

P2. NATIONAL



Curbs on panchayat powers in Bengal -West Bengal's 2026 panchayat reforms transfer key administrative and financial powers to government officials in an effort to improve governance while reshaping the functioning of local self-government.

P3. HEALTH



Study finds multiple dengue virus strains circulating together in India : The simultaneous circulation of multiple dengue virus serotypes in India has increased the importance of continuous surveillance and targeted vaccination for effective dengue control..

P4. ECONOMICS



Relaxation of Airport-Airline Cross-Ownership Rules in India : The proposed relaxation rules seeks to promote investment and competition while addressing concerns over market neutrality.

P7. SCIENCE



Behind China's first Fields Medal wins - The 2026 Fields Medal underscores China's emergence as a global leader in mathematics through sustained investments in research, higher education, and scientific talent.

Editor's Note

As another edition of the Pala Civil Times reaches our readers, we bring together a diverse set of issues spanning governance, public health, infrastructure, science, and sports. We begin with the recent reforms in West Bengal's Panchayati Raj institutions, examining their implications for decentralised governance and public administration. In the health section, we analyse India's evolving dengue landscape, marked by the co-circulation of multiple virus serotypes and the significance of the country's first approved dengue vaccine. We also discuss the proposed relaxation of airport-airline cross-ownership norms and its implications for competition, investment, and aviation governance. Within the Decoded Editorials, we explore India's opportunity to strengthen the future relevance of the Commonwealth Games as it prepares to host the 2030 edition, alongside an examination of the balance between the right to peaceful protest and the state's responsibility to maintain public order. In the science section, we discuss the Fields Medal, China's rise in mathematical research, and the lessons for strengthening India's research ecosystem. Together, these themes offer valuable insights for UPSC preparation. We hope this edition helps you build a deeper conceptual understanding. Happy reading!

Editorials Decoded



Protecting protest



Managing public protests requires balancing the constitutional right to peaceful assembly with proportionate policing, accountability, and public order.



Diminishing Relevance



The 2026 Commonwealth Games highlight India's sporting aspirations while underscoring the importance of clean sport, good governance, and effective preparations for hosting the 2030 edition.

Curbs on panchayat powers in Bengal

The West Bengal Government has undertaken significant reforms in local governance by reducing the administrative and financial authority of elected panchayat representatives. The measures seek to strengthen transparency, curb corruption, and improve administrative efficiency in public service delivery. At the same time, they have generated debate over the balance between bureaucratic oversight and democratic decentralisation.

Key Reforms Introduced

- Gram panchayat pradhans and municipal chairpersons have been removed from their roles as registrars for birth and death registration, with dedicated government officials assuming these responsibilities.
- The Government cites the need to improve transparency, streamline record-keeping, and address irregularities in the issuance of birth and death certificates.
- The West Bengal Panchayat (Second Amendment), 2026 transfers cheque-signing and financial disbursement powers from elected gram pradhans to panchayat secretaries, executive assistants, and Block Development Officers.
- Elected panchayat heads will continue to approve proposals, while financial sanction and disbursement will be undertaken by designated officials.
- The reforms are intended to ensure timely service delivery and reduce opportunities for corruption.

Historical Context and Evolution of Panchayat Governance

- West Bengal was among the first States to establish a three-tier panchayat system, enacting the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, with the first panchayat elections held in 1978.
- The State introduced this framework well before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1993) granted constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Over time, panchayats became the principal institutions for implementing welfare programmes and managing local public resources.
- Control over panchayats increasingly translated into control over local resources and political influence.
- The growing concentration of authority at the local level also led to persistent concerns regarding corruption and electoral violence.

Governance Issues and Political Implications

- The Government attributes the reforms to allegations of corruption, delays in service delivery, and demands for kickbacks by certain elected representatives.
- Birth and death registration assumed greater significance following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and the Government's focus on identifying illegal immigrants.
- The State argues that greater bureaucratic oversight will improve transparency and administrative accountability.
- The transfer of powers to officials is expected to increase bureaucratic involvement in local governance.



The West Bengal reforms represent a significant shift in the functioning of local self-government by increasing the administrative role of the bureaucracy in panchayat administration. While the measures seek to strengthen transparency, financial accountability, and efficient service delivery, their long-term success will depend on maintaining an appropriate balance between administrative oversight and the democratic authority of elected local institutions.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



"Effectiveness of the government system at various levels and people's participation in the governance system are interdependent" Discuss their relationship in the context of India.

