

# THE PALA CIVIL TIMES



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West Asia conflict takes a toll on medical tourism industry in India

THE HINDU : 18-03-2026 - Page 1



Mexico hails Spanish king's rare admission of colonial abuses

THE HINDU : 18-03-2026 - Page 14

Cholesterol makes cells' nuclei squishy, helping melanoma spread

THE HINDU : 18-03-2026 - Page 7



UPSC Spotlight - focus page for prelims 2026

The Pala Civil Times special feature



## PAKISTAN STRIKE KILLS 400 IN KABUL: WHERE IS THIS WAR HEADED, WHAT IT MEANS FOR REGION



The conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan has escalated significantly following Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghan territory, including in Kabul. The Taliban government has alleged that over 400 people were killed in one such strike on a drug rehabilitation facility, while Pakistan has denied this, stating that only military and terrorist-related targets were hit. The escalation marks a shift from earlier border tensions to deeper military engagement within Afghanistan. Since Pakistan launched "Operation Ghazab lil-Haq" on February 27, both sides have carried out retaliatory strikes, with overall casualties estimated to be around 1,000, though exact figures remain unverified.

The immediate cause of the conflict is Pakistan's action against the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant group operating near the Afghanistan border. Pakistan has expressed concerns over the presence and activities of the group and has taken multiple steps in the past, including negotiations, economic measures, and limited military responses, before initiating the current operation. The situation is significant as it reflects rising tensions between the two neighbouring countries, potential instability along the border region, and the risk of prolonged conflict, which could impact regional security dynamics.



## SC allows 12 weeks' paid leave to all new adoptive mothers



The Supreme Court of India has reaffirmed that maternity leave is a basic human right, extending its scope to include adoptive mothers. The Court struck down a provision under the Code of Social Security 2020 that limited maternity benefits to women adopting children below three months of age, calling it discriminatory and impractical given the lengthy legal adoption process. It emphasised that adoptive mothers have the same rights and responsibilities as biological mothers, and that adoption is an expression of reproductive autonomy. By recognising maternity benefits as essential for ensuring women's economic security and workplace inclusion, the judgment strengthens gender-sensitive labour governance.

From a governance perspective, the ruling has broader social implications. The Court highlighted that lack of maternity support could negatively impact child welfare and even reinforce gender inequality, such as forcing older girl siblings to drop out of school for caregiving. Importantly, it also urged the government to introduce legal provisions for paternity leave, recognising parenting as a shared responsibility. This signals a shift toward more inclusive and equitable social security frameworks, where both maternal and paternal roles are supported, contributing to better child development outcomes and more balanced gender roles in society.

## Gujarat UCC panel submits final report to CM Patel

The Gujarat government has taken a significant step toward implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) by receiving the final draft prepared by a five-member committee led by former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai. The proposed framework aims to establish a common set of laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption across all religions and communities in the state. A key focus of the draft is ensuring gender equality and strengthening protections for women, while also taking into account Gujarat's cultural and social diversity. This move reflects a growing trend at the state level to operationalise the idea of a uniform civil framework within India's plural legal system.

The concept of a UCC originates from Article 44 of the Constitution of India, which directs the State to endeavour to secure a common civil code for all citizens, although it is not legally enforceable. The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly emphasised its desirability, notably in the Shah Bano case, *Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India*, and later observations highlighting the need for legal uniformity to promote equality and national integration. However, debates persist due to tensions between the right to equality and the freedom of religion. In practice, Uttarakhand became the first state to implement a UCC, passing the law in 2024, receiving presidential assent, and notifying its rules in 2025. The code applies broadly to residents while exempting certain Scheduled Tribes, marking an important precedent that states like Gujarat are now seeking to follow.



