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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

THE HINDU
ANALYSIS

Current Affairs & Editorial

3 August 2026

PRELIMS · MAINS · EDITORIALS · PRACTICE MCQs

COMPILED BY

Sapna Chauhan

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01 Cauvery Water Situation & the Mekedatu Question

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06 Supreme Court's Judgment on Sex Work

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Each topic opens with a **Why in News** box, followed by crisp analytical notes, ★ **Fact Boxes** for prelims-ready data, the original news clipping, and a **Syllabus Linkage**. The edition closes with **2 Mains questions** and **10 practice MCQs** with an answer key.

WHY IN NEWS

Karnataka CM D.K. Shivakumar said the Cauvery water situation was “slightly better” after rain, and that the State was releasing a limited quantity of water to Tamil Nadu for drinking purposes. He reiterated the need for the Mekedatu project and appealed to Kannada organisations to withdraw the State-wide bandh planned for August 13.

- An **all-party meeting** was convened to address concerns over the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) directive asking Karnataka to abide by the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee’s order to release **3,500 cusecs daily to Tamil Nadu for 15 days**, which set off protests in parts of Karnataka.
- Data from the Water Resources Department showed Karnataka was releasing water at the rate of **25,000 cusecs from the Kabini reservoir** and **1,819 cusecs from Krishnaraja Sagar** to Tamil Nadu.
- Shivakumar clarified that water was being released **through canals only to fill lakes and tanks meant for drinking**, and not for irrigation.
- He described the proposed **Mekedatu project** as the long-term solution to the problems faced by both States, adding that Karnataka would respect Supreme Court orders while protecting the State’s interest.
- Kannada Chaluvali leader **Vatal Nagaraj**, who is leading the protest, said the **August 13 bandh** would be held as planned; TN CM had agreed to postpone his Bengaluru visit at Karnataka’s request.

Cauvery situation slightly better, says Karnataka CM

Releasing limited quantity of water to T.N. for drinking purposes, says Shivakumar after all-party meet; he reiterates need for Mekedatu project, appeals to protesters to withdraw Aug. 13 bandh

Sharath S. Srivatsa

Laigh A. Khan

BENGALURU/MYSURU

Stating that the water situation in the Cauvery was “slightly better” in view of the rain, Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Sunday reiterated his appeal to the Kannada organisations to withdraw their State-wide bandh plan for August 13.

However, Kannada Chaluvali leader Vatal Nagaraj, who is leading the protest, said the bandh would be held as planned.

At an all-party meeting, the Chief Minister said Karnataka was carefully assessing the Cauvery situation, including a petition filed in the Supreme Court by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Opposition party in Tamil Nadu.



Karnataka CM D.K. Shivakumar with former CMs B.S. Yeddiurappa and Siddaramaiah at an all-party meet. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A limited quantity of water was being released from the reservoirs following rain, he said.

The meeting had been convened to address the concerns over the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)’s directive to the State to abide by the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee’s order to re-

lease 3,500 cusecs daily to Tamil Nadu for 15 days. The order set off protests in parts of Karnataka.

The data shared by the Water Resources Department show that Karnataka was releasing water at the rate of 25,000 cusecs from the Kabini reservoir and 1,819 cusecs from the Krishnaraja Sagar on Sunday to

Tamil Nadu. “We are releasing a limited quantity of water through canals only to fill lakes and tanks meant for drinking water purposes, and not for irrigation,” he said.

Reiterating that the proposed Mekedatu project on the Cauvery was the long-term solution to the problems faced by both States, he said: “Karnataka will respect the law and orders of the Supreme Court while protecting the State’s interest”. He said Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay had agreed to postpone his visit to Bengaluru to discuss the issue on the request of the Karnataka government.

CONTINUED ON

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EDITORIAL

» **PAGE 6**

The Hindu, Page 1 — ‘Cauvery situation slightly better, says Karnataka CM’

