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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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3. Buxa Tiger Reserve and Tiger Reintroduction
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1.Legislative Privileges vs Free Speech

Source: *The Hindu*

Why in News?

On 6 October 2026, a seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court closed a long-pending reference concerning the conflict between legislative privileges and freedom of speech. The matter arose from the 2003 Tamil Nadu Assembly action against journalists of *The Hindu*. The Court did not decide the larger constitutional issue because the Tamil Nadu Assembly had already withdrawn the impugned resolution in 2004. Hence, the reference was closed as infructuous, leaving the larger questions open for a future case.

What are Legislative Privileges?

Legislative privileges are special powers and immunities given to Parliament and State Legislatures to ensure their **independent and effective functioning**.

- **Article 105** – Privileges of Parliament and its members.
- **Article 194** – Privileges of State Legislatures and their members.
- They include protection against obstruction of legislative work and the power to act against **breach of privilege and contempt of the House**.
- These privileges are meant to protect the **functioning of the legislature**, rather than the personal interests of individual legislators.

Where is the Conflict with Fundamental Rights?

The conflict arises when privilege powers are used against **journalists, citizens or critics outside the House**.

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Protects freedom of speech and expression, including press freedom.
- **Article 21:** Becomes relevant if privilege proceedings result in arrest or imprisonment.

- **Article 14:** Requires fairness and non-arbitrariness in state action.

Thus, the key constitutional question is whether legislative privileges can be exercised in a manner that restricts fundamental rights, particularly when the speech concerns **legislative or governmental functioning**.

2003 Tamil Nadu Assembly Case

- In 2003, *The Hindu* published reports concerning proceedings of the Tamil Nadu Assembly and an editorial critical of the then government led by **J. Jayalalithaa**.
- The Assembly treated the publications as a **breach of privilege** and took action against journalists. Five journalists of *The Hindu* and the editor of *Murasoli* were sentenced to imprisonment for 15 days.
- The journalists approached the Supreme Court, raising wider constitutional questions regarding the relationship between **legislative privilege and freedom of speech**. The matter was subsequently referred to larger Benches.

Earlier Judicial Position

The issue has its roots in earlier constitutional cases:

- **M.S.M. Sharma v. Sri Krishna Sinha (1959) – Searchlight Case:** The Court examined the relationship between legislative privilege and freedom of the press in relation to publication of Assembly proceedings.
- **Special Reference No. 1 of 1964:** The Supreme Court further considered the relationship between legislative privileges, fundamental rights and judicial review.

These decisions created important constitutional questions about the extent to which legislative privileges can operate against fundamental rights.

Important Development: Sita Soren Case, 2024

In **Sita Soren v. Union of India (2024)**, the Supreme Court adopted a **functional approach** to legislative privileges.

The Court held that legislative immunity must have a connection with the **legitimate functioning of the legislature**. It rejected the argument that parliamentary privilege could protect an MP from prosecution for accepting a bribe in connection with a vote.

This approach is significant for the present debate because it suggests that privileges cannot automatically become an **absolute shield against accountability or legitimate public scrutiny**.

What Happened on 6 October 2026?

The seven-judge Constitution Bench was informed that the Tamil Nadu Assembly had **withdrawn its 2003 resolution in 2004**.

Since the original dispute no longer survived, the Court treated the reference as **infructuous and closed it**.

Importantly, the Supreme Court **did not decide** whether legislative privileges can override fundamental rights such as freedom of speech. The larger constitutional questions therefore remain open for determination in an appropriate future case.

Why Does it Matter?

1. **Press Freedom:** Excessive use of privilege can create a chilling effect on journalists reporting on legislatures.
2. **Democratic Accountability:** Legislatures exercise public power and must remain open to legitimate criticism and scrutiny.
3. **Protection of Citizens:** Privilege proceedings resulting in detention or imprisonment require constitutional safeguards.
4. **Balance of Powers:** The issue involves balancing legislative autonomy with judicial review and fundamental rights.
5. **Constitutional Governance:** Privileges should protect genuine legislative functioning, not shield governments or legislators from legitimate criticism.

Way Forward

Legislative privileges should be exercised **only when necessary to protect the functioning and dignity of the House**. Clear procedural safeguards should protect citizens and journalists from arbitrary action, while courts must maintain the constitutional balance between **legislative autonomy and fundamental rights**.

2.Disabled Citizens and the Future of AI

Source: *The Hindu*

Why in News?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly being used in **government services, healthcare, education and recruitment**. For persons with disabilities, AI can improve independence and access to essential services. However, the benefits of AI will remain unequal unless

accessibility, representation and disability inclusion are incorporated into AI development from the beginning.

