



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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1 Tamil Nadu Announces \$1 Million Prize to Decode Indus Valley Script

Context: The **Tamil Nadu Chief Minister** has unveiled a **\$1 million reward** for experts and organizations that successfully **decipher the ancient script** of the **Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)**. This announcement reflects the state's commitment to exploring and preserving India's rich historical and cultural heritage.



Understanding the Indus Valley Script:

Key Characteristics:

- **Ancient Origins:** Among the oldest and most enigmatic writing systems, dating back to the Indus Valley Civilization.
- **Pictographic Symbols:** The script includes over **400 unique signs**, featuring pictorial representations of humans, animals, plants, and geometric patterns.
- **Media of Writing:** Found on seals, pottery, tools, and tablets, the inscriptions are often short, typically **5-6 characters** long.
- **Logo-Syllabic Nature:** The script likely combines **logograms** (symbols for words or ideas) with **syllables**, making it complex.
- **Direction of Writing:** Most inscriptions are written **right to left**, with some evidence suggesting **boustrophedon style** (alternating direction).
- **Challenges in Decipherment:** The lack of a **bilingual text** like the Rosetta Stone and the unknown language behind the script, possibly **Dravidian or proto-Dravidian**, have hindered efforts to decode it.

Why Decipher the Indus Script?

Unlocking Ancient History:

Decoding the script could reveal crucial details about the **social structure**, **economy**, and **daily life** of one of the world's first urban civilizations.

Religious Insights:

Understanding the script may shed light on early **religious practices** and beliefs.

- **The Pashupati Seal:** Suggests links to early forms of **Shiva worship**, fire rituals, and other traditions that later influenced **Vedic and Hindu practices**.

Linguistic Evolution:

The script might hold the key to understanding the linguistic roots of **Dravidian languages** and their relationship with other ancient language families.

Indus Valley Civilization: A Glimpse into the Past

Overview:

- Also known as the **Harappan Civilization**, it flourished from **3300 to 1300 BCE** across present-day **Pakistan** and **northwestern India**.
- Discovered in 1924 by **John Marshall**, it stands alongside **Egypt** and **Mesopotamia** as one of the earliest urban civilizations.

Urban Sophistication:

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- **Planned Cities:** Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro showcased advanced urban design with **grid-like streets, drainage systems, and public baths.**
- **Craftsmanship:** Harappans excelled in **bead-making, pottery, and metallurgy**, and engaged in extensive trade with Mesopotamia.

Decline of Civilization:

- Around **1900 BCE**, the civilization faced a decline, attributed to **environmental changes, river shifts, and possible internal conflicts.**

A Step Toward Preserving Heritage:

Tamil Nadu's **\$1 million challenge** offers a unique opportunity to decode the **Indus script**, bridging the gap between ancient history and modern knowledge. Successfully deciphering it could revolutionize our understanding of **India's ancient civilization**, influencing **global historical narratives** and affirming India's legacy as a cradle of advanced human civilization.



2 MeitY Releases Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025

Context: The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has unveiled the **draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025**, for public consultation. These rules aim to facilitate the effective implementation of the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, strengthening India's data privacy landscape.



Key Provisions of the Draft Rules:

Classification of Data Fiduciaries:

- Major tech firms like **Meta, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon** are expected to be designated as **Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDFs)** under the proposed rules.
- The classification ensures stricter accountability for organizations handling vast amounts of **personal data**.

Appointment of Data Protection Officers (DPOs):

- Every SDF must appoint a **Data Protection Officer** based in India, accountable to their **Board of Directors**.
- The DPO will act as the primary point of contact for data principals (individuals whose data is processed).

Transparency and Consent:

- Clear and accessible information** must be provided about how personal data is collected and processed, ensuring **informed consent** from individuals.
- Mechanisms must be in place for citizens to manage their data, including options for **data erasure** and appointing **digital nominees**.

Restrictions on Data Flow:

- Certain types of personal data cannot be **transferred outside India**, as specified by the Union Government.
- This provision aims to safeguard **sensitive personal data** and maintain sovereignty over critical information.
- Children's Data Protection:** Companies must secure **verifiable parental consent** before processing the data of individuals under 18 years.

Data Breach Reporting:

- In case of a **data breach**, companies must promptly inform affected individuals and detail measures to mitigate risks.
- Non-compliance could result in penalties up to **₹250 crore**.