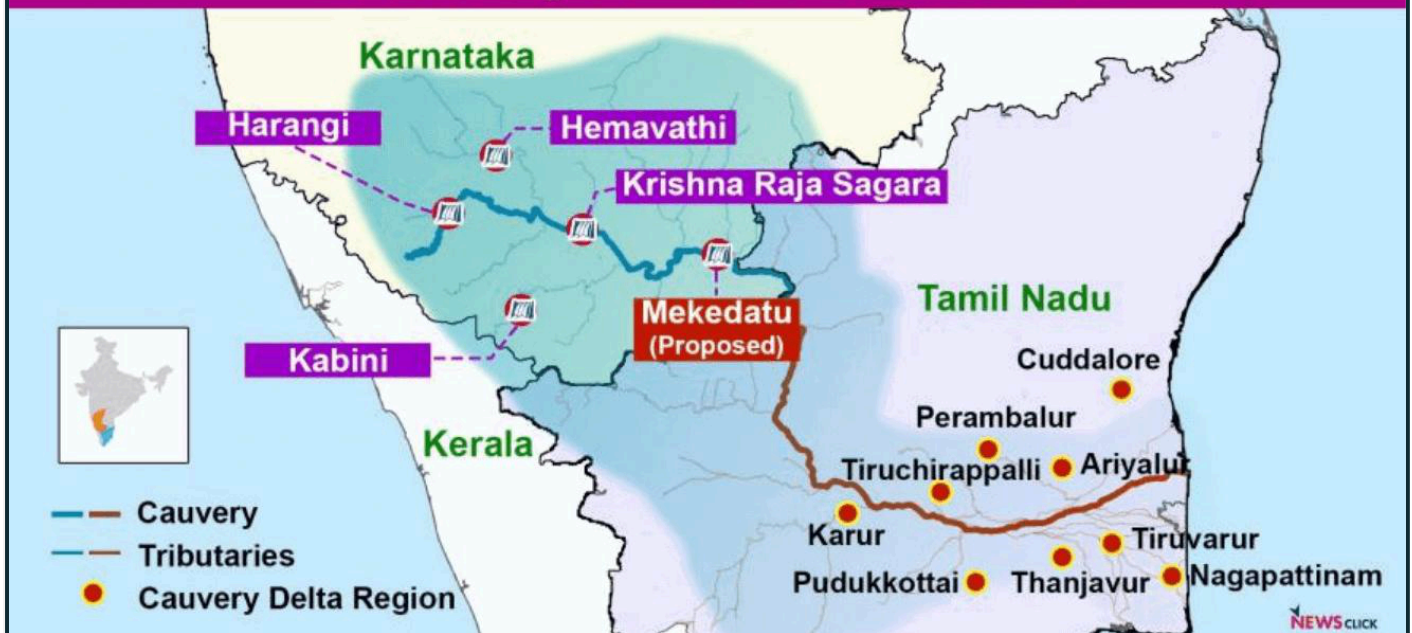
★ About the Cauvery (Kaveri) River

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THE HINDU ANALYSIS · 3 AUGUST 2026

- **Origin:** Rises at **Talakaveri** on the Brahmagiri hills (Western Ghats), Kodagu district, Karnataka.
- **Course:** Flows ~800 km across southern India, draining into the **Bay of Bengal at Poompuhar**, Tamil Nadu.
- **Basin:** ~87,900 sq km across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala & Puducherry.
- **Left-bank tributaries:** Harangi, Hemavati, Shimsha, Arkavati.
- **Right-bank tributaries:** Lakshmantirtha, Kabini, Suvarnavati, Bhavani, Noyil, Amaravati.

Dams in Karnataka across Cauvery and Tributaries



Major dams in Karnataka across the Cauvery and its tributaries

★ Water Sharing & the Supreme Court Verdict (2018)

Of an estimated **740 TMC** total yield at 50% dependability, the Tribunal allotted — **Tamil Nadu 419**, **Karnataka 270**, **Kerala 30**, **Puducherry 7** and **14 TMC** for environmental protection.

In 2018, a three-judge Bench declared an inter-State river a **national asset** and modified shares: **Karnataka 284.75 TMC** (+14.75 for Bengaluru's drinking needs), **Tamil Nadu 404.25 TMC** (-14.75; 10 TMC groundwater recognised), Kerala 30, Puducherry 7.

Annual release: Karnataka must release **177.25 TMC** to Tamil Nadu at the **Biligundlu** gauging station (reduced from 192 TMC under the 2007 award).

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS 1: Distribution of key natural resources — peninsular river systems. **GS 2:** Inter-State water disputes, cooperative federalism, the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, and the role of CWMA and the Supreme Court.

WHY IN NEWS

In a major cross-border conservation milestone, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and the UAE released **672 captive-bred Houbara Bustards** (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) into Karakalpakstan's Aral Sea region.



The Houbara Bustard (Asian / MacQueen's bustard)



Aral Sea & the Central Asian release region

- The **Houbara Bustard** (the Asian or MacQueen's bustard, *Chlamydotis macqueenii*) is a medium-to-large, ground-dwelling **migratory bird** of the bustard family (**Otididae**), noted for its elusive nature and adaptation to **hyper-arid desert** environments.
- **Habitat:** Arid and semi-arid landscapes — sandy and stony deserts, gravel plains, dry steppes and open shrublands across Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and parts of South Asia (including the **Thar Desert** and **Rann of Kutch**).
- **Transboundary migration:** Northern populations from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan undertake long-distance seasonal migrations south to wintering grounds in **Pakistan, India and the Arabian Peninsula**.
- It is a **flagship conservation species** — protecting it conserves vast desert ecosystems and associated wildlife.
- The release is a **model for cross-border conservation**, showing how international cooperation, biofinancing and captive breeding can restore degraded ecosystems.

★ Protection Status

- **IUCN Red List:** Vulnerable
- **CITES:** Appendix I (bans international commercial trade)
- **CMS (Convention on Migratory Species):** Appendix I (strict protection across migratory corridors)

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS 3: Conservation of species and ecosystems, international environmental conventions (CITES, CMS), and models of trans-boundary / captive-breeding conservation.

WHY IN NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the **Nasha Mukht Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan** (Drug-Free Youth for Developed India Pledge Campaign), calling a drugs-free youth population the foundation of “Viksit Bharat”. Over **one crore youth** joined the pledge against substance abuse.

- Modi said that as India has set the goal of becoming a developed country, it is essential for the youth to remain **physically and mentally fit** and stay away from drug abuse.
- The programme was supported by **125+ spiritual and public organisations**, educational institutions and industrial associations, and was conducted at over **28,000 locations**, with participation of over one crore youth, several Chief Ministers and Governors.
- The launch (video conference, 11 AM, 2 August 2026) begins a **100-week nationwide Jan Bhagidari campaign**, with weekly Sunday activities — sports, walkathons, meditation, cultural programmes, street plays, awareness drives and art competitions — to keep prevention visible beyond a one-day pledge.
- Participants include **MY Bharat** and **NSS** volunteers, youth clubs, schools, colleges, NGOs and youth wings of industry associations; the launch connected youth from **10,000+ locations** virtually.
- Modi warned that hostile countries **conspire to lure youth into drug addiction** as part of a malicious agenda, and urged people not to hide cases but to seek professional help and give those recovering “a second chance”.

