquiry** is unconstitutional.

Justice Viswanathan’s View

- Earlier rulings struck down:
 - Rank-based discrimination (Section 6A of DSPE Act)
- Section 17A applies **uniformly to all public servants**.
- Core concern of precedents was **executive control over investigations**.
- Independent screening by Lokpal cures this defect.

Core Issue Before the Larger Bench

- Can **institutional redesign** (independent screening) save Section 17A?
- Or is **prior approval itself** fundamentally incompatible with:
 - Article 14
 - Anti-corruption jurisprudence
 - Binding precedents?

What is futuristic marine and space biotechnology?

Syllabus: GS-3: Science and Technology

Context:

Marine and space biotechnology can transform India's bioeconomy by unlocking ocean and space resources for sustainable food, materials, energy, and long-term space exploration.

Marine Biotechnology

- Study and application of **marine organisms** (microbes, algae, invertebrates).
- Focus on **bioactive compounds, enzymes, biomaterials, nutraceuticals, biostimulants**.
- Organisms adapted to **high salinity, pressure, low light, extreme temperatures** → high industrial value.

Space Biotechnology

- Study of **biological systems in microgravity and high-radiation environments**.
- Involves **microbes, plants, human physiology**.
- Enables **life-support systems, space food, regenerative medicine, bio-manufacturing in space**.



Why Marine and Space Biotechnology Matters for India

Strategic Advantages

- **11,000 km coastline** and **>2 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** → vast marine biodiversity.
- Reduces dependence on **land, freshwater, and conventional agriculture**.
- Supports **Atmanirbhar Bharat** in bio-based materials and inputs.

Economic & Developmental Significance

- New sources of:
 - Food (algae-based proteins)
 - Energy (biofuels)
 - Chemicals & biomaterials
- High potential for **Blue Economy** and **future-ready biomanufacturing**.

Space Ambitions

- Critical for **long-duration human space missions**.
- Ensures **food security, health management, and biological production** in space.
- Aligns with India's expanding space ecosystem led by **Indian Space Research Organisation**.

India's Current Position

Marine Biotechnology

- Marine biomass (including seaweed): **~70,000 tonnes/year** (low global share).
- Heavy **imports** of agar, carrageenan, alginates for:
 - Food processing
 - Pharmaceuticals
 - Cosmetics
 - Medical applications
- Policy support through:
 - **Blue Economy** framework
 - **Deep Ocean Mission**
 - **BioE3 (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment & Employment)**

Key Stakeholders

- Private sector: *Sea6 Energy, ClimateCrew*
- Research institutions: **ICAR–Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute**

Space Biotechnology

- ISRO conducting **microgravity experiments** on:
 - Microbes
 - Algae

- Closed-loop life-support systems
- **Private sector participation limited** due to:
 - High entry barriers
 - Nascent commercial ecosystem

Global Advances (Comparative Perspective)

European Union

- Strong investment in:
 - Marine bioprospecting
 - Algae-based biomaterials
 - Bioactive marine compounds
- Shared infrastructure: **European Marine Biological Resource Centre**

China

- Rapid scale-up of **seaweed aquaculture**.
- Integrated marine bio-processing for a robust **bioeconomy**.

United States

- Leadership in space biotechnology via **NASA**.
- **International Space Station** experiments on:
 - Protein crystallisation
 - Stem cells
 - Drug discovery
 - Regenerative medicine
 - Life-support systems

Challenges for India

- Fragmented R&D ecosystem.
- Limited scale-up and commercialisation.
- Insufficient private investment and risk capital.
- Gaps in **marine bioprospecting infrastructure** and **space biology platforms**.

Way Forward

- **Dedicated national roadmap** with:

- Clear timelines
- Mission-mode targets
- Integrate:
 - Cultivation → Extraction → Processing → Market
- Promote **public-private partnerships**.
- Incentivise startups in:
 - Marine biomanufacturing
 - Space life sciences
- Strengthen regulatory clarity and global collaborations.

Conclusion

Marine and space biotechnology represent **largely untapped strategic frontiers**. With coordinated policy support, focused R&D, and private sector participation, India can leverage its natural and technological advantages to emerge as a **global leader in future biomanufacturing**, while advancing sustainability, economic resilience, and space self-reliance.