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Editor's Note

This edition of Pala Civil Times brings together important national, international and policy developments, helping aspirants understand not just what is in the news, but why it matters. The international affairs section explores Exercise MALABAR 2026, the participating countries, its strategic significance and its relevance to India's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. The Decoded Editorials section examines the proposed revamp of the Agnipath scheme, its implications for military recruitment and personnel management, and the persistent deaths of sanitation workers despite legal safeguards and government initiatives such as NAMASTE. The national affairs pages analyse the Supreme Court's latest interpretation of the constitutional safeguards governing detention, alongside the recent amendments to India's immigration and foreigners framework.

Together, these topics encourage critical engagement with constitutional principles, public institutions, national security and the challenges of translating policy into outcomes.

Happy reading.

P6. WORLD



Exercise MALABAR 2026 and Its Significance for the QUAD

Exercise MALABAR 2026 is a four-nation naval exercise involving India, the United States, Japan and Australia that strengthens maritime cooperation, interoperability and India's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Editorials Decoded

THE HINDU

The Indian EXPRESS



Danger in the sewer: On India's sewer cleaning deaths

Despite the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, and subsequent judicial and government interventions, hazardous sewer cleaning continues.



Revamped Agnipath opens a window, casts a wider net

The proposed Agnipath scheme revamp introduces an additional two-year engagement for Agniveers not initially selected for regular service, with revised pay and exit benefits.

Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) (Amendment) Order, 2026

On November 4, 2026, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) amended the Immigration and Foreigners (Exemption) Order, 2025, requiring members of six non-Muslim minority communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who entered India on or before December 31, 2024, citing religious persecution or fear of persecution, to obtain an appropriate visa for their continued stay in India.

Key Provisions of the Amendment

Eligible Communities: Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Eligibility: The exemption covers members of these communities who were compelled to seek shelter in India due to religious persecution or fear of persecution and entered India on or before December 31, 2024.

Exemption from Travel Documents: They continue to be exempt from the requirement of possessing valid passports or visas at the time of entry into India, even if their documents have expired.

New Visa Requirement: Every person covered by the exemption must obtain an appropriate category of visa after entering India to continue their stay.

Legal Basis: The amendment has been issued under the ***Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025.***

Relationship with the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019

Common Eligible Communities: The six communities covered by the amendment are the same communities identified under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019.

Citizenship Eligibility: The CAA provides an expedited route to Indian citizenship for eligible Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.

No Automatic Citizenship: Exemption under the amended Order does not automatically confer Indian citizenship.

Provisions for Indian, Nepali and Bhutanese Citizens

Identity Documents: Indian citizens travelling to Nepal or Bhutan, and Nepali and Bhutanese citizens entering or leaving India, must produce prescribed identity documents.

Travel to Third Countries: Indian citizens using the Indo-Nepal or Indo-Bhutan borders to travel to third countries must carry valid passports and use designated immigration checkpoints.

Additional Visa Requirements: Nepali and Bhutanese citizens travelling beyond India, Nepal and Bhutan, or arriving after embarking from or transiting through China, Macau, Hong Kong or Pakistan, must possess valid passports and visas.

Introduction of the Visa Manual

The amendment formally defines the Visa Manual as a manual issued by the Central Government containing instructions relating to visas, immigration and associated matters.

Other Exempted Categories

Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees: Registered refugees who took shelter in India up to January 9, 2015, remain exempt from penal provisions relating to the absence of valid passports, travel documents or visas.

Tibetan Refugees: Specified categories entering through designated procedures and immigration posts remain exempt from passport and visa requirements, *subject to registration and obtaining a Certificate of Registration*.

Military Personnel: Exemptions cover Indian Armed Forces personnel travelling on duty and accompanying family members on government transport, as well as specified foreign military personnel arriving on warships or government vessels undergoing repairs in India.

Certain Long-term Residents: Specified Pakistani nationals who entered India before December 31, 2009, certain Partition-era migrants who returned from Pakistan and settled in Kerala, and persons of Indian origin who acquired Malaysian or Singaporean citizenship but cannot renew their passports are covered by exemptions.

PYQ COMPASS

Q. With reference to India, consider the following statements: (2021)
1. There is only one citizenship and one domicile.
2. A citizen by birth only can become the Head of State.
3. A foreigner once granted citizenship cannot be deprived of it under any circumstances.
Which of the statements given above is / are correct?
(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) 1 and 3 (d) 2 and 3

Supreme Court: 24-Hour Arrest Rule Begins from Detention

On November 5, 2026, the Supreme Court, in a judgment delivered by a Bench headed by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, clarified that the constitutional 24-hour period for producing an arrested person before a Judicial Magistrate begins from the moment of actual detention, when physical contact is made to restrain the person's liberty, and not from the time of formal arrest.