Drugs-free youth crucial for developed India: Modi

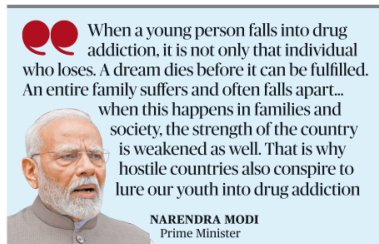
The PM launches nationwide campaign against drugs, says physically and mentally fit young Indians are key for 'Viksit Bharat'; over one crore participants join pledge against substance abuse

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday laid out a national vision for building a drugs-free youth population as the foundation of “Viksit Bharat” (developed India). Stressing the need for sustained action and community participation to combat drug abuse, he said today's youth would eventually enjoy the fruits of a developed India.

After launching the *Nasha Mukht Yuva for Viksit Bharat Sankalp Abhiyan* (Drug-Free Youth for Developed India Pledge Campaign), Mr. Modi said that as India has set the goal of becoming a developed country, it was essential for the youth to remain physically and mentally fit, and therefore stay away from drug abuse.

Supported by more than 125 spiritual and public organisations, educational institutions, and industrial associations, the programme was conducted at over 28,000 locations across the country and saw participation from over one crore youth, besides several Chief Ministers and



NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister

Governors.

Before the Prime Minister's address, the participating youth pledged to make India drugs-free.

'Youth to lead India'

Mr. Modi said the initiative required collective action. “The pledge taken today will continue over the next 100 weeks. Every Sunday, activities related to art, culture, sports, meditation, spirituality, and service will be organised. The message of a drug-free life will reach more and more people,” he said.

“Over the next 20 to 25 years, you will shape your own lives, and by 2047, it is you who will lead India to the goal of becoming a developed country. You will be the ones enjoying the

fruits of that achievement,” he said, addressing the youth.

Noting that young people were today excelling in start-ups, leading the field of Artificial Intelligence, setting new milestones in sports, science and space, he said the country needed their energy, imagination, and talent.

“That is why it is essential that you remain free from drugs, for both your own future and for the country... When a young person falls into drug addiction, it is not only that individual who loses. A dream dies before it can be fulfilled. An entire family suffers and often falls apart,” said Mr. Modi.

“When this happens in families and society, the

strength of the country is weakened as well. That is why hostile countries also conspire to lure our youth into drug addiction. Profiting from drug trafficking while weakening our country is part of their malicious agenda. Therefore, we must protect every young person from falling into the trap,” he said.

Mr. Modi urged people not to hide cases of addiction and to seek professional help for young people struggling with substance abuse, pointing out that rehabilitation centres have been established to aid their recovery. “Someone who defeats addiction is a true warrior. Society should respect them and give them a second chance,” he said.

The Prime Minister said the government had been taking stringent action against drug traffickers and dealers. “Compared with previous years, arrests have increased significantly. This shows how seriously our government is tackling this issue,” he said, expressing confidence that the government would continue the mission with full commitment.

