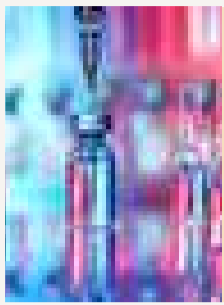


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How the Middle East war has brought MP's basmati exports to a standstill
THE INDIAN EXPRESS : Explained



UPSC Spotlight - focus page for prelims 2026
The Pala Civil Times special feature



SC STATUS 'ONLY FOR HINDUS, BUDDHISTS, SIKHS'



The Supreme Court held that a person who converts to a religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism immediately loses Scheduled Caste (SC) status, regardless of birth. Referring to Clause 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, the Court stated that this exclusion is absolute and applies to anyone who does not publicly profess one of these three religions. In the case of Chinthada Anand, a Hindu-Madiga who converted to Christianity, the Court upheld that he could not claim protection under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, as Christianity does not recognise caste. The judgment clarified that “professing” a religion requires an outward and public expression of faith, not just private belief.

The Court further ruled that individuals seeking to regain SC status through reconversion must provide clear proof of their original caste, genuine reconversion, and acceptance back into the caste community through its customs and practices. It also emphasised that mere declaration of reconversion is insufficient, and the burden of proof lies on the individual to establish continuity of social identity. On Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Court noted that the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 does not impose religion-based restrictions. However, eligibility depends on continued adherence to tribal identity, customs, and practices. If a person abandons these and fully assimilates into another religion, their tribal status may be questioned and must be determined based on evidence.

How the Middle East war has brought MP's basmati exports to a standstill

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has severely disrupted the basmati rice export cycle from India, particularly affecting clusters like Raisen district in Madhya Pradesh. This period, especially March–April, is typically the peak export season when rice is shipped to Gulf countries ahead of Ramzan and Eid. However, due to the conflict, rice mills have slowed or completely halted operations, breaking a well-established supply chain that connects Indian producers to West Asian markets.

Halt in Shipments and Trade Losses

Export activity has been significantly affected, with most shipments either delayed, halted mid-transit, or returned. Exporters are facing financial stress as goods already shipped are stuck at sea, and fresh consignments are not being dispatched. Rising shipping costs, without a corresponding increase in prices, have further worsened the situation. As a result, exporters are experiencing a freeze in monthly revenues, leading to liquidity issues and growing financial uncertainty.

High Dependence on West Asian Markets

India's basmati export sector is heavily dependent on West Asia, with countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, UAE, and Yemen accounting for nearly half of total exports. This concentration makes the sector structurally vulnerable to geopolitical tensions in the region. Since other markets like Europe, the US, and Africa either prefer different rice varieties or lower-cost alternatives, rerouting exports is not a viable option in the short term.

Supply Chain and Logistics Challenges

The conflict has disrupted global shipping routes, leading to a sharp increase in freight costs and delays in delivery. In some cases, exporters are unable to track containers already shipped. Additionally, insurance companies have reduced or stopped coverage for shipments in the conflict zone, increasing the financial risks for exporters. Rerouting shipments through alternative ports is adding further costs and delays.



Accumulation of Unsold Stock

A significant quantity of basmati rice—estimated at around 10 lakh tonnes—is currently lying unsold in warehouses and ports across India. Exporters have halted processing activities as there is no clarity on market access. This buildup of inventory is locking up capital and increasing storage costs, further straining the financial position of traders and millers.

Impact on Local Economy and Producers

Regions like Raisen, which have developed as major basmati export hubs due to favorable agricultural conditions and infrastructure, are facing widespread economic stress. Farmers, millers, and exporters are all affected due to reduced demand and halted operations. Many exporters are unable to service loans and are seeking temporary relief measures such as EMI waivers to manage the crisis.

Structural Nature of the Crisis

The crisis highlights the structural nature of India's basmati export dependency. The specific variety grown and processed is tailored to West Asian consumer preferences, making diversification difficult. As a result, any disruption in this region has a direct and immediate impact on the entire value chain—from farmers to exporters.

While some exporters are hopeful that alternative shipping routes may ease the situation, uncertainty remains high. Continued conflict could prolong the disruption, deepen financial losses, and potentially impact future planting and production decisions. The situation underscores the need for market diversification and risk mitigation strategies in India's agricultural export sector.