## Mexico hails Spanish king's rare admission of colonial abuses

Recent remarks by Claudia Sheinbaum welcoming the acknowledgment of colonial-era abuses by Felipe VI mark a significant moment in Mexico–Spain relations. Diplomatic tensions between the two countries have persisted since 2019, when Mexico formally sought an apology for the violence and exploitation associated with Spanish conquest and colonisation. The King's statement, recognising that “much abuse” occurred during the conquest of the Americas, has been interpreted as a gesture of rapprochement, opening space for renewed dialogue. This acknowledgment also reflects a broader global trend where former colonial powers are increasingly reassessing historical actions through modern ethical frameworks.

### Historical wounds

The historical background of this issue lies in the early 16th-century Spanish conquest of regions such as Mesoamerica, led by figures like Hernán Cortés. The Spanish successfully defeated powerful empires like the Aztecs and Incas through a combination of superior military technology, strategic alliances with local groups, and the devastating impact of diseases such as smallpox. While colonial laws were sometimes framed as protective, in practice they enabled exploitation through systems like *encomienda*, leading to large-scale population decline, forced labour, and cultural disruption. Over time, these processes resulted in profound demographic and social transformations, with Indigenous populations declining drastically due to violence, disease, and displacement.

The present acknowledgment is important because it connects historical processes with contemporary diplomacy and international relations. Recognising past injustices can help address long-standing grievances, promote reconciliation, and strengthen bilateral ties. It also contributes to a broader discourse on colonial accountability, historical memory, and cultural justice. For countries like Mexico, such recognition is not only symbolic but also part of asserting historical narratives and dignity, while for Spain, it represents an effort to engage constructively with its colonial legacy in a changing global context.

## South Sudan conflict pushes close to 100,000 into Ethiopia: UNICEF



The ongoing conflict in South Sudan has intensified in Akobo, emerging as a major flashpoint in the eastern part of Jonglei State. Earlier in March, the national army ordered a complete evacuation of the town, including foreign aid agencies, and subsequently claimed control, though independent verification remains difficult due to communication disruptions. The evacuation triggered a large-scale displacement, with nearly 100,000 people fleeing across the border into Ethiopia or to relatively safer areas within Jonglei and Upper Nile regions. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply, particularly affecting children. According to UNICEF, violence across Jonglei has led to widespread disruption of essential services like health and nutrition facilities across the state. This has contributed to rising malnutrition levels among displaced children, alongside an ongoing cholera outbreak. The conflict reflects deeper structural instability in South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011 but soon descended into civil war. A 2018 power-sharing agreement between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar had temporarily reduced violence but has weakened since early 2025.

## West Asia conflict takes a toll on medical tourism industry in India

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has begun affecting India's medical tourism sector, primarily through disruptions in international travel. India, known for affordable and advanced healthcare, attracts a large number of foreign patients, particularly from West Asia. However, flight restrictions, airspace closures, and rising travel uncertainty have reduced patient inflows.

**Expanding Economy through Strengthening Tourism**

- ▶ To launch a **Scheme to support States** in establishing **Five Regional Medical Hubs**, in partnership with the private sector
- ▶ These Medical Hubs to have **AYUSH Centres, Medical Value Tourism Facilitation Centres** and **infrastructure** for **diagnostics, post-care** and **rehabilitation**
- ▶ To set up a **National Institute of Hospitality** by upgrading the existing National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology
- ▶ Pilot scheme for upskilling **10,000 guides in 20 iconic tourist sites** through a standardized, high-quality **12-week training course** in **hybrid mode**, in collaboration with an **IIM**

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### Decline in Patient Footfall

Hospitals, especially in North India, are witnessing a significant drop in international patients. For instance, some hospital networks have reported over 30% decline in international footfall, with a 75% drop in patients from West Asia within a short period. Given that this region contributes nearly one-third of international patients, the impact on the sector is substantial.

### Role of Connectivity and Travel Constraints

The primary reason for this decline is disruption in air travel. Flight cancellations, rerouting, and increased ticket prices have made travel difficult. Certain routes, such as from Iraq, have been completely halted, while others face reduced frequency. Even where connectivity exists, uncertainty and safety concerns are discouraging patients from travelling.