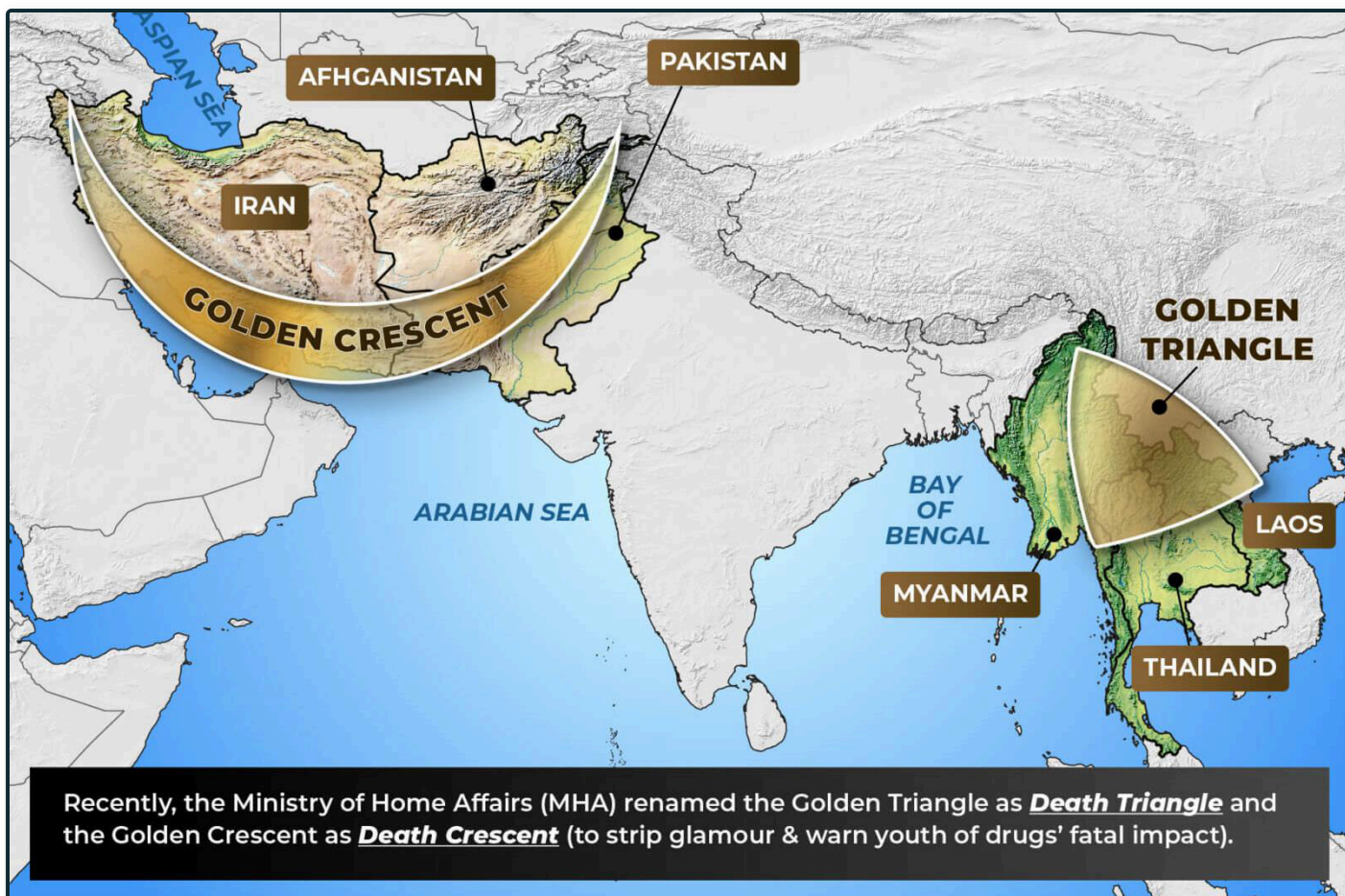
The Hindu, Page 10 — ‘Drugs-free youth crucial for developed India: Modi’

★ Death Triangle & Death Crescent

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THE HINDU ANALYSIS · 3 AUGUST 2026

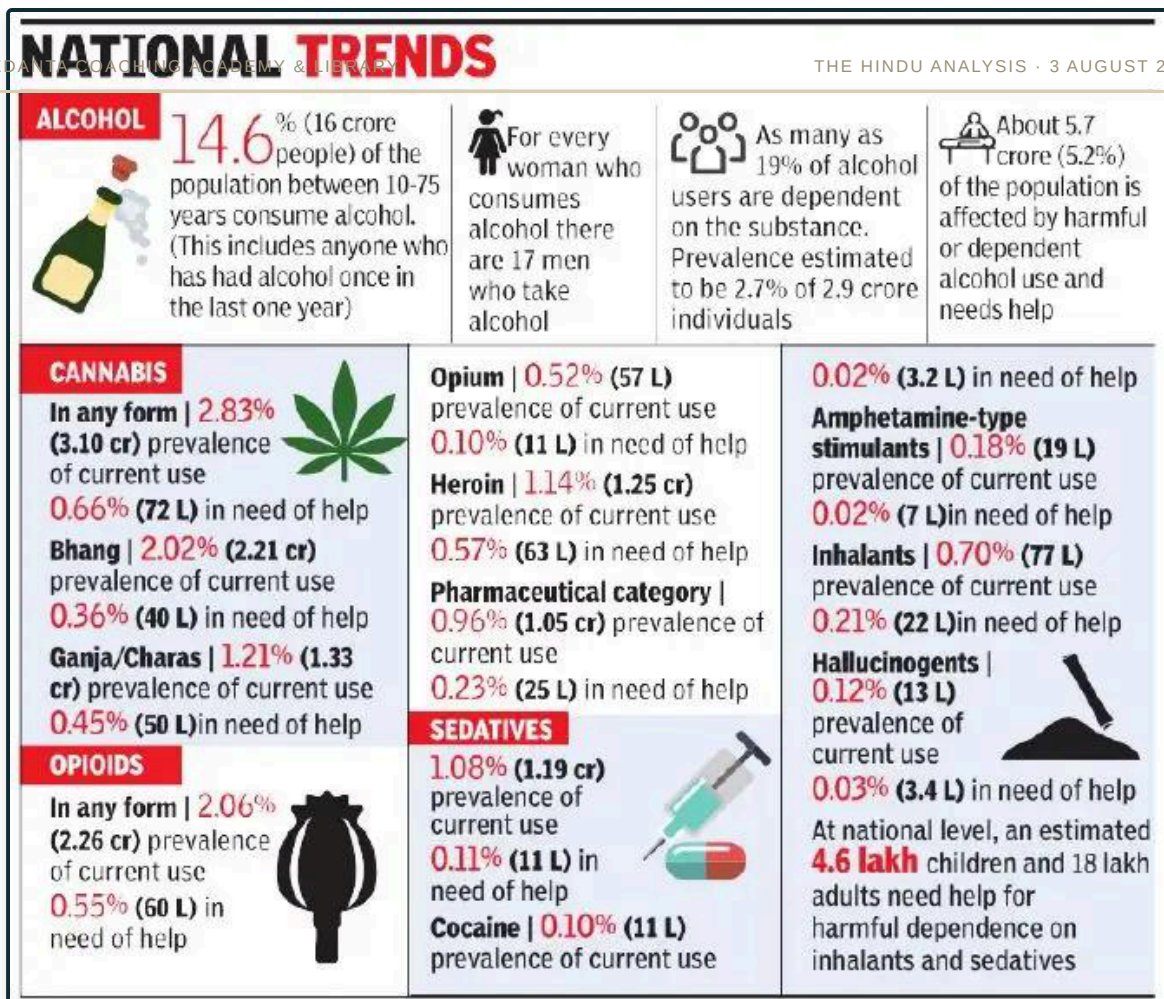
The Ministry of Home Affairs recently renamed the **Golden Triangle** as the **Death Triangle** (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand) and the **Golden Crescent** as the **Death Crescent** (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan) — to strip the ‘glamour’ and warn youth of drugs’ fatal impact.