How BioPharma SHAKTI can transform biologics with non-animal models

The development of biologic drugs has highlighted serious limitations in traditional animal testing. A notable example is the Northwick Park Tragedy in London, where a monoclonal antibody caused severe immune reactions in human volunteers despite appearing safe in animal trials. Similarly, drugs like semorinemab failed in human trials even after success in animal models. These cases show that animal physiology often differs significantly from human biology, making such models unreliable for predicting drug safety and effectiveness.

What Are Biologics?

Biologics are complex medicines derived from living cells, including monoclonal antibodies, vaccines, and insulin. Unlike conventional drugs, they are highly specific and interact with particular receptors in the human body. Because these receptors may be absent or function differently in animals, testing biologics in animal models often produces misleading results. As a result, the global pharmaceutical sector is increasingly focusing on alternative testing methods.

Rise of Human-Relevant Models (NAMs)

To overcome these challenges, scientists are adopting non-animal methodologies (NAMs) such as organoids, organ-on-a-chip systems, and 3D bioprinting. These models are developed using human cells and can better replicate real human biological conditions. For instance, advanced “cancer-on-chip” systems allow researchers to study how therapies like CAR T-cell treatment interact with tumours in a controlled environment, offering more accurate insights without relying on animal testing.



For India to fully realise the potential of biologics, it must strengthen regulatory clarity, invest in infrastructure, and promote the large-scale adoption of NAMs. Building robust, standardised, and industry-ready systems will make drug development faster, safer, and more cost-effective.

Advantages of NAMs

NAMs offer several benefits beyond improved accuracy. They can significantly reduce drug development costs and timelines, making the process more efficient for pharmaceutical companies. Studies suggest that such technologies can lower overall costs and shorten the time required to identify effective drug candidates. Additionally, they reduce ethical concerns associated with animal testing and enable more precise evaluation of treatment outcomes and safety risks.

India's Policy Push: Biopharma SHAKTI

Recognising the importance of biologics, the Government of India has introduced the Biopharma SHAKTI strategy to boost domestic production of biologics and biosimilars. Alongside this, regulatory reforms like the New Drugs and Clinical Trials (Amendment) Rules, 2023 aim to promote the adoption of NAMs. However, despite growing research activity, the practical use of these technologies in industry remains limited.

Challenges in Adoption

The transition to NAMs faces several hurdles in India. These include limited infrastructure, lack of standardised protocols, insufficient funding, and weak industry-academia collaboration. While many academic institutions are developing these models, their translation into commercially viable tools is slow. Additionally, the biotechnology sector requires stronger entrepreneurial support and better awareness among investors about the risks and potential of biologics.

Biosimilars and Regulatory Issues

Another important focus area is biosimilars, which are cost-effective alternatives to original biologic drugs. However, their development is complicated by regulatory challenges and practices like patent evergreening, which extend the market exclusivity of original drugs. Approval processes governed by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation also need clearer and updated guidelines to accommodate new testing methods like NAMs.

HEALTH

Menstrual leave debate: What studies say about women's work productivity, and the way forward

The Supreme Court of India recently expressed concerns regarding mandatory menstrual leave policies, noting that such provisions could unintentionally discourage employers from hiring women and reinforce gender stereotypes. The Court observed that compulsory leave might create perceptions of inequality in the workplace, potentially affecting women's professional growth and opportunities.