Opportunities of AI for Persons with Disabilities

- **Greater independence:** AI can help visually impaired persons read documents, understand images and navigate government forms without depending entirely on others.
- **Improved assistive technology:** AI can enable accessible navigation, eye-tracking, voice recognition and other personalised tools.
- **Accessible information and education:** Speech-to-text, automatic captions, image descriptions and digital assistants can make digital content more accessible.
- **Better communication:** AI-powered sign-language tools and communication technologies can assist persons with hearing or speech disabilities.
- **Independent living:** AI-enabled systems can respond to individual needs and enable persons with disabilities to live more independently.

Major Concerns

1. Accessibility deficit

Persons with disabilities are often included in AI policy discussions **after systems have already been designed**. Many government websites and digital services continue to have accessibility problems despite legal requirements under the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**.

2. Weak implementation of accessibility standards

In the **Rajive Raturi v. Union of India (2024)** judgment, the Supreme Court recognised accessibility as an important aspect of the constitutional guarantee of **life and dignity** and highlighted weaknesses in the implementation of accessibility standards.

3. Disability bias in AI

AI systems can reproduce biases present in their training data. Research involving language models has found that disability-related inputs can result in **more errors, negative responses and stereotyping**.

Similarly, the **CLIP image model** was found to be significantly less accurate for photographs taken by blind and low-vision users. Objects important to disabled persons, such as **white canes and Braille displays**, were also under-represented in training datasets.

4. Risk of discriminatory outcomes

AI systems may provide inappropriate or stereotypical responses when users disclose their disability. Such biases can become particularly serious when AI is used in **recruitment, healthcare, welfare delivery or public services**.

5. Lack of human fallback

AI cannot handle every individual situation. Evidence from the **NClude platform** indicates that many users still required human assistance to complete tasks that could not be successfully completed through AI alone.

Therefore, essential public services should not become **AI-only systems**.

6. Energy and infrastructure concerns

India's expansion of data centres will increase electricity and infrastructure requirements. Power disruptions can have serious consequences for persons dependent on **powered wheelchairs, oxygen equipment and other essential devices**.

Way Forward

- **Disability-by-design:** Accessibility should be incorporated from the beginning of AI development rather than added later.
- **Bias testing:** Government AI systems should undergo regular testing for disability-related bias.
- **Inclusive datasets:** Training datasets should contain genuine and diverse representation of persons with disabilities, with appropriate consent and privacy safeguards.
- **Human-in-the-loop:** Essential public services should always provide a human fallback mechanism.
- **Accessible digital governance:** Government websites, apps and AI interfaces should comply with accessibility standards.
- **Inclusive decision-making:** Persons with disabilities should participate in decisions regarding AI design, datasets and digital infrastructure.
- **Sustainable infrastructure:** Data centres should improve energy efficiency, adopt renewable sources and account for their impact on electricity grids.

3.Buxa Tiger Reserve and Tiger Reintroduction

Source: PIB

Why in News?

A **three-year-old tigress, T138, has been brought from Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar and released into Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) in West Bengal** as part of an effort to restore the tiger population in the reserve. The reintroduction is significant because recent assessments indicated the **absence of resident tigers in Buxa**, despite its historically important tiger habitat and strategic location in the India-Bhutan landscape.

About Buxa Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal.
- **Declared Tiger Reserve:** 1983; it was India's **15th Tiger Reserve**.
- **Area:** About **760.87 sq. km**.
- **Biogeographic significance:** Located at the meeting point of the **Lower Gangetic Plains, Central Himalayas and Brahmaputra Valley**.
- **International connectivity:** It is connected with the **forests of Bhutan** in the north.
- **Landscape connectivity:** It is linked with **Manas Tiger Reserve and Kochugaon forests** towards the east and **Jaldapara National Park** towards the west.
- **Important corridors:** Buxa–Chilapata, Buxa–Titi and Buxa–Ripu corridors.
- **Major rivers:** Sankosh, Raidak, Jayanti and Dima.
- **Vegetation:** Predominantly **moist tropical forests**.

Thus, Buxa forms an important part of the larger **transboundary tiger landscape between India and Bhutan**.

Why Reintroduce Tigers in Buxa?

Buxa historically supported tigers, but the population declined due to:

- habitat degradation and fragmentation;
- changes in land use;
- decline in prey availability; and
- increasing human pressure.

The reserve is ecologically important because restoring tigers in Buxa can strengthen connectivity between tiger populations across the **India-Bhutan landscape**.