India between two major drug-source zones — the Death Crescent & the Death Triangle

★ India's Drug Burden — Key Data

- Around **10 crore** people are affected by narcotics (NCB); **UP, Maharashtra & Punjab** recorded the highest NDPS-Act FIRs (2019–21).
- **National Survey (2019):** ~**16 crore (14.6%)** aged 10–75 use alcohol; **3.1 crore (2.8%)** use cannabis; opioid use ~2.06% (2.26 cr).
- Heads of anti-drug agencies of **BRICS** adopted the **Guwahati Declaration** (6–7 July 2026, hosted by the NCB) for coordinated action against illicit trafficking.



National trends in substance use (National Survey on Extent & Pattern of Substance Use)

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS 2: Government welfare schemes, issues of health & vulnerable sections. **GS 3:** Drug trafficking, internal security, and India's position between the Death Crescent and Death Triangle.

04

Stronger Health Systems through Better Public Spending

GS 2 · Health & Governance

WHY IN NEWS

An editorial argues that with foreign aid shrinking and domestic budgets strained, the way forward for public health systems is not just more money but **spending the available money better** — through the right execution, the right investments and better governance.

- **World Bank:** per-capita public spending on universal health coverage in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is about **half of the minimum benchmarks**.
- **Development Assistance for Health (DAH)** peaked in 2021 during COVID-19 but reversed sharply after the pandemic. In early 2025 the **US cut foreign assistance by 67%**; the UK, France and Germany followed with cuts of 39%, 35% and 12%. Per the OECD, health funding could drop up to **60% from its 2022 peak**.
- **Fiscal strain:** global public debt hit a record **\$102 trillion in 2024** (\$31 trillion from developing countries). Since 2010 developing-country debt has grown twice as fast as advanced economies'; in 2024 developing countries paid a record **\$921 billion in net interest (UNCTAD)**, leaving less for health.

Compiled by **Sapna Chauhan**

The Hindu Analysis · 3 August 2026

Three ways to make health spending go further

- **Spend what is allocated:** LMIC health budgets are executed at ~85–90%, lower than for the general budget. In India's National Health Mission, only 26% of communicable / non-communicable disease funds were used in 2024-25, and only about two-thirds of the flagship health-infrastructure allocation was spent.
- **Spend on the right things:** money is best spent on classic **public goods** — infectious-disease control and sanitation (where there is a market failure) — rather than expanding cheap curative services. India spends **less than one-fourth** of its health money on prevention (LSHTM).
- **Better governance, better health:** reducing corruption and improving bureaucratic quality raises the payoff from health spending (e.g., on child mortality). Simply spending more where governance is weak rarely helps — hence the focus on **subnational governance**, budget credibility, cash disbursement and public finance management.

Strong health systems for all with better public spending

The discourse on building strong public health systems tends to start with financing. Indeed, according to the World Bank, the per capita public spending on universal health coverage in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) — including government expenditure and off-budget development assistance — is about half of the minimum benchmarks. As a share of gross domestic product (GDP), the health expenditure gap between LMICs and high-income countries narrowed from 2.05 percentage points in 2000 to 1.68 percentage points in 2023. While it may seem that LMICs are “catching up”, recent World Health Organization data show that in per capita terms the gap has in fact expanded more than three-fold during this period.

Health aid under pressure

Over the years, “development assistance for health” (DAH) has played a critical role in supplementing national budgets in LMICs with the amount of such aid peaking in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the trend of increasing DAH reversed sharply post the pandemic. Further, in early 2025, the United States, a country that has historically contributed over a third of all DAH globally per year, announced cuts to the tune of 67% to its foreign assistance programme. The United Kingdom, France, and Germany followed suit, with cuts of 39%, 35%, and 12%, respectively. As per the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), health funding could drop by up to 60% from its 2022 peak.

At the same time, national budgets are strained due to rising public debt and its costs. Global public debt reached a record figure of \$102 trillion in 2024, with developing countries accounting for \$31 trillion of this total. Since 2010, the public debt of developing countries has grown twice as fast as that of advanced countries. In 2024, according to UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), developing countries paid a record \$921 billion in net interest payments in public



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With foreign aid cuts and strained domestic budgets, the way forward may be to spend available money better

debt leaving less for other needs including health.

With public sources drying up, it is unlikely that more money will flow into health systems anytime soon and the way forward may be to spend available money better. There are three broad ways to make public health spending go further.