Case Background : The judgment arose from appeals filed by four accused persons in a narcotics case. Their formal arrests were recorded 18 hours after they were actually detained. While the Tripura High Court had denied them bail, the Supreme Court ordered their immediate release.

Key Observations of the Supreme Court

Meaning of Arrest: Although criminal laws, including the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, do not explicitly define arrest, the Court clarified that arrest occurs when an authority physically touches a person with the intention of detaining them and effectively curtails their liberty.

Detention vs. Formal Arrest: Police cannot distinguish between detention and formal arrest to delay the commencement of the constitutional 24-hour period. Detaining a suspect for questioning and recording the arrest at a later stage to conceal the actual period of custody is unconstitutional.

Article 22(2): Every arrested and detained person must be produced before the nearest Judicial Magistrate within 24 hours of actual detention. Only the time reasonably necessary for travelling from the place of arrest to the Magistrate's court is excluded.

No Buffer Zone: The Constitution does not permit a period of unofficial detention between taking a person into custody and formally recording their arrest. Such a buffer zone facilitates illegal detention, custodial torture and other human rights violations.

Role of Magistrates: Magistrates must record the actual date and time of detention. If a person has been detained beyond 24 hours, they must order immediate release. They may also order release if the detention exceeds a reasonable period, even when the 24-hour limit has not been crossed.

Constitutional Significance

Article 21: Protects the fundamental right to life and personal liberty.

Article 22(2): Provides the safeguard against prolonged detention without judicial scrutiny by mandating production before a Magistrate within 24 hours.

Human Rights Protection: The judgment seeks to prevent arbitrary detention, custodial torture and manipulation of arrest records by law enforcement agencies.

PYQ COMPASS

Q. Consider the following statements: (2023)

1. According to the Constitution of India, the Central Government has a duty to protect States from internal disturbances.
2. The Constitution of India exempts the States from providing legal counsel to person being held for preventive detention
3. According to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, confession of the accused before the police cannot be used as evidence.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

Danger in the sewer: On India's sewer cleaning deaths

The deaths of four sanitation workers while cleaning a hotel's food-waste chamber in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, have once again highlighted the continued dangers faced by sanitation workers in India. Despite legislative safeguards, Supreme Court directions and government initiatives promoting mechanised sanitation, workers continue to die due to hazardous cleaning practices, exposure to toxic gases and inadequate enforcement of safety regulations.

Extent of the Problem

Worker Fatalities: According to government and National Commission for Safai Karamcharis data, 859 workers died during sewer and septic tank cleaning between 2014 and 2025, while another reported figure records 498 deaths between 2019 and mid-2026.

Under-reporting: Safai Karamchari Andolan has repeatedly raised concerns about the under-reporting of sanitation worker deaths.

Social Dimension: Members of historically marginalised castes remain disproportionately represented in hazardous sanitation work.

Continued Hazardous Practices: Workers remain exposed to toxic gases and unsafe conditions while cleaning sewers, septic tanks and other waste chambers.

Legal and Judicial Safeguards

Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013: Prohibits manual scavenging and regulates hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.

Supreme Court – Safai Karamchari Andolan Case (2014): Issued directions for the identification and rehabilitation of manual scavengers and compensation for sewer-related deaths.

Dr. Balram Singh Case (2023): The Supreme Court strengthened earlier safeguards by directing authorities to prevent sewer-cleaning contracts from requiring workers to enter sewers and increased compensation for sewer and septic tank deaths to ₹30 lakh per worker.

Subsequent Directions: In 2025, the Court directed an end to manual sewer cleaning in four metropolitan cities. In 2026, it issued notices to 15 Chief Secretaries for non-compliance with its 2023 directions, including compensation requirements.

Challenges in Eliminating Sanitation Worker Deaths

Weak Enforcement: Municipal bodies and private contractors continue to violate restrictions on hazardous manual cleaning despite existing legal safeguards.

Informal Employment: Contractors often employ undocumented daily-wage workers to evade legal accountability and compensation obligations.

Inadequate Mechanisation: Mechanised cleaning technologies are not sufficiently adopted, leaving workers exposed to hazardous conditions.

Implementation Gaps: Government initiatives often focus on distributing safety equipment rather than eliminating situations that require workers to enter hazardous spaces.

Inadequate Accountability: Under-reporting of deaths and weak enforcement of compensation provisions undermine the effectiveness of existing safeguards.