Data Protection Board:

- A **digital-first platform** will enable individuals to lodge complaints and seek swift grievance redressal.
- The Board will have powers equivalent to a **civil court** for adjudicating personal data breaches.

Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023: Key Features

Scope and Applicability:

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- The Act governs the **processing of digital personal data** collected online or offline but digitized.
- It applies to data processing within and outside India if the data concerns goods or services offered in India.

Rights of Individuals:

- Individuals have the right to:
 - Access their personal data.
 - Request corrections or erasure.
 - Seek grievance redressal for violations.

Obligations for Data Fiduciaries: Maintain **data accuracy**, ensure **security**, and delete data once its purpose is fulfilled.

Exemptions for Government Agencies: Government bodies may be exempt from certain provisions in cases of **national security, public order, or crime prevention**.

Challenges in Implementation:

1. **Potential Privacy Concerns:** Broad exemptions for government agencies might infringe on the **fundamental right to privacy**.
2. **Limited Regulation of Data Processing Risks:** The rules focus on consent but lack provisions for addressing **indirect harms** from data misuse.
3. **Short Tenure of Board Members:** **Two-year terms** for Data Protection Board members, with scope for reappointment, could compromise **independent decision-making**.
4. **International Data Transfers:** Permitting cross-border data flow raises concerns about **adequate protection standards** in recipient countries.

Significance of the Rules:

- **Empowering Citizens:** The rules empower individuals by granting **control over their data** and enabling **rights like erasure** and grievance resolution.
- **Building Trust in Digital Platforms:** Enhanced provisions for **transparency** and **consent** aim to foster trust among users in digital services.
- **Balancing Growth with Privacy:** Unlike restrictive global frameworks, the rules prioritize **economic growth** while ensuring **citizen welfare**.

Quick and Transparent Redressal

A **digital-first approach** by the Data Protection Board ensures **swift and efficient complaint resolution**, bolstering public confidence.

Additional Insights:

- **Global Context:** India's data protection framework aligns with international efforts like the **EU GDPR**, but with unique provisions tailored to its demographic and economic realities.
- **Future Opportunities:** The Act and its associated rules could pave the way for a **thriving digital economy**, with trust and security as cornerstones.
- **Potential Reforms:** Addressing privacy concerns and refining cross-border data flow provisions could further strengthen the framework.

The **Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025**, mark a significant step toward safeguarding citizens' data rights while fostering a robust and trustworthy digital ecosystem.

3

Expansion of the Great Nicobar Project

Context: The **Union Shipping Ministry** has proposed a major expansion of the 72,000 crore **mega-infrastructure project** on **Great Nicobar Island**. The initiative aims to transform the island into a key global maritime and tourism hub, while raising critical concerns about ecological preservation and indigenous rights.

The Great Nicobar Project: Vision and Scope:

Implementing Authority:

The project is spearheaded by the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Ltd. (ANIIDCO)**, a quasi-government agency focused on sustainable resource exploitation and balanced development.

Key Features:

- **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT):** Aims to establish Great Nicobar as a vital node in **global maritime trade**.
- **International Airport:** Boosts connectivity for trade and tourism.
- **Township Development:** Plans for modern urbanization on the island.
- **Power Generation:** A **450 MVA gas and solar-based power plant**, promoting renewable energy use.
- **New Additions:**
 - **International Cruise Terminal:** Aimed at high-end tourism and eco-tourism.
 - **Shipbuilding and Shipbreaking Facility:** Proposed on a **100-acre seafront**, including an export-import port.

Significance of the Project:

1. **Economic Growth**
 - Positions Great Nicobar as a **global trade hub**, fostering regional economic development.
 - Encourages investments in tourism and infrastructure.
2. **Strategic Importance**
 - Strengthens India's **maritime capabilities**.
 - Reduces dependency on foreign ports for cargo transshipment, boosting **strategic autonomy**.
3. **Sustainability Initiatives**
 - The use of **gas and solar-based energy** aligns with India's commitment to **renewable energy** and reducing fossil fuel dependence.

Concerns Surrounding the Project:

1. **Ecological Impact**
 - **Biodiversity Loss:** The project threatens to destroy **33,000 acres of forest** and impact fragile ecosystems, including **coral reefs** and nesting grounds for endangered species.
 - **Marine Ecosystem Threats:** Development could disrupt marine habitats vital to the island's ecological balance.