Perceptions Among Women: Support with Caution

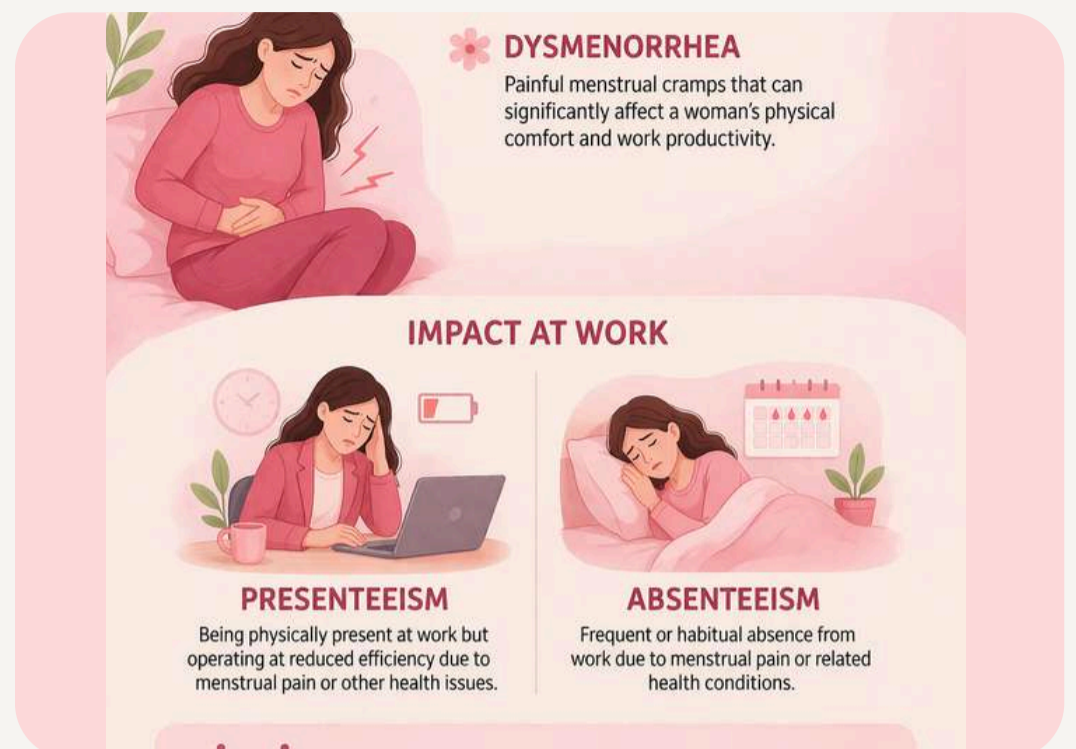
Research studies indicate that women's attitudes towards menstrual leave are nuanced. A study published in the British Medical Journal found that many young women support menstrual leave, especially for managing pain and maintaining hygiene. However, these preferences are accompanied by concerns about stigma, including fears that such policies may portray women as less capable or reinforce ideas of fragility. This highlights a tension between immediate health needs and long-term professional implications.

Health and Productivity Dimensions

Menstruation-related symptoms, particularly Dysmenorrhea, can significantly affect productivity. Studies suggest that women may experience both absenteeism (missing work) and presenteeism (reduced productivity while at work). On average, global estimates indicate a loss of several working days annually due to such symptoms, although the impact varies widely depending on individual health conditions and job requirements.



A balanced and context-sensitive approach is essential. Policies should aim to support women's health needs while maintaining workplace equality and avoiding unintended biases. This includes promoting awareness, improving workplace infrastructure, enabling flexible arrangements, and allowing organisations to design context-specific solutions. Such an approach can ensure both inclusivity and productivity in a professional environment.



Limitations of a Uniform Policy Approach

Experts emphasise that a "one-size-fits-all" policy may not be suitable given the diversity of work environments and individual experiences. The nature of employment—whether in academia, services, or manual labour—can influence how menstruation affects work performance. Therefore, uniform mandatory leave policies may not effectively address the varied needs of women across sectors.

Alternative Workplace Measures

Instead of focusing solely on menstrual leave, researchers and policymakers suggest broader workplace improvements. These include providing hygienic restrooms, access to rest facilities, and flexible work arrangements such as remote work where feasible. Such measures can support women's health without reinforcing stereotypes or creating unintended disadvantages in hiring or career progression.

Medical Support and Targeted Interventions

For women experiencing severe symptoms due to underlying conditions such as endometriosis or fibroids, access to medical care and provision for certified medical leave can be more effective. Early diagnosis and treatment can significantly improve quality of life and work participation, making healthcare access an important component of the solution.

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Mughal Empire in India - Part I

Babur, originally named Zahiruddin Muhammad, was the founder of the Mughal Empire in India. He was a descendant of Timur (father's side) and Genghis Khan (mother's side). After losing his kingdom of Farghana, he captured Kabul and later turned towards India. In 1526, he defeated Ibrahim Lodi in the First Battle of Panipat using superior cavalry and artillery, marking the beginning of Mughal rule. Babur consolidated his position through key victories like Battle of Khanua (1527) against Rana Sangha. Capture of Chanderi (1528) and Battle of Gogra (1529) against Afghans.

Babur declared himself "Emperor of Hindustan" and laid the foundation of Mughal authority. He was also a scholar and author of Tuzuk-i-Baburi, providing valuable insights into his life and India.

Humayun

Humayun, Babur's son, faced internal and external challenges. His decision to divide the empire among his brothers weakened central authority. He was defeated by Sher Khan (Sher Shah) in:

- Battle of Chausa (1539)
- Battle of Kanauj/Bilgram (1540)

This led to his exile for 15 years. During exile, he sought help from Persia and later regained the throne in 1555 after the decline of the Sur dynasty. However, his rule was short-lived as he died in 1556.



