DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 27-01-2026

Mapping Perspective

1. **Java Island**

Prelims Perspective

2. **Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards**
3. **Agarwood**

Mains Perspective

4. **Bigger schools, better futures**
5. **BRICS Digital Currency Linkage**

Java Island

Syllabus: Prelims Bits.

Context:

Indonesia's main island of Java has been recently hit by a massive landslide in which at least 8 people have been reported to be killed.

Location & Physical Geography

- Large island in **Indonesia**; part of **Greater Sunda Islands**.
- **13th largest island globally**; **5th largest in Indonesia**.
- Surroundings:
    - **North** – Java Sea (Borneo across it)
    - **South** – Indian Ocean
    - **Northwest** – Sumatra across **Sunda Strait**

Geological Formation

- Formed due to **subduction of Australian Plate under Sunda Plate**.
- Part of the **Pacific Ring of Fire**.
- Characterised by **numerous active volcanoes** → fertile soils but disaster-prone.

Historical Background

- Centre of **Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms** (e.g., Majapahit, Sailendra).
- Later ruled by **Islamic sultanates**.
- Core region of **Dutch East Indies**.
- Played key role in **Indonesia's independence movement (1930s–40s)**.

Population & Human Geography

- **Most populated island in the world**.
- Population: **~156.4 million**.
- Houses **56% of Indonesia's population**.
- **Jakarta** located on **northwest coast** (capital city).

Prelims Perspective

- Frequently asked through **map-based and disaster-related questions**.
- Key focus areas:
  - Greater Sunda Islands
  - Sunda Strait location
  - Plate tectonics in Southeast Asia
  - Densely populated islands

Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards

Syllabus: Prelims – Polity | Governance | Awards

Context

- President of India approved **Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards 2025** for **30 individuals**, including **6 posthumous awards**.

About Jeevan Raksha Padak

- **Nature:** Civilian life-saving gallantry awards
- **Established:** 1961
- **Origin:** Offshoot of Ashoka Chakra series

Categories

- **Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak:** Conspicuous courage under very grave danger
- **Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak:** Courage under great danger
- **Jeevan Raksha Padak:** Courage involving risk of serious bodily injury

Eligibility & Acts Covered

- Open to civilians of all walks of life
- Can be awarded posthumously
- Covers rescues during:
  - Drowning, fires, accidents, electrocution
  - Mine disasters and natural calamities

Process & Benefits

- Nominations by States/UTs & Ministries
- Examined by Awards Committee
- Final approval by **Prime Minister and President**
- **One-time monetary award:**
  - Sarvottam: ₹2 lakh
  - Uttam: ₹1.5 lakh
  - Jeevan Raksha: ₹1 lakh
- No service concessions

Significance

- Encourages **civic courage and humanitarian values**
- Recognises **extraordinary acts by ordinary citizens**

Agarwood

Syllabus: Prelims – Environment & Ecology | Economy

Context

- Union Minister laid the foundation stone of **₹80 crore Agarwood Value Chain Development Scheme** in **Tripura**.

About Agarwood

- Also called **oud, gaharu, aloeswood**
- Formed in **Aquilaria trees** after fungal infection
- Produces **highly aromatic resin**

Historical Significance

- Mentioned in **Susruta Samhita**
- Traded historically across **Asia and the Middle East**

Habitat & Distribution

- South & Southeast Asia:
  - India (Tripura, Assam, Northeast), Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, China
- Found in **tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests**

Key Features

- Resin forms in **<10%** of wild trees
- Natural formation takes **20–50 years**
- Artificial induction methods widely used

- Listed under **CITES Appendix II**

Uses

- **Perfumery:** High-end fragrances and oils
- **Incense & rituals**
- **Medicine:** Ayurveda, Unani, Chinese medicine
- One of the **most expensive forest products** globally

Bigger schools, better futures

Syllabus: GS-2: Social Justice – Education.

Context:

India has more schools than China but significantly fewer students per school. This fragmentation poses a severe challenge to the quality of education.

- **The Problem:** Thousands of government schools have very low enrollment (often fewer than 20–30 students).
- **Impact of Fragmentation:**
    - **Multigrade Teaching:** One teacher often handles multiple grades (e.g., Class 1 to 5) in a single room.
    - **Resource Dilution:** Limited funds are spread thin across many tiny units, resulting in lack of libraries, labs, and playgrounds.
    - **Administrative Burden:** Difficulty in monitoring and providing specialized subject teachers (Math, Science, Arts) for every small school.

The Concept: School Consolidation (Bigger Schools)

The authors argue for the consolidation of small, sub-scale schools into larger, well-resourced "hub" schools.

- **Definition:** Merging nearby low-enrollment schools to create a single, larger school unit.
- **Global Precedent:** Countries like China and Vietnam successfully consolidated schools to improve learning outcomes and administrative efficiency.

Key Advantages of Larger Schools

- **Better Infrastructure:** Larger schools allow for specialized facilities like ICT labs, sports complexes, and better sanitation.

- **Specialized Teaching:** Enables "grade-appropriate" teaching where every class has a dedicated teacher and subject specialists for higher grades.
- **Social & Peer Learning:** A larger student body fosters healthy competition, diverse peer groups, and better extracurricular participation.
- **Efficiency:** Reduced per-pupil cost and improved governance/monitoring by the education department.

Challenges & Concerns

- **Access vs. Quality:** The Right to Education (RTE) Act emphasizes "neighborhood schools" (proximity). Consolidation might increase the distance for some students.
- **Transport Issues:** Without a robust school transport system, merging schools could lead to higher dropout rates, especially among girls and marginalized communities.
- **Community Resistance:** Local communities often view the closing of a village school as a loss of identity or a government withdrawal from the area.