Despite short-term challenges, there is a potential long-term opportunity. As instability affects traditional medical hubs in West Asia, some patients are increasingly considering India as a more stable alternative. This indicates a possible shift in global medical tourism patterns, provided India can maintain accessibility, connectivity, and quality healthcare services.

### Regional Variations within India

The impact is uneven across India. Southern centres like Chennai and Hyderabad have experienced relatively minor disruptions so far due to diversified patient sources (SAARC, Africa, Europe) and alternative flight routes. Some hospitals have reported only marginal declines of 2–3%, indicating resilience due to better connectivity and varied international outreach.

### Nature of Medical Demand

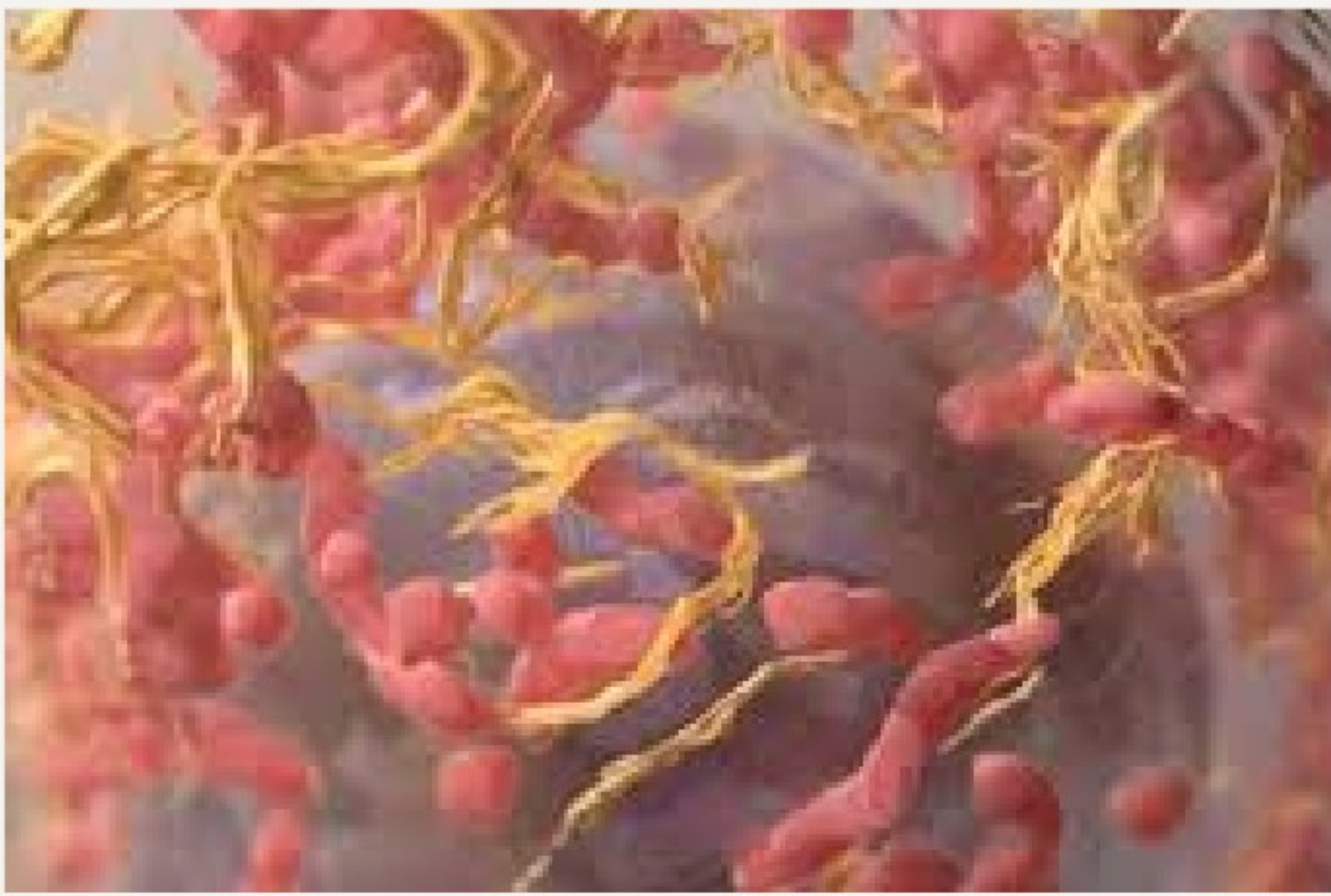
Critical treatments such as cancer care, organ transplants, and bone marrow procedures continue with limited disruption, as many are government-supported or essential in nature. However, elective procedures have been affected more significantly, as patients tend to postpone non-urgent travel during periods of uncertainty.