The first is to spend what is allocated. The World Bank reports that health budgets in LMICs are executed at around 85%-90%, rates that are lower than that for the general budget and for education. This effectively means that there is a deprioritisation of health at the implementation stage of budgets. In India, a parliamentary panel found that only about two-thirds of the allocation for the flagship health infrastructure mission was spent in 2024-25. Within the National Health Mission (NHM), the picture is worse: just 26% of the money earmarked for communicable and non-communicable disease programmes was actually used that year.

The right health investments

The second is to spend on the right things. Budget execution varies across expenditure categories. While wages and salary budgets tend to be implemented in full, there is underspending on goods and services. As a result, workers are not well-equipped to deliver quality health care. More broadly, there is a choice to be made in terms of the tiers of health care that are prioritised in public spending. A lot of the money goes to curative care at the secondary and tertiary levels — at the cost of preventive, primary health care. According to estimates from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, India spends less than one-fourth of public health money on preventive care.

Purely from a health impact viewpoint, public health money is best spent on classic public goods such as infectious disease control or sanitation, where there is a ‘market failure’ — rather than on the expansion of relatively cheap curative health services (for instance, treating common illnesses) that the private sector is

already supplying competitively. Recent evidence bears this out: public health spending markedly improves infectious disease outcomes, through greater access, vaccination, and sanitation, but does far less for maternal and child health or non-communicable diseases, making a strong case for strategic allocation. As populations age, more will need to be done for chronic conditions in terms of addressing risk factors, early detection, and management.

Better governance, better health

The third is to improve governance and operational efficiency. Good governance is key: if corruption is reduced or the quality of bureaucracy improves, countries see greater positive effects of public health spending on desired health outcomes, such as child mortality. The converse also holds: simply increasing spending where governance is weak is unlikely to improve outcomes. Moreover, with the increasing decentralisation of public service delivery, it is becoming imperative to focus on improving governance at the subnational level.

Within governance, there is a crucial role for public finance management. While a well-formulated budget is a good starting point, impact will only be achieved if the budget is implemented efficiently. There is a need to improve budget credibility and cash disbursement. Involvement of public health providers in budget processes can enhance both their accountability and motivation. Improving procurement processes can help achieve greater value for money in health sector resources. As the pandemic has taught us, budgets should be flexible to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

That said, the case for enhanced spending remains: its returns are greatest precisely where health outcomes are poorest; hence, money that is well-directed can help narrow gaps across countries.

Both writers co-author ‘The Care Gap’, a living literature review supported by Coefficient Giving

The Hindu, Page 6 — ‘Strong health systems for all with better public spending’

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS 2: Issues relating to development and management of the health sector; government budgeting and public finance management; governance, transparency and accountability.

05

Falling Walls: India's Buildings Need Rehabilitation

GS 3 · Infrastructure & Disaster Management

WHY IN NEWS

An editorial on the collapse of the **Kohinoor building in Bhiwandi** (Maharashtra), which killed 10, argues that India's ageing buildings need **widespread rehabilitation work** — nothing short of an urban renewal would do.

- In September 2020 the Bhiwandi Municipal Corporation placed the **Kohinoor building** on its ‘danger’ list around the same time the nearby **Jilani building collapsed, killing 41**. THE HINDU ANALYSIS · 3 AUGUST 2026
- Six years on — and hours after officials again declared it unsafe and evacuated ~40 residents — the **Kohinoor collapsed, killing 10**. In between, owners had refused to vacate or redevelop and instead undertook **unauthorised repairs**.
- The Jilani fall was a **failure of anticipation** (old but not listed); the Kohinoor fall — listed and mid-repairs — implies a **failure of enforcement**. Yet the State responded similarly: suspending officials in 2020 and filing a criminal case against the contractor now.
- India treats infrastructure as a **one-time investment**. The post-2000s construction boom outpaced maintenance and oversight. Mid-2024 saw roof/canopy collapses at Delhi, Jabalpur and Rajkot airports; Bihar saw a spate of bridge collapses in 2024-26; roads have caved in and basements flooded in tier-I cities (Rajinder Nagar tragedy), with fresh collapses this year in Kolkata and Pune.
- Despite technologies to monitor structures and issue early warnings, **urbanisation has outrun municipal capacity**, and most failures involve a **known hazard**. In place of the state’s instinctive legal action, inquiries and compensation, India’s buildings need widespread rehabilitation — an urban renewal.

Falling walls

India’s buildings need widespread rehabilitation work

In September 2020, the Bhiwandi Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra placed the Kohinoor building on its ‘danger’ list around the same time the Jilani building collapsed a few kilometres away, killing 41. Six years on, and hours after officials declared the Kohinoor to be unsafe again and evacuated around 40 residents, it collapsed, killing 10. In the half decade in between, the owners had refused to vacate or redevelop the property and instead undertook unauthorised repairs. While the fall of the Jilani building, which was old but not on a ‘dangerous’ list, was a failure of anticipation, that of the Kohinoor building, on such a list and which fell mid-repairs, implies a failure of enforcement. Yet, the State responded similarly in both instances, by suspending officials in 2020 and filing a criminal case against the contractor now. Bhiwandi, one of India’s largest powerloom hubs, has a large low-income migrant population living in small houses in densely packed neighbourhoods. With hundreds of buildings on the ‘danger’ list and no transit camps or temporary housing, residents often choose unsafe homes over homelessness, while owners continue collecting rent. Evacuation orders are also hard to enforce without police support, while allowing the corporation to claim that legal liability has been discharged on