RELEVANCE

GS II - Parliament and State Legislatures

HEALTH

Study finds multiple dengue virus strains circulating together in India

Dengue is emerging as a more complex public health challenge in India due to the simultaneous circulation of multiple virus serotypes across several regions. This hyper-endemic transmission not only increases the likelihood of severe clinical outcomes but also has important implications for vaccine deployment and disease surveillance. The recent approval of India's first dengue vaccine further highlights the need to align immunisation strategies with evolving epidemiological trends.

Dengue Surveillance and Emerging Epidemiological Trends

- A nationwide molecular surveillance study by the ICMR's Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratory (VRDL) Network analysed 6,889 laboratory-confirmed dengue samples collected from 45 laboratories across 25 States and Union Territories during 2023–2025.
- DENV-2 remained the predominant serotype, accounting for more than half of all infections.
- Eight States and Union Territories reported the simultaneous circulation of all four dengue virus serotypes, while 15 reported the circulation of three serotypes.
- Nearly 7% of patients were simultaneously infected with two or more serotypes, indicating widespread dengue hyper-endemicity.
- The findings demonstrate increasing geographical overlap of dengue serotypes across India.

Clinical Implications & Vaccine Developments

- Concurrent infection with multiple dengue serotypes was associated with a greater likelihood of severe dengue manifestations, including bleeding complications, and severe joint pain, although long-term clinical validation is required.
- In July 2026, the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) granted market authorisation to QDENG A (TAK-003), developed by Takeda Biopharmaceuticals India, making it the first dengue vaccine approved in India.
- The vaccine is approved for individuals 4–60 years of age and is administered in two doses given three months apart.
- Vaccine protection is strongest against DENV-2, followed by DENV-1, while protection against DENV-3 and DENV-4 among individuals without prior dengue infection remains uncertain.
- The increasing prevalence of DENV-3 may influence overall vaccine effectiveness if it becomes the dominant circulating serotype.

Public Health Significance and Policy Considerations

- Hyper-endemic transmission increases the complexity of dengue prevention and clinical management.
- Continuous surveillance of circulating serotypes is essential because changes in dominant strains can influence both outbreak intensity and vaccine performance.
- The approval of a dengue vaccine provides an opportunity to strengthen preventive public health measures, particularly in endemic regions.
- Vaccination should complement, rather than replace, routine mosquito breeding prevention and vector-control measures.
- Evidence-based surveillance will be critical for guiding future vaccination strategies and programme implementation.



India's dengue landscape is undergoing a significant epidemiological transition with the co-circulation of multiple virus serotypes. The introduction of the country's first approved dengue vaccine marks an important advance in disease prevention, but its long-term effectiveness will depend on sustained molecular surveillance, monitoring of circulating serotypes, and integrated public health interventions. A coordinated strategy combining vaccination, surveillance, and vector control will be essential for reducing the future burden of dengue.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. What is the basic principle behind vaccine development? How do vaccines work? What approaches were adopted by the Indian vaccine manufacturers to produce COVID-19 vaccines? (GS III – 2023)

RELEVANCE

- *GS II - Issues relating to health.*

Relaxation of Airport–Airline Cross-Ownership Rules in India

The Ministry of Civil Aviation is considering relaxing cross-ownership restrictions between airport operators and airlines. The proposal aims to encourage greater investment and facilitate new airline entrants in the domestic aviation sector. However, it has also raised concerns regarding market competition, operational neutrality, and the potential for conflicts of interest in airport management.

Existing Framework & Proposed Changes

- The restrictions are contained in airport concession agreements rather than legislation.
- Delhi and Mumbai airport concession agreements limit aggregate airline ownership in the airport operator to 10%, while Noida International Airport (Jewar) and Navi Mumbai Airport permit up to 26% ownership.
- These provisions also operate in reverse, limiting airport operators from acquiring significant stakes in airlines.
- The Government is preparing a concept note for consultation with NITI Aayog and other ministries before any proposal is considered by the Union Cabinet.
- The proposal is intended to encourage new airline entrants and enhance connectivity, particularly to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.



