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DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS-

1. Old Grasslands: Why They May Never Fully Regrow
2. Amazon v. Perplexity: Who Controls an AI Agent Acting for You?
3. Uttarakhand's First Glacial Lake Early-Warning System
4. Import Duty Reduction on Edible Oils

1.Old Grasslands: Why They May Never Fully Regrow

Source: The Hindu, Page II; study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*

Subject: Environment | Ecology | Biodiversity | Ecosystem Restoration

Why in News?

A new global study involving researchers from **IISER Pune** has found that ancient or old-growth grasslands, once destroyed, may **not return to their original ecological state even after a century**. The findings highlight the need to treat natural grasslands as distinct ecosystems rather than as degraded land available for development or afforestation.

Key Findings of the Study

- Secondary grasslands that emerge after destruction of old grasslands differ significantly from the original ecosystems.
- They tend to have:
    - Different and taller plant species.
    - Fewer plant species.
    - Altered ecological traits.
    - Greater presence of non-native annuals in some cases.
- Old-growth grassland plants are generally more **resource-conservative**, while species in secondary grasslands tend to be more **resource-acquisitive**.
- Changes in **soil nutrients and pH** can prevent the original plant community from re-establishing.
- Therefore, simply allowing vegetation to return does not necessarily mean that the original grassland ecosystem has been restored.

Ecological Significance of Grasslands

- Grasslands are ecosystems dominated primarily by **grasses (Poaceae)** rather than trees and large shrubs.
- They occur where climatic conditions support grasses but are generally insufficient for forests to dominate.

- Periodic **fire and grazing** can help maintain grassland ecosystems by restricting woody vegetation.
- They provide habitat for diverse wildlife and support important food webs.
- Extensive root systems enable grasslands to store substantial amounts of **carbon underground**.
- They are also important sources of **fodder and livelihoods for pastoral communities**.
- Old grasslands are therefore valuable for both **biodiversity conservation and ecosystem functioning**.



Threats and the Indian Context

- Natural grasslands are often incorrectly classified as **"wastelands"**, making them vulnerable to:
    - Infrastructure and other development.
    - Mining.
    - Conversion to other land uses.
    - Afforestation projects that may replace naturally occurring grassland ecosystems.

- However, India currently lacks a dedicated national programme specifically focused on grassland restoration.

Grassland Ecosystems

Grassland ecosystems, often called the "breadbaskets of the world," are areas dominated by grasses rather than large trees or shrubs. They occur in regions where there is enough moisture for grass to grow but not enough to support a full forest canopy.

1. Types of Grasslands

Grasslands are broadly categorized based on their latitudinal position and climatic conditions:

- **Tropical Grasslands (Savannas):** Located near the equator between tropical forests and deserts. They experience high temperatures year-round and distinct wet and dry seasons.
- **Temperate Grasslands:** Located in mid-latitudes, these have a wider range of temperatures, with cold winters and hot summers. They are known by different regional names:
    - **Prairies:** North America
    - **Steppes:** Eurasia (Central Asia/Europe)
    - **Pampas:** South America (Argentina)
    - **Veldts:** South Africa
    - **Downs:** Australia