Sher Shah Suri (1540-1545)

Sher Shah Suri established a strong administrative system despite his short rule.

Administrative Features

- Central administration with key ministers (Wazir, Army, Foreign Affairs, Communications)
- Empire divided into sarkars → parganas → villages
- Efficient law and order through officials like Shiqdar and Munsif

Revenue System

- Land surveyed and classified (good, medium, bad)
- State share fixed at one-third of produce
- Payment allowed in cash or kind

Other Contributions

- Introduced silver coin (Rupiya precursor)
- Built major roads (including Grand Trunk Road)
- Improved policing and communication
- Promoted trade and infrastructure

Sher Shah's system became the model for later Mughal administration.

Akbar (1556-1605)

Akbar is regarded as the greatest Mughal ruler. He secured his position after defeating Hemu in the Second Battle of Panipat (1556). Initially, Bairam Khan acted as regent.

Territorial Expansion

- Conquered North India, Gujarat, Bengal
- Strengthened northwest frontier
- Extended influence into the Deccan

Akbar followed a policy of alliance and accommodation:

- Married Rajput princess (Amber)
- Appointed Rajputs like Raja Man Singh and Bhagwan Das to high posts
- Defeated Rana Pratap in Battle of Haldighati (1576).

Prelims 2026 Most Probable High-Yield Topics

Prelims model questions

Q. With reference to Babur, consider the following statements:

1. He was a descendant of Timur on his mother's side.
2. He introduced gunpowder artillery effectively in Indian warfare.
3. He defeated Rana Sangha in the Battle of Panipat.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

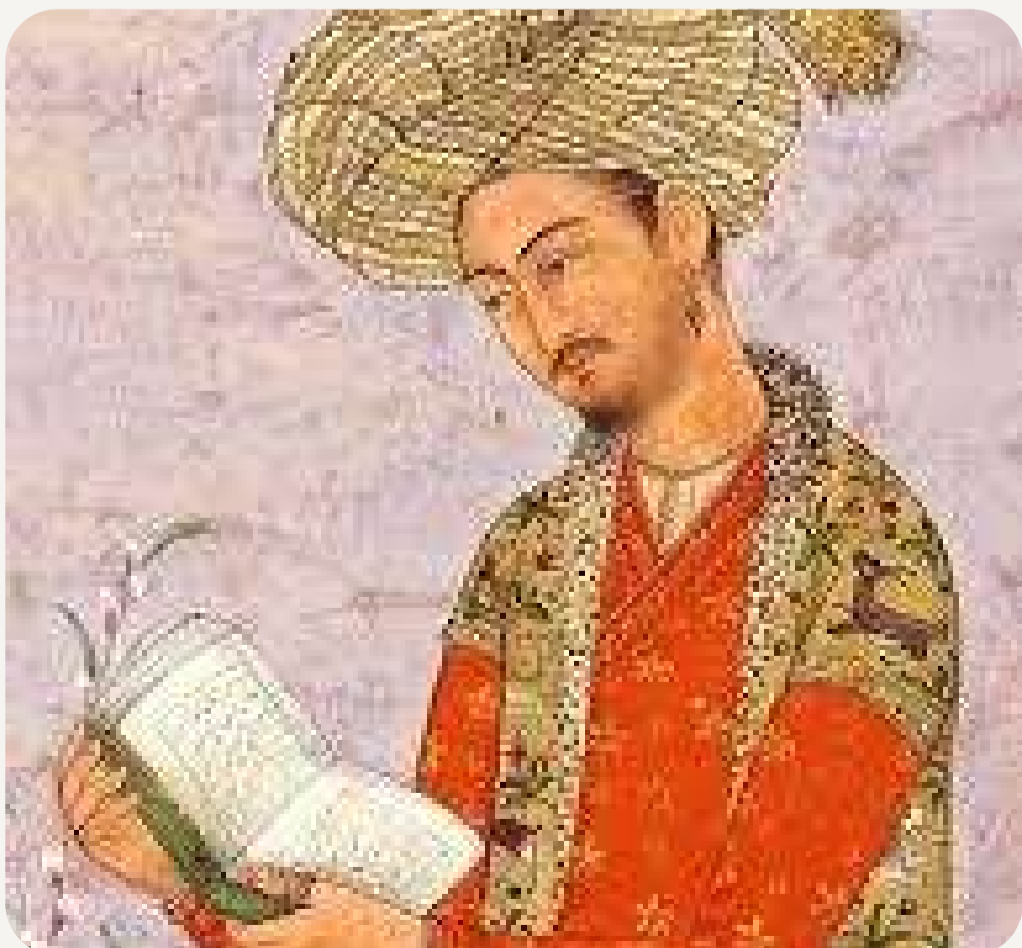
- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b)