Rationale & Safeguards Under Consideration

- The existing separation seeks to ensure airports function as neutral infrastructure providers without favouring affiliated airlines.
- The Government proposes retaining neutrality through an "arm's length" relationship between airport and airline businesses.
- Measures under consideration include restrictions on the sharing of commercially sensitive information relating to slot allocation and airport operations.
- The proposal also envisages preventing common key managerial personnel from holding executive positions in both airport and airline entities.
- The discussions coincide with efforts to strengthen India's aviation manufacturing ecosystem, including exploration of domestic passenger aircraft production.

Concerns and International Experience

- IndiGo and Air India have opposed the proposal, arguing that common ownership could create conflicts of interest and reduce competition.
- Concerns have also been raised regarding vertical integration, particularly where an entity has interests across multiple segments of the aviation value chain.
- Countries such as Singapore, Qatar, and the UAE have common ownership of airports and airlines, but these arrangements largely involve government ownership.
- Unlike these models, India's aviation market consists of multiple privately owned airlines operating at privately managed airports, making concerns regarding preferential treatment more significant.
- The proposal therefore requires balancing investment objectives with fair competition and consumer interests.

Implications

Relaxing airport–airline cross-ownership restrictions has the potential to promote investment and expand competition in India's aviation sector. At the same time, maintaining operational neutrality and preventing anti-competitive practices will be essential for preserving a level playing field. Any policy change will require effective safeguards to balance infrastructure development with fair market competition.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Consider the following airports: (2024)

1. Donyi Polo Airport
2. Kushinagar International Airport
3. Vijayawada International Airport

In the recent past, which of the above have been constructed as Greenfield projects ?

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

RELEVANCE

GS III : Infrastructure; Investment models.

Protecting protest (The Hindu : 29-07-2026)

The management of public protests presents a complex governance challenge requiring the protection of democratic freedoms while ensuring public safety and order. Allegations of excessive police force during recent protests have raised questions regarding proportionality, accountability, operational preparedness, and judicial oversight. The issue highlights the need to reconcile citizens' right to protest with the state's obligation to prevent violence and protect the rights of all stakeholders.

Judicial Scrutiny and Police Accountability

- The Supreme Court has commenced hearing petitions alleging disproportionate police force during protest management.
- Separate petitions from families of police personnel alleging assaults during the protests have also been admitted.
- Questions have been raised regarding the credibility of police investigating allegations against their own personnel.
- Judicial observations have highlighted concerns over inadequate protective equipment provided to police officers.
- The proceedings focus on ensuring accountability while examining the circumstances surrounding the protests.

Crowd Control Practices and Operational Standards

- International best practices favour a graduated and proportionate use of force during crowd management.
- Inadequate protective equipment may increase the likelihood of excessive force due to fear among personnel.
- Standardised escalation procedures can reduce arbitrary or disproportionate responses.
- A national protocol could establish uniform thresholds for deploying high-impact crowd-control measures.
- Standard procedures may also include mandatory documentation, medical assistance after force is used, preservation of evidence, and independent inquiries into serious injuries.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. 'The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty'. Examine this statement in the context of international relations. (GS IV – 2020)

RELEVANCE

GS II -Separation of powers between various organs.

Balancing the Right to Protest and Public Order

- Peaceful protest derives its democratic significance from its ability to draw public attention and inconvenience the state.
- Restricting protests only to designated locations may dilute their constitutional purpose.
- The distinction between public inconvenience and violence is crucial in assessing the legality of protests.
- While the state must prevent violence and maintain essential services, peaceful disruption should not automatically be equated with unlawful conduct.
- The principle of proportionality should guide both restrictions on protests and police responses.



Way Forward

Effective protest management requires safeguarding democratic freedoms while ensuring public safety through proportionate policing. Greater operational preparedness, transparent accountability mechanisms, and uniform procedures across States can strengthen public confidence. Judicial oversight remains essential in maintaining the balance between constitutional liberties and legitimate state interests without allowing either to undermine the other.

Diminishing relevance (The Hindu : 29-07-2026)

The 2026 Commonwealth Games represent an important international sporting event for India despite the competition's reduced scale. India's medal prospects, notable individual performances, and preparations to host the centenary edition in Ahmedabad in 2030 have renewed attention on sports governance, athlete development, integrity in competition, and effective event management.