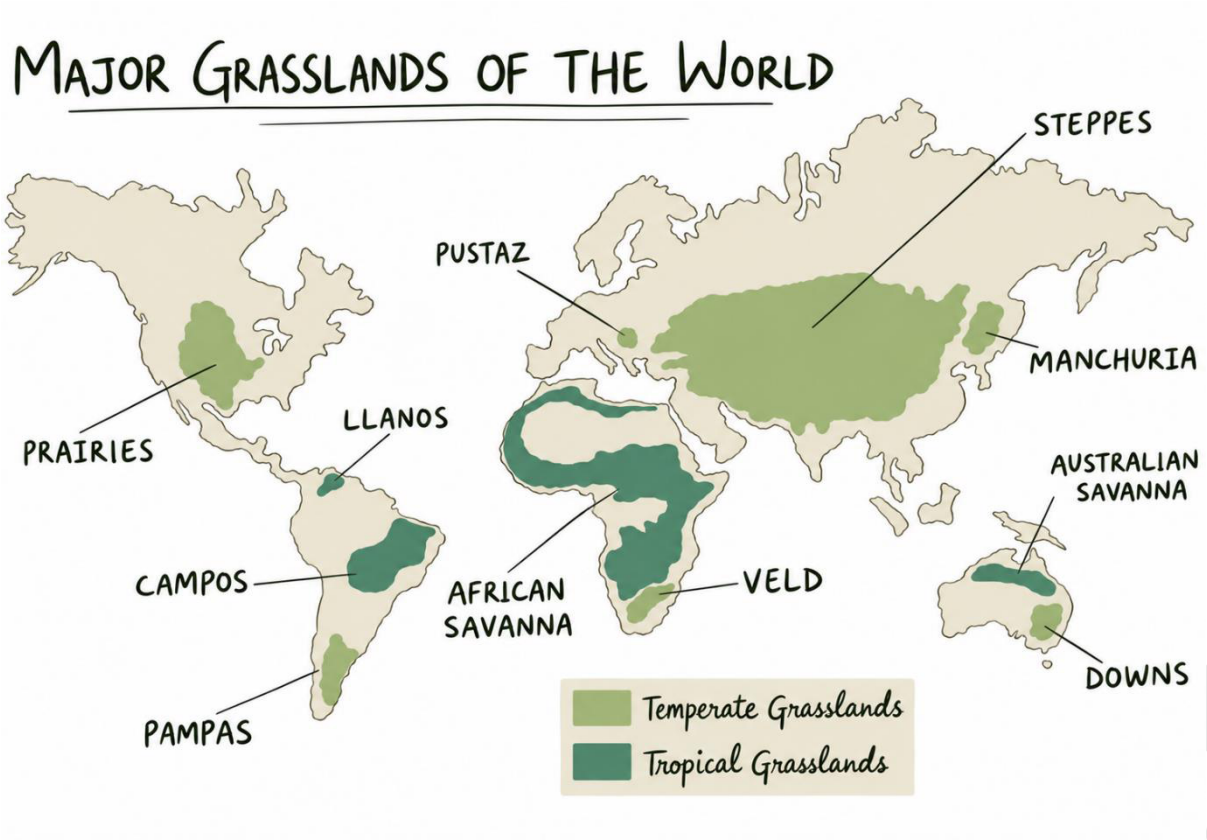
2. Key Characteristics

- **Climate:** Annual rainfall varies between 25 cm and 75 cm. This is too little for forests but prevents desertification.
- **Soil Fertility:** Temperate grasslands have some of the most fertile soils in the world (e.g., Chernozem or Black Soil in the Steppes), rich in organic matter due to the decay of deep grass roots.
- **Fire Adaptation:** Fire is a natural and essential part of the ecosystem. It clears dead matter and prevents woody shrubs from taking over, while grass roots remain protected underground to regrow quickly.

3. Structure and Function (Biotic Components)

The ecosystem follows a clear energy flow, primarily through the **Grazing Food Chain**.

- **Producers:** Various species of grasses (like *Dichanthium* in India) and some scattered shrubs.
- **Consumers:**
    - **Primary:** Herbivores like Bison, Antelopes, Zebras, and in India, the **Blackbuck**.
    - **Secondary/Tertiary:** Predators like Lions, Wolves, and Cheetahs.
- **Decomposers:** Fungi and bacteria that recycle nutrients back into the soil.



Way Forward

- Develop a **National Grassland Restoration Programme** to identify, protect and restore degraded grasslands.
- Formulate a **National Grazing Policy** that balances livestock-dependent livelihoods with ecological sustainability.
- Avoid treating all open landscapes as degraded land suitable for afforestation.
- Restoration should focus on recovering **native species, soil conditions and ecological functions**, rather than merely increasing vegetation cover.
- Conservation planning should recognise old-growth grasslands as distinct ecosystems with their own biodiversity and carbon-storage value.

UPSC Prelims Practice

Q.With reference to grassland ecosystems, consider the following statements:

1. Grasslands are generally dominated by grasses rather than large trees and shrubs.
2. Extensive root systems allow grasslands to store significant amounts of carbon below the ground.

3. Secondary grasslands always recover the same species composition and ecological characteristics as old-growth grasslands.
4. Grazing and periodic fire can play a role in maintaining some natural grassland ecosystems.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 2 and 4 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b) 1, 2 and 4 only

Explanation: The study shows that secondary grasslands may remain ecologically different from old-growth grasslands for at least a century. Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.

UPSC Mains Practice

Q."Grassland restoration cannot be equated with merely increasing vegetation cover." Discuss with reference to biodiversity, carbon storage and livelihoods in India. (150 words)

2.Amazon v. Perplexity: Who Controls an AI Agent Acting for You?

Source: The Hindu, Page II
Subject: Science & Technology | Artificial Intelligence | Data Protection | E-commerce

Why in News?

A U.S. court dispute between **Amazon and Perplexity AI** over the use of an AI agent to access e-commerce accounts has raised questions about **user agency, platform control, AI-agent authorization and liability**. The case is particularly relevant as AI agents increasingly perform tasks on behalf of users.