### Economic Impact and Short-Term Outlook

The immediate revenue impact on India's medical tourism sector is estimated at 15–20% for the current period, with concerns of a larger impact in the coming months due to reduced new patient arrivals. Seasonal factors like Ramzan may temporarily mask the decline, but sustained disruptions could deepen the slowdown.

## Cholesterol makes cells' nuclei squishy, helping melanoma spread

Melanoma is a dangerous form of skin cancer that begins in melanocytes, the cells responsible for producing melanin. Cancer develops gradually as normal cells accumulate genetic changes over time, leading them to divide uncontrollably, evade the immune system, and spread to other parts of the body. This spread, known as metastasis, is the primary reason many cancers become life-threatening. Identifying the key drivers behind these changes is crucial for developing effective treatments.



### Role of the Nuclear Envelope in Cancer Spread

Recent research has identified an unexpected factor influencing cancer progression: cholesterol present in the nuclear envelope, the membrane surrounding the cell's nucleus. The nucleus houses DNA and functions as the control centre of the cell. When cholesterol levels in this membrane are high, the nucleus becomes more deformable or "squishy," allowing cancer cells to squeeze through tight spaces between tissues more easily, thereby aiding metastasis.

### Impact of Cholesterol on DNA Damage and Aggression

High cholesterol levels not only make the nucleus more flexible but also more fragile. This fragility increases the likelihood of small tears in the nuclear envelope, exposing DNA to damage. Such damage can lead to additional mutations, some of which may make the cancer more aggressive. Importantly, reducing cholesterol levels in cancer cells was found to decrease their invasiveness, suggesting a direct link between cholesterol and cancer severity.

### The Role of Lamin B Receptor (LBR)

The study identified a protein called Lamin B Receptor (LBR) as a key regulator of cholesterol in the nuclear envelope. LBR has a dual function: it helps anchor DNA within the nucleus and also supports cholesterol production. In many melanoma cases, elevated levels of LBR were observed, leading to increased cholesterol and a more deformable, fragile nucleus. When LBR levels were reduced, the nuclear membrane became more stable and less prone to deformation.

### Experimental Evidence and Mechanism

Further experiments confirmed that the cholesterol-producing function of LBR is central to this process. When researchers used modified versions of LBR that could not produce cholesterol, the nucleus did not become fragile, even if LBR levels were high. Additionally, removing cholesterol directly from cell membranes strengthened the nuclear envelope, reinforcing the idea that cholesterol alters the physical properties of the nucleus and contributes to cancer spread.

### Therapeutic Potential and Clinical Implications

The findings suggest that LBR and cholesterol metabolism could serve as important targets for cancer treatment. Studies in animal models showed that tumours with reduced LBR levels had fewer nuclear envelope ruptures and were less invasive. Patient data also indicated that higher LBR expression is associated with poorer outcomes in melanoma. This aligns with earlier observations that statin use, which lowers cholesterol, may slow cancer progression, highlighting potential therapeutic benefits.

### Importance of Fundamental Research

The discovery of LBR's role in cancer traces back to earlier basic research on sterol production in fungi. Decades later, this knowledge helped scientists understand how LBR influences cholesterol dynamics in human cells and contributes to cancer metastasis. This demonstrates the long-term value of curiosity-driven research, where findings from unrelated fields can eventually provide critical insights into complex diseases like cancer.