Q. Which of the following battles ensured the establishment of Mughal rule in India?

- (a) Battle of Khanua
- (b) Battle of Chanderi
- (c) First Battle of Panipat
- (d) Battle of Gogra

Answer: (c)



Prelims model questions

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Humayun:

1. He divided his empire among his brothers.
2. He defeated Sher Shah Suri in the Battle of Chausa.
3. He regained the throne with Persian assistance.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: (a)

Q. With reference to Sher Shah Suri's administration, consider the following:

1. Introduction of a uniform land revenue system based on measurement.
2. Introduction of the Mansabdari system.
3. Construction of major roads connecting different parts of the empire.

Which of the above are correct?

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

Answer: (b)

PRELIMS CORNER :

1) With reference to Mian Tansen, which one of the following statements is not correct? (2019)

(a) Tansen was the title given to him by Emperor Akbar.

(b) Tansen composed Dhrupads on Hindu gods and goddesses.

(c) Tansen composed songs for his patrons.

(d) Tansen invented many Ragas.

2) Who among the following Mughal Emperors shifted emphasis from illustrated manuscripts to the album and individual portraits? (2019)

(a) Humayun

(b) Akbar

(c) Jahangir

(d) Shah Jahan

**PRELIMS 2026
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CASE STUDY

Role of Social Media and AI in Preventing Suicides in Telangana

The recent intervention model developed by the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) presents a significant example of how digital media and technology can be effectively used to address critical social issues such as suicide and mental distress. In multiple instances across districts like Warangal and Mahabubnagar, individuals in distress posted videos of self-harm attempts on social media platforms. These digital signals were rapidly detected, allowing authorities to intervene in real time and prevent potential fatalities. This reflects a shift from passive observation of online content to active, life-saving engagement.

At the core of this system is an AI-driven monitoring mechanism developed in collaboration with Meta. The system continuously scans social media posts using advanced algorithms that analyse keywords, tone, images, audio, and behavioural patterns to identify signs of distress. Once such content is flagged, critical user data such as phone numbers and IP addresses are shared with TGCSB. Using open-source intelligence tools, officials quickly trace the individual's location and alert local police units, often enabling intervention within minutes. Since November, this system has led to 89 alerts and 76 successful rescues, highlighting its operational effectiveness.

This case demonstrates the growing importance of media as not just a communication tool, but as an active participant in governance and social welfare. The integration of artificial intelligence, real-time data sharing, and law enforcement response showcases how technology can bridge the gap between virtual expression and physical intervention. Additionally, the involvement of NGOs for post-rescue counselling ensures that the response is not merely reactive but also rehabilitative.

Overall, this model underlines the transformative potential of media in the technological era.

Prelims Corner: Explanations

1) The correct answer is (a).

The statement that “Tansen was the title given to him by Emperor Akbar” is incorrect. Mian Tansen, one of the greatest musicians of medieval India, was originally named Ramtanu Pandey. The name “Tansen” was not a title conferred by Akbar but the name by which he became widely known due to his musical excellence. However, Emperor Akbar is believed to have bestowed upon him the honorific title “Mian,” reflecting his high status in the royal court.

Statement (b) is correct as Tansen composed Dhrupads, a prominent genre of Hindustani classical music, many of which were devoted to Hindu deities such as Shiva and Krishna. This reflects the syncretic cultural environment of the Mughal period.

Statement (c) is also correct because Tansen served as a court musician and composed extensively for his patrons, especially Akbar, under whose patronage music flourished significantly.

Statement (d) is correct as well. Tansen is traditionally credited with the creation or refinement of several ragas, such as Miyan ki Todi and Darbari Kanada, which remain central to Indian classical music today.



2) The correct answer is (c) Jahangir.

Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) is credited with shifting the emphasis in Mughal painting from large illustrated manuscripts to albums (muraqqas) and individual portraits. Unlike his predecessors, Jahangir had a deep personal interest in art, particularly in realistic portraiture and the study of nature. He encouraged artists to produce highly detailed and lifelike images of individuals, including nobles, courtiers, and even common people. Under his patronage, painting became more refined, with greater attention to facial expressions, textures, and naturalism.

Jahangir also promoted the compilation of albums containing carefully arranged portraits, calligraphy, and studies of flora and fauna. These albums reflected a shift from narrative storytelling to aesthetic appreciation and individual representation.