The absence of resident tigers makes reintroduction important for restoring a **breeding population**, provided that adequate prey, habitat and protection are ensured.

How is the Tiger Being Reintroduced?

- A **three-year-old tigress (T138)** from **Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar**, has been brought to Buxa.
- Initially, the tigress will remain in an **acclimatisation enclosure for around 2–3 months**.
- It will subsequently be released into the wider reserve.
- **Radio/telemetry monitoring, camera traps and field surveillance** will be used to monitor its movement, adaptation and behaviour.
- Further tiger releases are planned to establish a **viable breeding population**.

Valmiki was considered suitable because of similarities in **habitat and terrain** with Buxa.

However, tiger translocation requires careful ecological assessment. An earlier attempt to translocate a tiger from the **Sundarbans to Buxa** was unsuccessful, highlighting the importance of habitat compatibility and animal adaptation.

India's Experience with Tiger Reintroduction

India has undertaken tiger reintroduction programmes in several reserves.

- **Sariska Tiger Reserve:** Tigers were reintroduced after the local population disappeared.
- **Panna Tiger Reserve:** Reintroduction helped restore the tiger population after its local extinction.

Such programmes involve coordination among the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), State Forest Departments and Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**.

However, reintroduction does not automatically guarantee success. Survival depends on **habitat quality, prey availability, protection from poaching, genetic considerations and adaptation of individual animals**.

Major Challenges in Buxa

1. Human settlements

Several villages and human habitations are located within and around the reserve, increasing the possibility of human-tiger interactions.

2. Human-wildlife conflict

If reintroduced tigers move into human-dominated areas, livestock depredation and conflict may increase.

3. Habitat fragmentation

Roads and railway infrastructure can fragment wildlife habitats and restrict animal movement.

4. Heavy traffic

Roads connecting **Bhutan and West Bengal** carry significant commercial traffic, creating risks for wildlife movement.

Way Forward

- Conduct **scientific assessment of prey availability and carrying capacity** before further releases.
- Strengthen protection against **poaching and illegal wildlife trade**.
- Maintain and restore **wildlife corridors** connecting Buxa with neighbouring landscapes.
- Establish effective **human-wildlife conflict mitigation and compensation mechanisms**.
- Regulate traffic and improve wildlife-crossing infrastructure on roads and railways.
- Use **camera traps, GPS/radio telemetry and field monitoring** for long-term assessment.
- Ensure that reintroduction is accompanied by **habitat and prey-base restoration**, rather than focusing only on releasing animals.

Conclusion

Tiger reintroduction in Buxa is an opportunity to restore a historically important tiger population and strengthen the **India-Bhutan transboundary conservation landscape**. However, successful reintroduction requires more than releasing individual tigers. It depends on a secure habitat, sufficient prey, ecological connectivity, scientific monitoring and effective management of human-wildlife conflict.

4.Analogue Paneer

Source: *The Times of India*

Why in News?

The **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** has proposed changes to the regulations governing **analogue dairy products**, including analogue paneer. The proposal seeks to prevent such products from being marketed or labelled simply as **"paneer"**, as their milk constituents may be partly or wholly replaced by non-milk ingredients.

The issue is important from the perspective of **consumer rights, food safety, nutritional transparency and regulation of the dairy sector**.

What is Analogue Paneer?

Analogue paneer is a formulated food product in which milk fat, milk protein or both are partly or wholly replaced by non-milk ingredients.

It may contain:

- Vegetable fats or oils
- Vegetable proteins
- Starches
- Milk solids
- Emulsifiers
- Stabilising agents

Therefore, unlike conventional paneer, its nutritional composition can vary considerably depending on the ingredients used.

How is Analogue Paneer Made?

1. **Ingredient substitution:** Milk fat or milk protein is partly/wholly replaced by cheaper ingredients such as vegetable fats, oils, starches or plant proteins.
2. **Blending:** Starches, emulsifiers and stabilisers are mixed to obtain the desired texture, firmness and water-binding capacity.
3. **Setting:** Acidulants are added and the mixture is mechanically pressed into solid blocks resembling paneer.

The product can therefore resemble conventional paneer in **appearance and texture**, even though its composition is different.

Nutritional Concerns

Conventional milk paneer has a relatively defined nutritional profile. Approximately, per 100 g, it contains:

- **Protein:** 18.9 g

- **Fat:** 24.8 g
- **Carbohydrates:** 2.4 g

Analogue paneer does not have one fixed nutritional profile because its composition depends on the ingredients used.

For example, replacing milk fat with vegetable oil or milk protein with plant protein can alter its **protein quality, fat composition and overall nutritional value**.