Social Inequality: Caste-based occupational concentration and economic vulnerability increase the exploitation of sanitation workers.

PYQ COMPASS

Q. Is caste disappearing in urban India? Illustrate your answer with examples (GS II - 2026)

Q. Despite comprehensive policies for equity and social justice, underprivileged sections are not yet getting the full benefits of affirmative action envisaged by the Constitution. Comment. (GS II - 2024)

Revamped Agnipath opens a window, casts a wider net

The Union Cabinet has approved significant changes to the Agnipath scheme, introducing a two-stage recruitment and retention process that provides all Agniveers with an opportunity to join the Armed Forces as regular soldiers. Under the revised arrangement, the 25% initially selected after four years will continue towards regular absorption, while the remaining 75% will be offered an additional two-year engagement, after which they can compete for regular enrolment.

About the Agnipath Scheme

Introduction: Launched in 2022, the Agnipath scheme provides for the recruitment of personnel into the Army, Navy and Air Force for a short-term tenure.

Tenure: Agniveers are initially recruited for four years, including the training period.

Initial Retention: Under the original scheme, up to 25% of Agniveers in each batch could be selected for permanent enrolment in the regular cadre.

Exit Provision: The remaining 75% were required to leave the Armed Forces after four years and receive a Seva Nidhi package.

Objectives: The scheme aims to reduce the average age profile of the Armed Forces, create a younger and fitter military, and reduce the long-term expenditure on salaries and pensions.

Major Changes Introduced in the Revised Scheme

Initial Retention: The existing provision of selecting 25% of Agniveers on merit for regular enrolment after four years will continue.

Additional Engagement: The remaining 75% will be offered an additional two-year service opportunity, taking their total tenure to six years.

Enhanced Salary: Agniveers undertaking the extended engagement will receive ₹43,500 in the first year and ₹47,500 in the second year, compared with the initial starting pay of ₹30,000.

Further Regular Enrolment: After six years, they will have another opportunity for regular enrolment based on objective selection criteria, including adaptability, discipline, performance and absence of vigilance cases.

Enhanced Exit Benefits: Those leaving after the extended engagement will receive an enhanced Seva Nidhi package, with the government's contribution increased from 50% to 70%.

Rationale Behind the Changes

Retention of Experienced Personnel: The Armed Forces identified the need to retain a larger proportion of trained personnel to preserve operational experience and institutional knowledge.

Addressing Manpower Shortages: The Armed Forces have faced personnel shortages, partly aggravated by the two-year recruitment freeze during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Operational Effectiveness: Retaining experienced Agniveers is expected to strengthen training continuity, professional expertise and operational readiness.

Career Opportunities: The additional engagement provides a longer service pathway and another opportunity for regular enrolment.

Maintaining a Young Force: The revised arrangement retains the original objective of maintaining a youthful military while balancing it with the need for experienced personnel.

Competitive Selection: Multiple stages of evaluation are expected to encourage discipline, performance and professional development among Agniveers.

PYQ COMPASS

Q. “Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance”. In this context suggest reforms in the Civil Service for strengthening democracy. (GS II - 2020)

Exercise MALABAR 2026 and Its Significance for the QUAD

The Indian Navy's indigenous stealth frigate INS Sahyadri arrived at Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan on November 4, 2026, to participate in Exercise MALABAR 2026, being conducted from November 5 to 12. The multilateral naval exercise brings together the navies of India, Japan, the United States and Australia to strengthen maritime cooperation, operational coordination and interoperability in the Indo-Pacific. The exercise is significant not only as a major naval engagement among the four countries but also as an indication of growing strategic convergence within the QUAD grouping, particularly in maintaining a free, open and stable Indo-Pacific.

About Exercise MALABAR

Nature: MALABAR is a multilateral naval exercise involving India, Japan, the United States and Australia.

Origin: It began in 1992 as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the United States.

Expansion: Japan and Australia subsequently joined the exercise. Japan returned in 2014 and became a regular participant, while Australia rejoined in 2020.

Four-Nation Participation: Since 2020, the exercise has been conducted annually with the participation of all four QUAD countries.

2026 Edition: The 2026 edition marks the 30th year of the exercise and the sixth edition involving all four participating countries.

Location: The exercise is being conducted in the waters south of Japan's Kanto region, with Yokosuka serving as the harbour-phase location.

MALABAR 2026: Key Activities

Indian Naval Participation: INS Sahyadri, an indigenous stealth frigate belonging to the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet, represents India.

Harbour Phase: Includes professional interactions, coordinated operational planning and exchanges of naval expertise among participating countries.