## Moral disengagement and the impact of power

Source : THE HINDU - Text & Context 18-03-2026

Despite the existence of laws and ethical norms, violence and unethical behaviour have persisted across societies and historical periods. A key reason is that harmful actions are often reframed to appear necessary or justified, especially by those in positions of power. From colonial violence described as “civilising missions” to modern military operations framed as “security measures,” language plays a crucial role in shaping perception. Similarly, social issues such as violence against women are frequently minimised or reframed in ways that shift blame onto victims. In contemporary contexts, even technological developments—like the use of personal data by artificial intelligence systems or job displacement due to automation—are often presented as inevitable progress, masking underlying ethical concerns.

The concept of moral disengagement, introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura, explains how individuals rationalise harmful behaviour while maintaining a positive self-image. Rather than rejecting morality, people cognitively restructure their understanding of actions to make them appear acceptable. This can involve justifying harm as serving a greater good, minimising personal responsibility, ignoring consequences, or blaming victims. Importantly, moral disengagement is not limited to individuals—it can operate collectively within institutions, where shared language and norms help diffuse accountability and sustain authority.



Understanding moral disengagement is essential in today’s world. It reveals that harmful systems are not sustained by the absence of morality, but by its reinterpretation. Recognising these mechanisms enables individuals to question dominant narratives, demand accountability, and insist on clarity in language. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical and technological landscape, this awareness is crucial for critically evaluating policies, media representations, and institutional actions.

## Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

Bandura identified several mechanisms that enable this process. These include moral justification (portraying harmful acts as necessary), advantageous comparison (presenting them as less harmful than alternatives), and displacement or diffusion of responsibility (shifting accountability across individuals or systems). Other mechanisms include distortion of consequences, where harm is downplayed, and dehumanisation, where victims are portrayed as less deserving of empathy. Together, these strategies allow individuals and institutions to engage in harmful actions without experiencing moral conflict.

### Euphemistic Labelling and Media Framing

A particularly powerful tool in this process is euphemistic labelling—the use of neutral or technical language to sanitise violence. Terms like “collateral damage” instead of civilian deaths or “enhanced interrogation” instead of torture reduce the emotional weight of actions. This effect is amplified through media framing. According to Media Framing Theory, the way information is presented influences how audiences interpret events. By choosing specific words and narratives, media can soften or obscure the reality of harmful actions, often aligning with the interests of powerful actors.

### Institutional Power and Diffusion of Responsibility

This dynamic is evident across domains—from the portrayal of exploitation cases using softened language, to the framing of military actions in technical terms that hide human suffering. In complex systems such as governments, militaries, and corporations, hierarchical structures further fragment responsibility. Leaders justify decisions as necessary for larger goals, while individuals within the system defer accountability to procedures or authority. As a result, the public often receives a diluted understanding of events, limiting critical engagement.

**Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics**

**Places in News**

“Places in News” for UPSC focuses on important locations—both in India and globally—that appear in current affairs. These include landmarks, disputed territories, major boundaries, water bodies, and strategic regions. A clear understanding of their geography, boundaries, and geopolitical relevance helps aspirants tackle map-based and current affairs questions effectively in the UPSC Prelims.

**Levant - West Asia**

The term Levant broadly refers to the eastern Mediterranean region, including countries such as Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Historically, it was used by European traders to describe lands to the east and has been applied in different contexts to parts of the Middle East or Near East. Today, it is commonly used in geopolitical discussions to denote this strategically important region bordering the eastern Mediterranean.



**Khartoum - Sudan**

Khartoum is the capital and major political-economic centre of Sudan, strategically located at the confluence of the Blue Nile and White Nile. Founded in 1821 during Egyptian rule, it developed as an important trade and administrative hub. The city forms a tri-urban region with Omdurman and Khartoum North, making it a key geographical and cultural centre. Khartoum has been in the news after Sudan’s army recaptured the city from the Rapid Support Forces following intense fighting in the ongoing civil war.