Therefore, the key issue is not necessarily that analogue products are inherently unsafe, but that **consumers should know what they are purchasing**.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

- The FSSAI regulates food standards and labelling in India.
- Analogue products are not inherently illegal. However, problems arise when a product containing substantial non-milk ingredients is marketed simply as conventional "paneer", potentially misleading consumers.
- FSSAI has proposed amendments to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011 to restrict the manufacture and sale of analogue products as paneer and discontinue the use of the term "paneer" in their nomenclature, labelling and marketing.
- The objective is to ensure truthful product identification and informed consumer choice.

Milk Paneer vs Analogue Paneer

Feature	Milk Paneer	Analogue Paneer
Basic source	Made primarily from milk/milk solids using permitted acids	Milk constituents partly/wholly replaced by non-milk ingredients
Fat source	Mainly natural milk fat	May contain vegetable fat/oil
Protein	Milk protein with essential amino acids	Protein quantity and quality vary with ingredients
Nutritional profile	Relatively standardised	Variable
Regulatory classification	Covered under standards for Chhana and Paneer	Classified as **"Analogue in the Dairy Context"**
Consumer concern	Established composition	Need for clear disclosure of ingredients

Why is Regulation Important?

1. Consumer protection

Consumers purchasing paneer may reasonably expect a milk-based product. Clear labelling prevents misleading representation.

2. Nutritional transparency

Consumers should be able to distinguish between products containing **milk protein and milk fat** and those relying substantially on plant-based substitutes.

3. Fair competition

Clear classification prevents manufacturers from gaining an unfair advantage by selling lower-cost analogue products under names associated with conventional dairy products.

4. Food safety and quality

Standardised regulation enables authorities to monitor ingredients, manufacturing practices and labelling more effectively.

5.About Siberia Region

Source –The Hindu

Location: Siberia is a vast region of Russia and part of northern Kazakhstan**.**

- **Boundaries:**
  - **Western Boundary:** The Ural Mountains separate Siberia from European Russia.
  - **Eastern Boundary:** The Pacific Ocean marks the eastern edge.



  - **Northern Boundary:** The Arctic Ocean forms the northern coastline**.**
  - **Southern Boundary:** Siberia extends towards northern Kazakhstan and the borders of Mongolia and China.

Key Features:

- Vast geographical region: Siberia spans about 13.1 million square kilometres, covering most of Russia's territory and almost 9% of Earth's land surface.
- Major geographical zones: Its major geographical zones include the West Siberian Plain and the Central Siberian Plateau.
- Geographical and political identity: Siberia geographically falls in Asia, while it is culturally and politically considered part of Europe because it is part of Russia.

6.Exercise Mountain Guardian 2026

Source: PIB

Why in News?

The inaugural India–UAE joint military exercise, Mountain Guardian 2026, commenced at the Foreign Training Node, Chaubatia, Uttarakhand. It focuses on high-altitude mountain warfare and joint tactical operations.

About the Exercise

- **Countries:** India and UAE
- **Type:** Bilateral Army-to-Army exercise
- **Venue:** Chaubatia, Uttarakhand
- **Focus:** Mountain warfare, tactical training and operational interoperability
- **Aim:** To strengthen mutual understanding, defence cooperation and the ability of both armies to conduct joint operations.

Key Features

- **Mountain Warfare:** Training in rock climbing, cliff assaults, rappelling, obstacle crossing and survival in difficult terrain.
- **Drone Surveillance:** Use of drones, day/night sensors and surveillance systems for reconnaissance, monitoring and target identification.
- **Weapon Training:** Combat shooting, sniper firing, reflex shooting and counter-terrorism drills.
- **Field Training Exercise (FTX):** Mixed teams conduct simulated joint operations under a coordinated command structure.

Significance

- **Enhances interoperability:** Common training improves coordination, communication and joint operational capabilities.
- **Shares India's expertise:** Gives UAE troops exposure to India's extensive experience in **mountain and high-altitude warfare**.
- **Complements Desert Cyclone:** While **Desert Cyclone** focuses on desert warfare, Mountain Guardian provides training in mountainous terrain.
- **Strengthens India-UAE defence ties:** Regular exercises build mutual trust and support the broader strategic partnership between the two countries.
- **Defence diplomacy:** Military exercises strengthen strategic cooperation beyond traditional diplomatic engagement.

Conclusion

Mountain Guardian 2026 reflects the deepening **India-UAE defence partnership** and India's role in defence diplomacy. By combining mountain warfare expertise with modern technologies such as drones and surveillance systems, the exercise aims to build **operational interoperability and joint military preparedness**.

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