2. Indigenous Displacement:

- **Impact on Tribes:** The project risks displacing indigenous communities like the **Shompen** and **Nicobarese**, jeopardizing their livelihoods and cultural heritage.

3. Transparency Issues:

- Limited access to project details under the **RTI Act**, citing national sovereignty and security, raises concerns about lack of public consultation and accountability.

Geographical and Historical Insights:

Location and Features:

- The **Andaman and Nicobar Islands** lie **1,300 km southeast of the Indian mainland** in the **Bay of Bengal**.
- The archipelago consists of over **500 islands**, divided into two groups:
 - **Andaman Islands** in the north.
 - **Nicobar Islands** in the south, separated by the **Ten Degree Channel**.

Great Nicobar Island:

- **Largest and southernmost island** of the Nicobar group.
- Home to **Indira Point**, India's **southernmost tip**.
- Known for its **rich biodiversity** and **volcanic base**, with features like coral reefs and limestone formations.

Renamed Islands (2018):

- **Ross Island:** Renamed **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Dweep**.
- **Neil Island:** Renamed **Shaheed Dweep**.
- **Havelock Island:** Renamed **Swaraj Dweep**.

Concluding Remarks: A Path Forward

The **Great Nicobar Project** presents a transformative vision for India's economic and strategic positioning. However, the potential risks to **ecological balance** and **indigenous rights** call for a **transparent, consultative, and sustainable approach**.

Suggestions for Sustainable Development:

1. **Enhanced Public Consultation:** Engage local communities and stakeholders in decision-making.
2. **Ecological Preservation Measures:** Implement compensatory afforestation, coral transplantation, and marine conservation programs.
3. **Cultural Safeguards:** Protect the rights and heritage of indigenous communities through inclusive policies.
4. **Periodic Monitoring:** Establish an independent body to monitor the environmental and social impact of the project.

By integrating these measures, the project can achieve its goals while preserving the unique identity and natural wealth of **Great Nicobar Island**.

4 Kerala Proposes Amendments to the Forest Act

Context: The Kerala government has introduced the **Kerala Forest (Amendment) Bill, 2024** to tackle **environmental challenges** and strengthen **forest management** in the state. While the Bill aims to prevent practices like waste dumping into rivers near forest areas, it has sparked debates due to certain contentious provisions.



Key Highlights of the Amendment Bill:

1. Expanded Powers for Forest Officials:

- **Arrest and Detention Without Warrant:**

- Forest officers are empowered to **arrest or detain individuals suspected of forest-related offenses**, even outside forest boundaries.
- This raises concerns about the potential **misuse of power**, especially since the definition of "forest officer" now includes **temporary staff**.

2. Redefining Forest Officers:

- The Bill includes **beat forest officers, tribal watchers, and forest watchers**—many of whom are **temporary appointees**.
- Critics fear this expansion could lead to **politically motivated actions** and misuse of authority.

3. Addressing Waste Dumping:

- **Waste Management Provisions:**

- Dumping waste into rivers and other water bodies connected to forests is now categorized as a **forest offense**.
- This is significant as many rivers in Kerala pass through **populated areas** before entering forests, potentially leading to **greater scrutiny over non-forest regions**.

4. Steeper Penalties for Violations:

- **Increased Fines:**

- The penalty for petty forest crimes has been hiked from **1,000 to 25,000**.
- In some cases, fines of **25,000** have been doubled to **50,000**.

Concerns Raised by Stakeholders:

1. Misuse of Power:

- Farmer organizations and local residents fear that the **expanded powers of forest officials** could lead to **harassment and wrongful actions** against innocent individuals.

2. Impact on Non-Forest Areas:

- The provision addressing waste dumping into rivers extends the Act's jurisdiction beyond forests, leading to fears of **increased control over populated areas**.

3. Temporary Staff and Accountability:

- By including **temporary forest staff** in the definition of forest officers, there are worries about a **lack of accountability** and potential **political influence**.



Significance of the Amendments:

1. Strengthening Environmental Protections:

- The Bill aims to **safeguard forest ecosystems** and prevent **pollution in water bodies**, ensuring better **resource management**.

2. Enhanced Deterrence Against Violations:

- The significant increase in fines is expected to act as a **deterrent** against forest-related crimes.

3. Focus on Sustainability:

- By targeting activities like **waste dumping**, the Bill reflects Kerala's commitment to **sustainable environmental practices**.