In contrast, Humayun is associated with the early Mughal phase, where Persian influences dominated and illustrated manuscripts were still the main artistic form. Akbar greatly expanded manuscript painting, especially through grand projects like the Akbarnama, emphasizing historical narratives and court scenes.

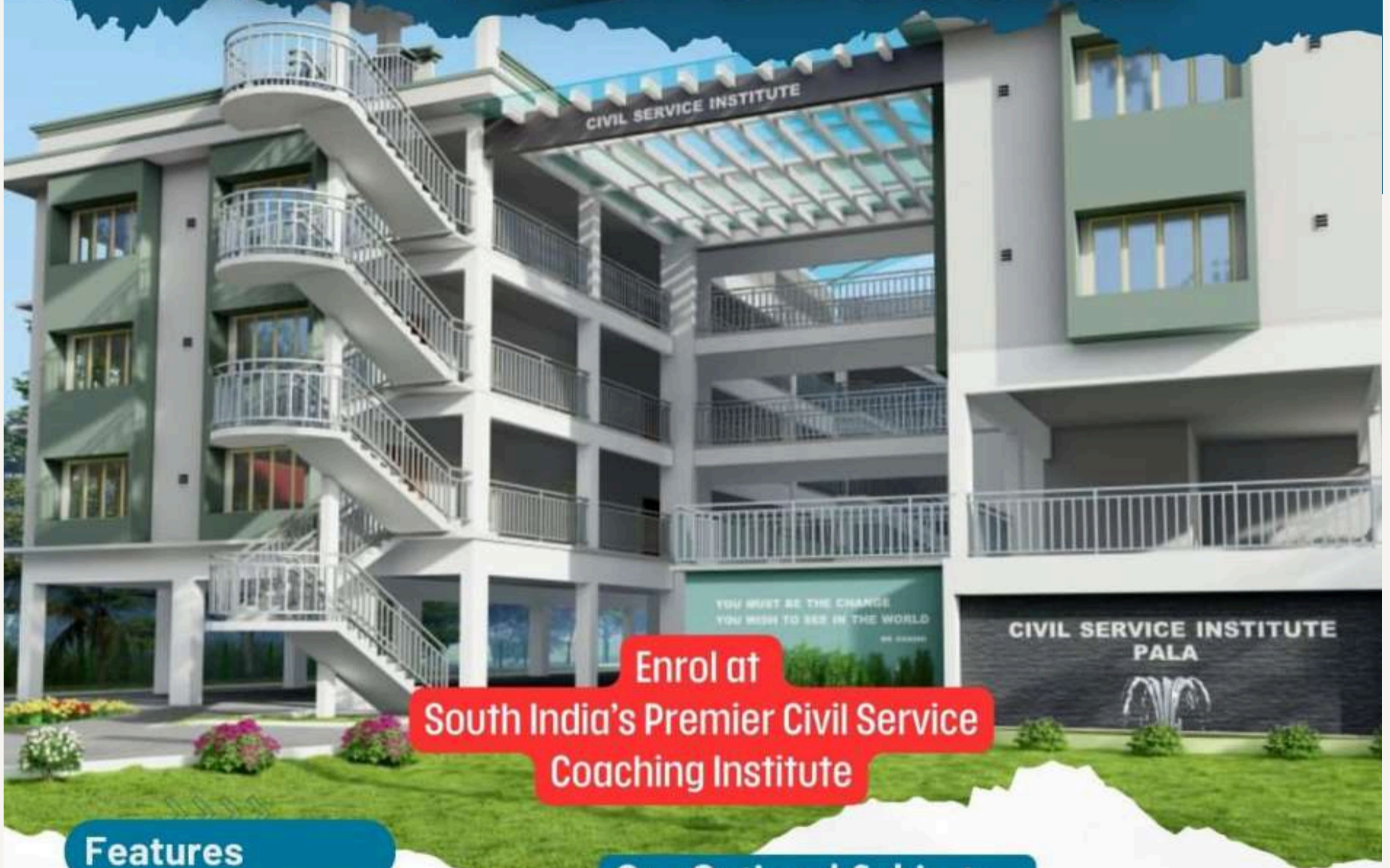
Shah Jahan, although a patron of arts, is more renowned for architectural achievements such as the Taj Mahal. While portraiture continued during his reign, the major stylistic shift had already occurred under Jahangir.

Thus, Jahangir’s reign marks a significant transition toward portrait-focused Mughal art.





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