India treats infrastructure as an asset with a one-time investment. The post-2000s construction boom only outpaced maintenance work and administrative oversight, with the latter having fragmented further since. In mid-2024, roofs/canopies collapsed at airports in Delhi, Jabalpur, and Rajkot while Bihar had a spate of collapsing bridges in 2024-26. Roads have frequently caved in and basements have flooded in tier-I cities, including in the Rajinder Nagar tragedy. This year, similar collapses have also been reported in Kolkata and Pune. Despite the availability of technologies to continuously monitor structures and issue early warnings, urbanisation has outrun municipal capacity, with most of the resulting failures involving a known hazard. The apparent rise in the frequency of these incidents indicates a lack of attention to construction quality as much as greater media coverage and there being more infrastructure to fail. But in place of the state’s almost instinctive responses in the form of legal and disciplinary action, inquiries and promises of audits, and victim compensation, India’s buildings need widespread rehabilitation work. Nothing short of an urban renewal would do.

The Hindu Editorial, Page 6 — ‘Falling walls’

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS 3: Infrastructure and its maintenance; disaster and disaster management; urbanisation, municipal capacity and the safety of the built environment.

WHY IN NEWS

The Supreme Court's judgment of **May 29, 2026** — running to nearly 300 pages — recognises sex work as a “profession” and directs that police must neither interfere with, nor take criminal action against, **adult and consenting sex workers**. Invoking **Article 142**, the Court gives its directions the force of law.

- For over three decades, sex workers have described how anti-trafficking interventions cause profound harm — **forced rescues, indefinite detention in ‘corrective homes’, separation from children** and threats to life — acknowledged only in fragments until now.
- The Court holds that **agency and vulnerability can coexist**; rejects conflating migration with trafficking; affirms that constitutional rights do not disappear because society disapproves of sex work; and rules that **consenting adults cannot be forcibly rescued** and that any intervention must begin with an inquiry into consent.
- It rightly recognises **caste** as a structural condition that can push women into sex work — but the critique notes the judgment places faith in institutions (police, magistrates, shelter homes) that have **repeatedly failed** the very people it seeks to protect.
- **Legal position:** prostitution itself is **not illegal**, but **soliciting and public prostitution are**; owning a brothel is illegal though rarely enforced (e.g., GB Road). Sex workers are entitled to **equal protection (Article 14)**, and **Article 21** guarantees life and personal liberty to citizens and non-citizens alike.

Analysing the SC's judgment on sex work

For more than three decades, sex workers have told governments and courts how anti-trafficking interventions cause profound harm including forced rescues, indefinite detention in “corrective homes”, separation from children and even threat to life. And for decades, these accounts were only acknowledged in fragments, and never in a comprehensive rights-based framework. That is what makes the Supreme Court's judgment of May 29, 2026, so significant.

Across nearly 300 pages, the court departs from many assumptions that have long shaped anti-trafficking discourse globally. It recognises that agency and vulnerability can coexist; rejects the conflation of migration with trafficking; affirms that constitutional rights do not disappear because society disapproves of sex work; holds that consenting adult sex workers cannot forcibly be rescued; and that any intervention must begin with an inquiry into consent. Invoking Article 142, the court gives these directions legal force.

But the judgment also exposes a paradox: it adopts arguments that have been painstakingly developed by sex workers but does not acknowledge the workers or their collectives (such as the National Network of Sex Workers among others). This is not only a question of credit; it reveals how even progressive jurisprudence can reproduce a hierarchy of knowledge in which those most affected by law remain its least recognised authors.

What the judgment assumes
The judgment places faith in institutions that have repeatedly failed the very people it seeks to protect. The court assumes that clearer legal standards will produce different institutional behaviour — that police officers will assess consent without prejudice, magistrates will suspend moral judgment, shelter homes will become rights-based



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Sex workers and their unions must move from the margins to the centre of implementation. They should draft guidelines, monitor compliance, shape police training, and establish standards for shelters

support services, and sex workers will have access to legal aid.

For many women, especially those from the Dalit and Adivasi communities, bureaucracy has never been a neutral system. Caste discrimination and economic marginalisation continue to shape everyday encounters with the state. One woman, wrongly labelled a trafficker after a raid, has spent seven years reporting every month to a police station while attending court hearings where, despite all this time, her statement has never even been recorded. “I go to court and sit outside. Then they call my name, and I go inside. But they don't ask me anything. They have not even recorded my statement yet!”

The top court rightly recognises caste as one of the structural conditions that can push women into sex work. But it stops there. Caste does not simply explain entry into the profession. It also structures every institution responsible for implementing this judgment. As one worker put it: “The state says that *ache din* (good days) will come. When will our *ache din* come? Everything is about money these days. Take any actor. They can kill but do not get arrested. Those who do not have money have to keep going to the court like me.” Her question exposes the judgment's central assumption: that the law is applied equally once rights are recognised. For many workers, the challenge is not only overcoming moral prejudice. It is navigating a legal and bureaucratic system that continues to be shaped by caste.

The judgment is also noticeably quieter about another source of violence: the anti-trafficking industry itself. The court recommends reforming shelter homes but does not examine the organisations that run them, the funding structures that sustain them, or the incentives that make carceral and forced rescue practices persist. The rescue industry is not solely a humanitarian project. It is sustained by a dense network of

civil society organisations that participate in forced raids, manage shelter homes, and exercise significant authority over the women confined within them.