Balancing Conservation and Community Rights:

While the amendments aim to bolster forest conservation and environmental management, it is crucial to ensure they do not **infringe upon the rights** of local communities. Transparent implementation and strict **accountability mechanisms** are essential to prevent misuse.

Way Forward:

- Public Consultation:** Engage farmers, tribal communities, and local residents to address their concerns.
- Safeguards Against Misuse:** Introduce checks and balances to prevent the misuse of newly granted powers.
- Awareness and Collaboration:** Promote awareness campaigns and collaborative waste management practices to reduce offenses.

By finding a balance between **conservation goals** and **community rights**, Kerala can set an example in **sustainable forest governance**.

5 Avian Influenza (H5N1) Outbreak Kills 3 Tigers: Zoos in India on Alert

Context: The recent outbreak of **avian influenza (H5N1)** has caused significant concern, with **three tigers** and a **leopard** succumbing to the virus at a Nagpur rescue center. This rare cross-species transmission in India has prompted nationwide precautions in zoos and wildlife establishments.



Why in News?

- **First Animal Cases in India:**
 - **Three tigers** and a **leopard** from a Nagpur rescue center were confirmed dead due to **avian influenza (H5N1)** in December 2024.
 - This marks the first instance of **bird flu infecting animals** in India.
- **Government Advisory:**
 - The Union government has issued a directive urging zoos across India to implement strict monitoring, adhere to containment protocols, and watch for symptoms among captive animals and nearby wildlife.
 - The advisory highlights the **zoonotic nature** of H5N1 and its potential risks to humans and animals.

What is Avian Influenza (H5N1)?

Overview of Bird Flu:

- **Avian influenza**, or **bird flu**, is a viral disease primarily affecting **poultry** and **wild birds**.
- The virus can spread to over **100 bird species**, with **ducks and geese** often acting as asymptomatic carriers.

About H5N1:

- H5N1 is a subtype of the **influenza A virus**, causing severe respiratory illness in birds.
- While human cases are rare, the **mortality rate** for infected individuals is a staggering **60%**.
- Transmission between humans is currently **difficult**, but mutations could increase this risk.

Evolution and Global Spread:

- The highly pathogenic H5N1 virus was first identified in **China (1996)** and has since spread worldwide:
 - **Europe (2020)**, **Africa**, **North America (2021)**, **South America (2022)**, and even **Antarctica (2024)**.
 - It has caused widespread mortality among both **domestic** and **wild bird populations** globally.

Impact of H5N1 on Animals:

Farm and Wild Birds:

- **Farm Birds:**
 - Overcrowded poultry farms facilitate rapid virus transmission, resulting in major outbreaks.
- **Wild Birds:**

- The virus has devastated bird populations, including endangered species like the **California condor**, which lost 6% of its population in 2023.

Mammals:

- **Terrestrial Mammals:** Cases have been reported among **foxes, pumas, and bears** in North America.
- **Marine Mammals:**
 - Massive die-offs have been recorded, including **20,000 sea lions** in South America and high mortality among **Southern elephant seals** in Patagonia.
- **Farmed Mammals:** H5N1 infections in **mink farms** in Europe have heightened concerns about the virus adapting for cross-species transmission.

Zoos on Alert: India's Response to H5N1:

Enhanced Monitoring:

- Zoos across India have been instructed to:
 - **Quarantine symptomatic animals** like tigers and other felines.
 - Monitor nearby wildlife for **unusual behavior or deaths**.

Government Measures:

- **Containment Efforts:**
 - Post-mortem samples from the infected animals were analyzed at the **NIHSAD in Bhopal**, confirming H5N1.
 - A **National Joint Outbreak Response Team** has been deployed to oversee containment measures.
- **Enhanced Biosecurity:**
 - Restrict personnel movement between infected and non-infected areas.
 - Temporary closures of affected facilities and **thorough disinfection**.

Protecting Zoo Staff:

- Personnel handling animals are required to wear **PPE (masks, gloves, suits)**.
- Regular **health screenings** and **training programs** have been implemented to ensure staff safety.

A Call for a One-Health Approach:

The Ministry of Animal Husbandry emphasized adopting a **One-Health** strategy, integrating efforts across:

1. **Human Health:** Mitigating zoonotic risks to prevent outbreaks in humans.
2. **Animal Health:** Monitoring and controlling the virus in wildlife and domestic animals.
3. **Environmental Health:** Ensuring clean and safe ecosystems to reduce viral transmission.