Policy Recommendations (The Way Forward)

- **Safe Transportation:** Governments must provide free and safe transport (buses/cycles) to ensure that "distance" does not become a barrier to "access."
- **Staffing & Governance:** Use the saved administrative resources to appoint dedicated School Principals/Leaders who focus solely on learning outcomes.
- **States as Pioneers:** Mention states like **Madhya Pradesh (CM Rise Schools)**, **Rajasthan (Adarsh Schools)**, and **Odisha**, which have already moved toward consolidation models.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve Parents-Teacher Management Committees (SMCs) in the transition process to build trust.

Conclusion

While the RTE Act ensured **Access**, the next phase of Indian education reform must focus on **Quality**. Transitioning from "one school per village" to "one high-quality school per cluster" is essential to achieving the goals of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.

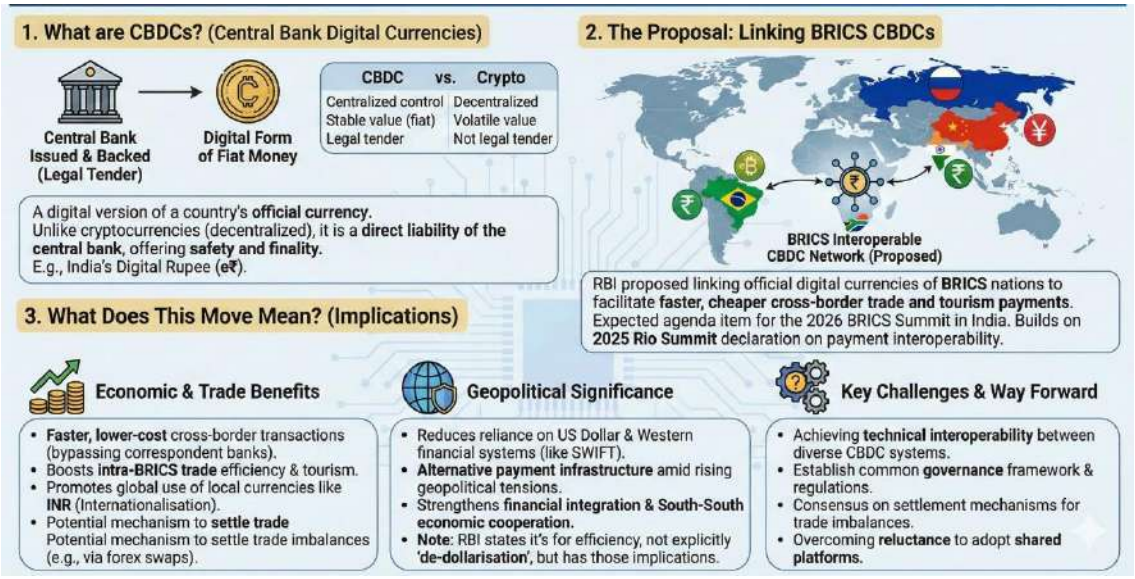
BRICS Digital Currency Linkage

Syllabus: GS-2: International Relations – Multilateral Institutions & GS-3: Indian Economy - Digital Currency

Context:

- RBI has advised India to use **BRICS Chairmanship (2026)** to promote **CBDC-based cross-border payments**.
- Proposal covers:
  - Founding members: **Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa**
  - New members: **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE, Indonesia**
- Objective: Reduce **transaction costs, settlement time**, and **dependence on US dollar / SWIFT**.

What are Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs)?



- **Definition**: Legal tender issued digitally by a central bank.
- **Indian example**: **e-rupee** by RBI.
- **Key features**:
  - Stored in **digital wallets**, not bank accounts
  - **Direct wallet-to-wallet transfer**
  - Maintained on **blockchain-based ledger**
- **Difference from**:
  - **UPI** → transfers bank deposits

- **Cryptocurrencies** → private, decentralised, unregulated

Objectives of BRICS CBDC Framework

- Faster and cheaper **cross-border settlements**
- Reduce **dollar dominance** in international trade
- Create an **alternative to SWIFT-based system**
- Strengthen **South–South financial cooperation**

Benefits of CBDC-Based Cross-Border Payments

(a) Financial Efficiency

- Lower transaction costs
- Faster settlement (near real-time)
- Reduced intermediary dependence

(b) Transparency & Traceability

- Immutable blockchain ledger
- Easier detection of:
  - Money laundering
  - Black money flows

(c) Programmable Money

- Restrictions by:
  - Time
  - Location
  - Merchant category
- Useful for **targeted policy interventions**

(d) Strategic & Geopolitical Gains

- Bypass payment restrictions in sanctioned trade (e.g., **Iran, Russia**)
- Reduce vulnerability to **dollar weaponisation**
- Strengthen **BRICS financial autonomy**

Risks and Challenges

(a) Regulatory & Technical Coordination

- Different:

- Legal frameworks
- Monetary policies
- Digital infrastructure levels

- Harmonisation is **complex and time-consuming**

(b) Financial Stability Risks

- Capital flow volatility
- Impact on domestic monetary control

(c) Cyber Security Risks

- Cross-border digital systems vulnerable to:
  - Hacking
  - Data breaches

(d) Geopolitical Retaliation

- Possible **US response**:
  - Higher tariffs
  - Trade penalties
- Adds pressure amid existing trade frictions

Strategic Assessment for India

Opportunities

- Leadership in **global digital public infrastructure**
- Strengthen trade with **Global South & sanctioned economies**
- Long-term reduction in transaction dependence on Western systems

Constraints

- Near-term economic retaliation risks
- Need for:
  - Strong cyber safeguards
  - Multilateral regulatory coordination
  - Gradual implementation