India's Performance and Medal Prospects

- **Mirabai Chanu** became the first Indian woman weightlifter to win three consecutive Commonwealth Games gold medals.
- Her victory also marked a fourth consecutive medal in the women's 48 kg category.
- India is expected to win around 30 medals according to an internal estimate by the Union Sports Ministry.
- Medal hopes extend across athletics, para-athletics, weightlifting, para-weightlifting, boxing, judo, and lawn bowls.
- Leading medal contenders include Neeraj Chopra, Murali Sreeshankar, Praveen Chithravel, Lovlina Borgohain, and Jaismine Lamboria.

Governance and Integrity Challenges

- The reduced format reflects the declining relevance of the Commonwealth Games in comparison with larger international competitions.
- India continues to experience inconsistent success at the highest levels across multiple sports.
- The country has topped global doping charts for three consecutive years.
- Multiple athletes were either withdrawn from the Indian contingent or failed to qualify because of doping-related violations.
- Preparations for the 2030 Games require stronger vigilance against financial irregularities and greater emphasis on promoting clean sport.

Evolution and Changing Nature of the Commonwealth Games

- The Commonwealth Games began in 1930 and are held every four years, except during the Second World War.
- From 11 participating countries and about 400 athletes, the Games have evolved into a multi-sport event involving 72 nations and territories and around 4,600 athletes.
- Built on the values of humanity, equality, friendship, and fair play, the Games seek to strengthen ties among Commonwealth members through sport.
- The 2026 edition was significantly scaled down after Victoria withdrew as host due to escalating costs, prompting Glasgow to organise a compact event with 10 integrated disciplines across four venues.
- The reduced format, along with the exclusion of sports such as wrestling, badminton, table tennis, hockey, and squash, reflects the changing scale and contemporary challenges facing the Commonwealth Games.



Way Forward

The 2026 Commonwealth Games provide India with an opportunity to strengthen its international sporting profile while preparing to host the centenary edition in 2030. Sustained sporting success will depend not only on athlete performance but also on transparent event management, effective anti-doping measures, and sound governance that enhances India's credibility in global sport.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. An athlete participates in Olympics for personal triumph and nation's glory; victors are showered with cash incentives by various agencies, on their return. Discuss the merit of state sponsored talent hunt and its cultivation as against the rationale of a reward mechanism as encouragement. (GS II – 2014)

RELEVANCE

GS II -Separation of powers between various organs.

Behind China's first Fields Medal wins

The Fields Medal is regarded as the highest international recognition in mathematics and is often considered the discipline's equivalent of the Nobel Prize. Awarded once every four years to mathematicians below the age of 40, it recognises outstanding contributions to mathematics. The 2026 edition is significant for China's emergence as a major centre of mathematical research, reflecting the impact of sustained investments in higher education and scientific research.

Fields Medal: Features and 2026 Recipients

- The Fields Medal is awarded once every four years to mathematicians below 40 years of age.
- Unlike the Nobel Prize, it recognises at least two and up to four recipients in each award cycle.
- The 2026 recipients are Yu Deng, Hong Wang (China), John Pardon (United States), and Jacob Tsimmerman (Canada).
- This marks the first time Chinese nationals have received the Fields Medal.
- Hong Wang became only the third woman to receive the award.

China's Scientific and Mathematical Ecosystem

- China's success reflects sustained efforts to strengthen higher education and basic research over the past two decades.
- Its expenditure on research and development (R&D) has increased from less than 1% of GDP in 2000 to about 2.6%.
- China now spends almost as much as the United States on R&D in purchasing power parity terms and possesses the world's largest researcher base, exceeding 2.28 million researchers.
- The country is among the leading contributors to research published in highly cited scientific journals.
- Both Chinese Fields Medal winners are alumni of Peking University, an institution that has received sustained government support under elite higher education initiatives.

Significance and India's Position

- China's achievements in mathematics complement its growing capabilities in artificial intelligence, where foundational advances depend heavily on mathematical research.
- Chinese students have consistently performed at the highest level in the International Mathematical Olympiad, demonstrating a strong talent pipeline.
- India has a long mathematical tradition but has yet to develop a comparable concentration of leading researchers within its domestic institutions.
- The two Indian-origin Fields Medal winners, **Manjul Bhargava** and **Akshay Venkatesh**, built their academic careers outside India.
- Strengthening research institutions, educational reforms, and the research ecosystem remain important for enhancing India's global scientific competitiveness.