Amazon–Perplexity Dispute

- Amazon sued Perplexity over its **Comet browser Assistant**, alleging that the AI agent accessed customer accounts without proper authorization.
- Amazon's claims invoked the **U.S. Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA)** and California's **Comprehensive Computer Data Access and Fraud Act**.
- A U.S. judge initially granted a preliminary injunction in Amazon's favour.
- The **U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit** later vacated the injunction.

- The court distinguished between:
    - Direct server-to-server access by an AI company's systems.
    - Access made by an AI agent acting through a user's browser/account at the user's direction.
- The ruling treated the **user**, rather than Perplexity's servers, as the party accessing Amazon's servers in the circumstances described.
- However, the court did not settle whether the AI agent's actions violated Amazon's **terms of service**, leaving contractual questions separate.

The Emerging Question of AI-Agent Agency

- Traditional online systems assume that a human user directly interacts with a platform.
- AI agents complicate this model because they can **search, compare, purchase and perform other tasks on behalf of users**.
- This raises questions about:
    - Who is legally responsible for an agent's actions?
    - When does user permission constitute valid authorization?
    - Can a platform block third-party AI agents while allowing its own AI tools?
    - How should platforms distinguish legitimate automated access from malicious bots?
- The case therefore highlights the emerging distinction between **user-controlled automation and unauthorized automated access**.

Key Pillars of the DPDP Act

The Act is built on the **SARAL** approach (Simple, Accessible, Rational, and Actionable) and focuses exclusively on **digital personal data**.

1. The Stakeholders

- **Data Principal:** The individual whose data is being processed. Notably, the Act uses **"she/her"** pronouns, a first in Indian legislative history.
- **Data Fiduciary:** The entity (company or government) that decides the "why" and "how" of data processing.
- **Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDF):** Large entities (e.g., social media giants) with higher risk profiles, required to appoint a Data Protection Officer and conduct periodic audits.

2. Consent and Notice

Processing is allowed only for a "lawful purpose" and requires **free, specific, informed, and unconditional consent**.

- **Notice:** Fiduciaries must provide a clear notice in any of the **22 languages** listed in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution.
- **Consent Managers:** A new class of regulated entities that act as single-point interfaces for individuals to manage, give, or withdraw consent.

3. Rights of Individuals

- **Right to Access:** To know what data is being processed and with whom it is shared.
- **Right to Correction & Erasure:** The "Right to be Forgotten" or corrected if the data is inaccurate.
- **Right to Nominate:** To appoint a person to manage data rights in case of death or incapacity.

Enforcement and Implementation Timeline

The government is currently in a **phased rollout** to allow businesses time to adapt.

Phase	Effective Date	Key Milestone
Phase 1	Nov 13, 2025	Constitution of the **Data Protection Board (DPB)**.
Phase 2	Nov 13, 2026	Mandatory registration for **Consent Managers** begins.
Phase 3	May 13, 2027	Full enforcement of obligations, penalties, and rights.

Way Forward

- Develop clear rules defining **authorization, responsibility and liability** for AI-agent actions.
- E-commerce platforms could develop structured **agent-facing APIs** to enable secure and controlled interaction.
- Establish safeguards for authentication, consent, transaction limits and personal-data processing.

- Ensure that platform security measures do not unnecessarily prevent legitimate user-directed AI assistance.
- At the same time, platforms need protection against automated abuse, fraud and unauthorized data extraction.
- India will need to balance **consumer autonomy, platform security, data protection and fair competition** as agentic AI becomes more widespread.

UPSC Prelims Practice

With reference to AI agents and digital governance, consider the following statements:

1. AI agents can perform digital tasks on behalf of users.
2. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, can become relevant when AI agents process personal data.
3. The Competition Commission of India can examine certain competition-related concerns involving dominant digital platforms.
4. India currently has a dedicated legislation that comprehensively defines the legal identity and liability of autonomous AI agents.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 2 and 3 only
(c) 2, 3 and 4 only
(d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer: (b) 1, 2 and 3 only

Explanation: India has several laws relevant to AI-agent activity, but the source does not identify any dedicated legislation comprehensively defining the legal identity and liability of autonomous AI agents.

UPSC Mains Practice

"AI agents challenge conventional notions of user authorization, platform control and digital liability." Discuss the regulatory issues arising from the growing use of AI agents in e-commerce. (150 words)

3.Uttarakhand's First Glacial Lake Early-Warning System

Source: The Hindu

Why in News?

- Uttarakhand has installed its first **real-time glacial lake early-warning system** at **Vasundhara Tal in Chamoli district**.
- The system aims to reduce the risk of **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**.
- Vasundhara Tal is one of **15 high-risk glacial lakes** identified by the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** in Uttarakhand and has been classified as **Category A**.