Conclusion:

The outbreak of **avian influenza (H5N1)** in India highlights the urgent need for **vigilance, robust biosecurity measures**, and a **collaborative approach** to prevent further spread. While the virus remains rare in humans, its ability to adapt poses a looming threat to global public health. **Integrating science, policy, and public awareness** will be key to addressing this challenge effectively.

6 52 Villages Allege Violations of Forest Rights Act (FRA) in Madhya Pradesh

Context: In Madhya Pradesh, 52 villages in Damoh, Narsinghpur, and Sagar districts have raised serious concerns about the violation of the **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**. The villagers allege that they were **forcibly relocated** and deprived of their **forest rights** after the **Rani Durgavati Tiger Reserve** was notified in **September 2023**. These complaints have led the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA)** to direct the state government to take action.



Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuary: Background and Key Features:

Location and Significance:

- **Situated in Damoh district, Madhya Pradesh**, the **Durgavati Wildlife Sanctuary** was established to protect the **biodiversity** of the **Vindhyan region**.
- The sanctuary is known for its **rugged terrain** and **dense forests**, which serve as a critical habitat for various wildlife species.

Flora and Fauna:

- **Flora:** The sanctuary features **dry deciduous forests** with key species like **Teak, Sal, Mahua, and Bamboo**.
- **Fauna:** It is home to species like **Chital, Nilgai, Leopards, and Indian Foxes**. The sanctuary also hosts various **migratory birds** and reptiles like the **Indian Cobra**.

Challenges:

- The sanctuary faces **human encroachment, deforestation, and illegal poaching**, which have threatened the delicate balance of its ecosystem.

Understanding the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:

Purpose and Key Objectives:

The **Forest Rights Act** was enacted to **recognize and secure the rights of forest-dwelling communities**. It aims to:

- **Recognize traditional rights** of **Scheduled Tribes (STs)** and **Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs)** over the forest lands they depend on for their livelihoods.
- **Empower local communities** by providing them with **legal rights** to forest resources, such as timber, medicinal plants, and grazing areas.

Types of Rights Recognized:

- **Individual Rights:** These include **ownership of land** (up to 4 hectares per family) and access to forest resources.
- **Community Rights:** Rights over the use of **minor forest produce, grazing, and water bodies**.
- **Community Forest Resource Rights:** Rights to protect, regenerate, and manage forests sustainably.

Challenges:

- **Delayed Implementation:** There have been significant delays in recognizing the rights of forest communities.



- **Documentation Issues:** Forest-dwelling communities often face difficulties in providing **evidence** to prove their eligibility for rights.
- **Conflict with Conservation Laws:** Balancing the **rights of local communities** with the need for **wildlife conservation** remains a challenge.

News Summary: Allegations of FRA Violations:

Background of Allegations:

- The villagers in **52 villages** have filed complaints alleging **forced relocation** and the **denial of forest rights** after the **Rani Durgavati Tiger Reserve** was notified in September 2023.
- **Key Issues:**
 - **Non-recognition of Forest Rights:** Villagers claim that their rights over **forest resources** have not been settled under FRA.
 - **Forced Relocation:** Relocations were carried out without obtaining the **free, prior, and informed consent** of the affected communities, as mandated by the law.

State's Response:

- The **Divisional Forest Officer (DFO)** of the **Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary** has denied allegations of forced eviction, stating that **relocation packages** were offered to eligible families.
- The **Rani Durgavati Tiger Reserve** spans **2,339 sq. km**, created by merging the **Rani Durgavati** and **Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuaries**.
- The merger aimed to compensate for the **Ken-Betwa River Linking Project**, which submerged a significant area of forest in the **Panna Tiger Reserve**.

Government Actions and Directives:

- The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA)** has instructed the **Madhya Pradesh government** to address the allegations and respect the **rights** of the local communities under the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** and the **Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA)**.
- The **National Tiger Conservation Authority** has been urged to ensure that **tribal interests** are safeguarded in conservation plans.

Conclusion: Moving Forward with Respect for Rights and Conservation

The issue of **forest rights violations** in the **Rani Durgavati Tiger Reserve** underscores the importance of striking a balance between **wildlife conservation** and the **livelihoods** of **forest-dependent communities**. A **transparent and consultative approach** is essential to ensure that both **biodiversity conservation** and **community rights** are respected. The **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** must be implemented effectively, with due consideration for the **historical** and **traditional ties** of indigenous populations to their land.