**Prasat Ta Muen Tho**

Prasat Ta Muen Thom is in the news due to renewed border tensions between Thailand and Cambodia, involving military clashes, surveillance allegations, and competing territorial claims over the disputed temple region.



## PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to Indian history, which of the following is/are the essential element/ elements of the feudal system? (2015)

1. A very strong centralized political authority and a very weak provincial or local political authority.
2. The emergence of an administrative structure based on control and possession of the land.
3. Creation of lord-vassal relationship between the feudal lord and his overlord.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

2) Consider the following: (2015)  
 The arrival of Babur into India led to the

1. introduction of gunpowder
  2. introduction of the arch and dome in the region's architecture
  3. establishment of the Timurid dynasty
- Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

**PRELIMS 2026 COUNTDOWN**

**67 DAYS TO GO**

## Balancing Efficiency with Officer Well-being



A Parliamentary Standing Committee of the Parliament of India has highlighted growing administrative pressures on civil servants and recommended reforms to strengthen both their well-being and effectiveness. In its review of the Department of Personnel and Training, the panel noted a significant shortage in the IAS cadre, leading to increased workload, stress, and potential decline in governance quality. To address this, it proposed measures such as institutional mental health support, improved training focused on “seva bhav” (spirit of service), and better personnel management practices. The recommendations also extend to regulating AI use in governance and improving electoral roll processes. Overall, the report is important as it links administrative efficiency with officer well-being, aiming to ensure better public service delivery and stronger institutional functioning.



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# Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) Answer is option (b) 2 and 3 only.

Feudalism, both in Europe and in the Indian context, is generally associated with the decentralization of political power, where authority is distributed among local lords rather than concentrated in a strong central authority. Hence, Statement 1 is incorrect, as it wrongly describes feudalism as having a strong centralized political system. In reality, kings often depended on subordinate chiefs, landlords, or intermediaries who exercised significant control over their territories.

Statement 2 is correct because feudal systems are fundamentally based on control and possession of land. In Indian history, institutions such as Jagir and Iqta illustrate how land grants were used as a means of administration, revenue collection, and political control. Land functioned as the primary source of wealth and authority.

Statement 3 is also correct as feudalism involves a hierarchical relationship between lords and vassals. These relationships were based on mutual obligations—vassals offered military or administrative service and loyalty, while lords provided protection and land rights. This network of obligations formed the backbone of the feudal structure.

Thus, feudalism is best understood as a system marked by land-based authority and hierarchical personal relationships, rather than centralized governance.



2) Answer is option b

Statement 1: Introduction of gunpowder: This statement is incorrect. Gunpowder was already introduced in India before Babur's arrival. The Bahmani Sultanate and the Vijayanagara Empire had used gunpowder and firearms in battles by the 14th century. However, Babur is credited with effectively using gunpowder artillery in Indian warfare, particularly during the First Battle of Panipat (1526 CE), which marked the beginning of the Mughal Empire.

Statement 2: Introduction of the arch and dome in the region's architecture: This statement is incorrect. The use of arches and domes in Indian architecture predates Babur's arrival. These architectural features were introduced in India during the Delhi Sultanate period (12th–13th century CE), under rulers like the Slave Dynasty and Khiljis. Structures like the Qutub Minar and Alai Darwaza already showcased these architectural elements.

Statement 3: Establishment of the Timurid dynasty: This statement is correct. Babur, a descendant of Tamerlane (Timur) from his father's side and Genghis Khan from his mother's side, established the Timurid dynasty in India, which came to be known as the Mughal dynasty. The Mughal Empire marked the continuation of the Timurid lineage in the Indian subcontinent.

Babur defeated **Ibrahim Lodi** in the **First Battle of Panipat (1526)**, marking the beginning of the Mughal Empire in India, and his victory was largely due to his effective use of cavalry and artillery. He consolidated power by defeating **Rana Sangha** in the **Battle of Khanua (1527)**, capturing Chanderi (1528), and defeating the Afghans in the **Battle of Gogra (1529)**.