Sea Phase: Involves coordinated naval operations and training across surface, subsurface, air and information domains.

Opening Ceremony: The exercise commenced on November 5 in the Funakoshi area, with senior naval commanders from all four participating countries.

Objectives and Strategic Significance

Interoperability: Enhances the ability of participating navies to operate together during complex maritime operations.

Operational Coordination: Develops coordinated planning and execution of naval operations.

Professional Exchange: Facilitates the exchange of operational knowledge, expertise and best practices.

Maritime Security: Strengthens cooperation in addressing maritime security challenges across the Indo-Pacific.

Strategic Deterrence: Demonstrates the collective commitment of participating countries to maintaining a rules-based maritime order and discouraging unilateral actions that threaten regional stability.

Relationship Between QUAD and MALABAR

Independent Framework: MALABAR is not formally conducted under the QUAD framework. It is an independent naval exercise involving the four countries.

Parallel Maritime Cooperation: While QUAD focuses on a broader positive agenda of regional cooperation, MALABAR provides a dedicated platform for strengthening naval interoperability and maritime security cooperation.

Strategic Convergence: The consistent participation of all four countries since 2020 reflects their growing strategic and operational convergence in the Indo-Pacific.

PYQ COMPASS

Q. Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is transforming itself into a trade bloc from a military alliance, in present times – Discuss (GS II - 2020)

PYQ COMPASS

Q. With reference to India, consider the following statements: (2021)
1. There is only one citizenship and one domicile.
2. A citizen by birth only can become the Head of State.
3. A foreigner once granted citizenship cannot be deprived of it under any circumstances.
Which of the statements given above is / are correct?
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3
(d) 2 and 3

Ans : a
Statement 1 is correct: India has a system of single citizenship, meaning all Indians are citizens of India, irrespective of the state or union territory they reside in. There is also a single domicile under Indian law.
Statement 2 is incorrect: There is no such restriction in India that only a citizen by birth can become the Head of State (President). A naturalized citizen is also eligible.
Statement 3 is incorrect: A foreigner granted Indian citizenship can be deprived of it under certain circumstances, such as if the citizenship was obtained fraudulently or if the person acts against the sovereignty and integrity of India (as per the Citizenship Act, 1955).

Q. Consider the following statements: (2023)
1. According to the Constitution of India, the Central Government has a duty to protect States from internal disturbances.
2. The Constitution of India exempts the States from providing legal counsel to person being held for preventive detention
3. According to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, confession of the accused before the police cannot be used as evidence.
How many of the above statements are correct?
(a) Only one
(b) Only two
(c) All three
(d) None

Ans : a
Statement 2 and 3 are incorrect: The Constitution does not exempt states from providing legal counsel to persons held under preventive detention. Article 22 ensures certain protections, including legal aid, for such persons. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002, a confession made before a police officer of a certain rank could be used as evidence in court. This provision was controversial and led to the repeal of POTA in 2004.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. Consider the following statements regarding hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning in India:

1. The prohibition of manual scavenging has eliminated all instances of hazardous human entry into sewer and septic tanks.
2. The use of undocumented daily-wage workers by contractors can make it difficult to establish accountability for sanitation-related deaths.
3. Mechanisation of sanitation work is an important measure to reduce workers' exposure to hazardous conditions.

Which of the statements given above are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3
Answer: (b) 2 and 3 only

- ***Statement 1 is incorrect:*** The prohibition of manual scavenging has not eliminated hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning.
- ***Statement 2 is correct:*** Contractors may employ undocumented daily-wage workers to evade liability, making accountability difficult.
- ***Statement 3 is correct:*** Mechanisation reduces the need for hazardous human entry and is central to improving sanitation-worker safety.

Q. With reference to Exercise MALABAR, consider the following statements:

1. It originated as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the United States.
2. Japan became a regular participant in the exercise in 2014.
3. Australia has participated in every edition of the exercise since its inception in 1992.
4. The exercise includes both harbour and sea phases.

Which of the statements given above are correct?
(a) 1, 2 and 4 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (a) 1, 2 and 4 only

- ***Statement 1 is correct:*** MALABAR began in 1992 as a bilateral naval exercise between India and the United States.
- ***Statement 2 is correct:*** Japan returned to the exercise in 2014 and subsequently became a regular participant.
- ***Statement 3 is incorrect:*** Australia rejoined the exercise in 2020. It was not a participant from its inception.
- ***Statement 4 is correct:*** The exercise includes harbour and sea phases involving professional interactions and coordinated maritime operations.