About the Early-Warning System

- The system is being deployed by a joint scientific and technical team from the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee, and the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun.
- The operation of the system is being supported by the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- The system will continuously monitor water level, weather conditions, snow conditions, water flow and ground movement around the lake.
- The system uses water-level sensors, automatic weather stations, subsurface temperature sensors, tilt sensors and accelerometers.
- The equipment is powered by solar energy.
- Communication between the high-altitude site and Uttarakhand State Disaster Management Authority (USDMA) will be maintained through satellite phones and low-Earth-orbit communication devices.

Other Key Facts

- The USDMA began planning the study and monitoring of Uttarakhand's glacial lakes in January 2025.
- The National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) identified 344 glacial lakes in Uttarakhand in 2023, of which 13 were designated as high-risk.
- Bathymetric surveys have been completed at six lakes, including Vasundhara Tal, to determine their depth and water-holding capacity.

- The initiative follows recent flood disasters, including the August 2025 flood in Nepal and the Dhauli flash flood in Uttarkashi.

4.Import Duty Reduction on Edible Oils

Source: The Hindu

Why in News?

- The Union Government reduced the **Basic Customs Duty (BCD)** on major imported crude edible oils on **24 September**.
- The decision aims to **reduce domestic edible oil prices, control food-price inflation and ensure adequate supply** ahead of the festive season.
- **Crude sunflower oil** will now attract **zero BCD**, while the BCD on **crude soybean oil and crude palm oil** has been reduced to **5%**.

Why Did the Centre Reduce Import Duty?

- India meets around 56–60% of its domestic edible oil demand through imports, making domestic prices sensitive to international prices.
- The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index reached its highest level since June 2022 in August, mainly due to rising palm and soybean oil prices.
- The duty reduction is expected to lower the landed cost of imported edible oils, which can help moderate retail prices.
- International palm oil prices have increased due to strong global demand and concerns over El Niño-related production impacts in Southeast Asia.
- Indonesia's B50 biofuel mandate is expected to increase domestic palm oil consumption, which could further raise global palm oil prices.

Impact and Concerns

- The measure is expected to provide **short-term relief to consumers** by moderating edible oil prices and inflationary pressures.
- Domestic oilseed farmers have expressed concerns that cheaper imports could reduce the competitiveness of domestically produced oilseeds and affect farm incomes.
- Lower import duties may also create concerns regarding the objective of Atmanirbharta in edible oil production.

- The government is simultaneously promoting domestic production through the National Mission on Edible Oils (NMEO), comprising NMEO-Oil Palm and NMEO-Oilseeds, to reduce import dependence.

Current Status of Edible Oil in India (2025-26)

India is the world's **largest importer** of edible oils, meeting roughly **56-60%** of its domestic demand through imports.

- **Domestic Production:** Estimated at approximately **9.6 to 12.18 million tonnes** for the 2025-26 oil year.
- **Import Dependency:** India is projected to import about **16.7 million tonnes** in 2025-26 to bridge the gap.
- **Major Imports:** Palm oil (from Indonesia/Malaysia) makes up the bulk, followed by Soybean oil (Argentina/Brazil) and Sunflower oil (Russia/Ukraine).
- **Consumption Gap:** While domestic production covers about 40-44% of needs, per capita consumption has risen sharply, reaching nearly **11-12 kg/year**.

Major Producing States

The production is concentrated in a few key "oilseed belts" across the country

State	Primary Oilseeds Produced	Share/Rank
Rajasthan	Rapeseed & Mustard	#1 Producer (~20% share)
Gujarat	Groundnut, Castor	Major hub for Groundnut
Madhya Pradesh	Soybean	Often called the "Soybean State"
Maharashtra	Soybean, Sunflower	Significant contributor
Andhra Pradesh/Telangana	Oil Palm	Accounts for ~98% of Oil Palm production

Strategic Missions for Self-Reliance

To reduce the massive import bill (which exceeded **₹1.6 lakh crore** in 2024-25), the government is running two major missions:

1. **NMEO-Oil Palm (NMEO-OP):** Launched in 2021 with an outlay of ₹11,040 crore.
    - **Goal:** Increase Crude Palm Oil (CPO) production to **2.8 million tonnes** by 2029-30.
    - **Progress:** As of March 2026, over **6.40 lakh hectares** have been brought under cultivation.
2. **NMEO-Oilseeds (NMEO-OS):** Approved in 2024 for a 7-year period (2024-25 to 2030-31).
    - **Target:** Increase primary oilseed production from 39 million tonnes to **69.7 million tonnes** by 2030-31.
    - **Focus:** High-yielding seed varieties and cluster-based interventions.