One woman who experienced both prison and a government shelter offered a striking comparison. “Even after rescue, we are bound by the shelter. It is another form of bondage. It seems better to serve six months in jail and come out free than to stay in a shelter for an unknown time.” This account is not an exception. It exposes an uncomfortable reality that anti-trafficking discourse obscures: rescue can become another mechanism of control.

The road ahead

The top Court's recommendations are important. But for the judgment to fulfil its promise, three priorities stand out.

First, sex workers and their unions must move from the margins to the centre of implementation. They should draft guidelines, monitor compliance, shape police training, and establish standards for shelters. Second, the anti-trafficking NGO sector deserves scrutiny. Longstanding evidence suggests that some have become active participants in coercive rescue practices while operating with limited accountability to the communities they claim to serve. Their funding and legal immunity should no longer be taken for granted. Finally, the structural conditions identified by the court do not require new institutions to fix. India already possesses an extensive welfare architecture. The challenge is ensuring that sex workers can access it as rights-bearing citizens.

The Supreme Court has opened an important constitutional door. Whether it leads to meaningful change will depend on whether India's institutions can abandon decades of paternalism and begin treating sex workers as citizens whose choices deserve the same legal respect as anyone else's.

The Hindu, Page 7 — ‘Analysing the SC's judgment on sex work’

★ Legal Framework

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THE HINDU ANALYSIS · 3 AUGUST 2026

Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act: originally the **Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Children Act, 1956**, later amended and renamed. It penalises keeping a brothel, soliciting in public, living off the earnings of sex work, and habitually being in the company of a sex worker.

Justice Verma Commission (2012–13): acknowledged a distinction between women **trafficked** for commercial sexual exploitation and adult, **consenting** women in sex work of their own volition.

SYLLABUS LINKAGE

GS 2: Judiciary and Article 142; fundamental rights (Articles 14 & 21); mechanisms and laws for the protection of vulnerable sections; issues relating to women.



Mains Practice Questions

ANSWER-WRITING · THE HINDU ANALYSIS · 3 August 2026

Q1. General Studies – II

15 Marks · 250 Words

“Merely increasing public health expenditure does not automatically translate into better health outcomes.” In the context of shrinking global development assistance for health and rising public debt, discuss how India can make its public health spending more effective.

Q2. General Studies – III

10 Marks · 150 Words

The recurring collapse of buildings and infrastructure in Indian cities reflects a failure of both anticipation and enforcement rather than isolated accidents. Examine the structural causes and suggest a roadmap for urban structural rehabilitation.



Prelims Practice MCQs

10 QUESTIONS · THE HINDU ANALYSIS · 3 August 2026

Q1. With reference to the Cauvery river, consider the following statements:

1. It originates at Talakaveri on the Brahmagiri hills of the Western Ghats.
2. Kabini is a left-bank tributary of the Cauvery.
3. The river drains into the Bay of Bengal.

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

Q2. Regarding the Supreme Court’s 2018 Cauvery verdict, consider the following statements:

1. It declared an inter-State river to be a national asset.
2. Karnataka’s allocation was increased to meet Bengaluru’s drinking water needs.
3. Kerala’s allocation was increased from the earlier award.

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

Q3. Consider the following about the conservation status of the Houbara Bustard:

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1. IUCN Red List — Vulnerable.
2. CITES — Appendix I.
3. Convention on Migratory Species — Appendix II.

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

Q4. The captive-bred Houbara Bustards were recently released near the Aral Sea. The Aral Sea lies between which two countries?

- (a) Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (b) Turkmenistan and Iran (c) Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan
(d) Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan

Q5. The terms ‘Death Crescent’ and ‘Death Triangle’, recently in the news, are associated with the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle. The Golden/Death Crescent comprises:

- (a) Myanmar, Laos and Thailand (b) Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (c) Iran, Iraq and Syria
(d) Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan

Q6. Consider the following statements on substance use in India:

1. As per the 2019 National Survey, alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive substance among those aged 10–75.
2. The Guwahati Declaration adopted in 2026 relates to BRICS cooperation against illicit drug trafficking.
3. The Narcotics Control Bureau functions under the Ministry of Health.

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

Q7. With reference to Development Assistance for Health (DAH), consider the following statements:

1. DAH peaked in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The United States has historically contributed over a third of global DAH per year.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q8. ‘Global public debt reached a record figure in 2024, with developing countries paying record net interest payments the same year.’ The record global public debt figure for 2024 was approximately:

(a) \$61 trillion (b) \$102 trillion (c) \$31 trillion (d) \$921 billion

Q9. With reference to the legal position on sex work in India, consider the following statements:

1. The governing law was originally enacted as the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Children Act, 1956.
2. Prostitution as such is illegal in India, though rarely prosecuted.
3. Soliciting and public prostitution are offences under the law.

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

Q10. Consider the following statements:

1. Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to pass any order necessary for doing complete justice.
2. The right under Article 21 is available to citizens as well as non-citizens.

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWER KEY

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1-(b)

2-(a)

3-(a)

4-(a)

5-(b)

6-(a)

7-(c)

8-(b)

9-(a)

10-(c)

1(b): Kabini is a right-bank tributary. **2(a):** Kerala's 30 TMC was unchanged. **3(a):** The Houbara is on CMS Appendix I, not II. **5(b):** Death/Golden Crescent = Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan. **6(a):** The NCB functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs. **9(a):** Prostitution itself is not illegal; soliciting and public prostitution are.