What lies ahead

The 2026 Fields Medal demonstrates how sustained investment in education, research, and scientific talent can translate into international academic excellence. China's achievement reflects the long-term benefits of building strong research institutions and nurturing mathematical capability. For India, the experience underscores the importance of strengthening domestic research ecosystems to convert intellectual potential into globally recognised scientific leadership.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. X', born in the UK, was conferred the Nobel Prize in 2025. He was a professor in an American university when this prize was announced. Identify 'X':

- Michel H. Devoret
- Richard Robson
- John Clarke
- Joel Mokyr

RELEVANCE

GS III - Science and Technology – Developments and their applications.

PYQ Compass

UPSC questions previously asked from the themes discussed on this page.



Q. Consider the following airports:

1. Donyi Polo Airport
2. Kushinagar International Airport
3. Vijayawada International Airport

In the recent past, which of the above have been constructed as Greenfield projects ? (a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans : a

Government of India has formulated a Greenfield Airports (GFA) Policy, 2008 for development of new Greenfield airports in the country. As per the policy, if any developer including the State Government desires to develop an airport, they are required to identify a suitable site and get the Pre-feasibility Study conducted for construction of airport and submit a proposal to the Central Government for 'Site Clearance' followed by 'In-Principle' approval. Government of India has accorded 'In-Principle' approval for setting up of 21 new Greenfield Airports namely, Mopa in Goa, Navi Mumbai, Shirdi and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, Kalaburagi, Vijayapura, Hassan and Shivamogga in Karnataka, Dabra (Gwalior) in Madhya Pradesh, Kushinagar and Noida (Jewar) in Uttar Pradesh, Dholera and Hirasar in Gujarat, Karaikal in Puducherry, Dagadarthi, Bhogapuram and Orvakal (Kurnool) in Andhra Pradesh, Durgapur in West Bengal, Pakyong in Sikkim, Kannur in Kerala and Hollongi also known as Donyi Polo (Itanagar) in Arunachal Pradesh across the country. Vijayawada Internatioanal Airport is not a Greenfield airport.

Hence option (a) is the correct answer.

Q. X', born in the UK, was conferred the Nobel Prize in 2025. He was a professor in an American university when this prize was announced. Identify 'X':

(a) Michel H. Devoret

(b) Richard Robson

(c) John Clarke

(d) Joel Mokyr

Ans : C

The 2025 Nobel Prize in Physics was awarded to John Clarke along with other recipients. John Clarke was born in the United Kingdom and was serving as a professor at the University of California, Berkeley at the time of the announcement. He is widely recognized for his contributions to SQUIDs (Superconducting Quantum Interference Devices) and advancements in quantum measurement technologies. Hence option (c) is the correct answer.

Practice Questions and answers

Q. Consider the following airports with reference to the existing airport concession agreements governing airport–airline cross–ownership restrictions:

1. Delhi International Airport
2. Mumbai International Airport
3. Noida International Airport (Jewar)

Under the existing framework, in which of the above airports is the aggregate airline ownership permitted up to 26%?

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

Ans: (c)

The existing airport concession agreements prescribe limits on airport–airline cross–ownership.

- Delhi International Airport – Aggregate airline ownership in the airport operator is capped at 10%.
- Mumbai International Airport – Aggregate airline ownership is also limited to 10%.
- Noida International Airport (Jewar) – The concession agreement permits up to 26% airline ownership in the airport operator.

Q. With reference to the Fields Medal, consider the following statements:

1. It is awarded once every four years.
2. Only mathematicians below the age of 40 are eligible for the award.
3. In each award cycle, the medal is awarded to exactly one recipient.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: A

- Statement 1 – Correct. The Fields Medal is awarded every four years.
- Statement 2 – Correct. Eligibility is restricted to mathematicians below 40 years of age.
- Statement 3 – Incorrect. The award recognises at least two and up to four recipients in each cycle.

Q. 'X', a Chinese national, became the first woman from her country to receive the Fields Medal in 2026. At the time of the award, she was teaching at an American university. Identify 'X'.

- (a) Yu Deng
- (b) Hong Wang
- (c) Maryna Viazovska
- (d) Maryam Mirzakhani

Ans: (b)

The 2026 Fields Medal was awarded to Hong Wang, Yu Deng, John Pardon, and Jacob Tsimerman. Hong Wang became the first Chinese woman and only the third woman overall to receive the Fields Medal. Although she was teaching at an American university when the award was announced, she remained a Chinese national and is an alumnus of Peking University. Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer