

## UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 04-09-2023

### Kathmandu-Kalinga Literary Festival concludes in Lalitpur, Nepal

The three day long Kathmandu-Kalinga Literary Festival successfully came to an end yesterday in Lalitpur, Nepal. Minister for Foreign Affairs NP Saud of Nepal had inaugurated the festival. This event fulfilled its role in the exchange of culture in the South Asia promoting literary and cultural activities. People from India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka exhibited in the festival. The festival showcased literature, music, dance, poetry and other art forms.



Professor Avadhesh Pradhan, actress and writer Divya Dutta, Prof Madhav Prasad Pokharel and actress Manisha Koirala's were awarded 'Yashaswi Sahitya Samman'. Similarly, those awarded with the 'Yashaswi Book Prize' initiated from this year include writer Bibek Ojha towards fiction for his book 'Aithan', Dr Nawaraj KC towards creative non-fiction for his book 'Sunyako Mulya', Renuka GC towards story for her book 'Sanesh', Dr Mahendra Malla towards poetry for the anthology of poems entitled 'Bhasako Bakpatra', Govinda Giri Prerana towards biography for the biography 'Sushree Parijaat' and Anuradha towards children's literature for her book 'Chhamchhako Chhamchhami'. Others prized with the 'Yashaswi Book Prize' are Rima KC towards translation for her translation of 'Selected Poems by Amrita Preetam', Narayan Ghimire towards food and medicine for his book 'Raithane Khanpan Ra Chadparva', Lakpa Dendi Sherpa towards autobiography for his autobiography 'Himalayan Maverick' and Sushant Thapa towards English poetry writing for his anthology of poems entitled 'Means of Merit'.

## 43rd ASEAN summit in Jakarta to be held from 5th to 7th September



The 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Jakarta will be held from 5th to 7th of this month. The meeting comes amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea, after China released a new map laying claims over large swathes disputed by some ASEAN members, triggering protests by these states.

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will lead a delegation to the summit where the bloc's leaders will discuss the crisis in Myanmar, among other issues. Singapore's Prime Minister's Office said in a statement today that ASEAN leaders will discuss ways to ensure the bloc's continued relevance and centrality in the evolving regional architecture. The leaders will also discuss strengthening ASEAN integration and expanding collaboration in key areas such as the digital and green economies.

### STATUS OF RTI

The Right to Information Act is a law that allows citizens to access information held by public authorities. It is intended to promote transparency and accountability in governance. However, the Act has been facing criticism for its poor implementation and misuse by some people.



## Concerns about the effectiveness of the RTI Act

### Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 introduced a significant change by prohibiting the government from disclosing the personal data of citizens, even in cases where there might be an overriding public interest.

This total prohibition has raised concerns because it can hinder transparency efforts, particularly in situations like 'social audits.' Social audits involve community members obtaining lists of beneficiaries, often related to government programs like ration distribution, through RTI requests. They then individually verify whether these beneficiaries received the benefits they were entitled to, as documented on paper.

With the new prohibition on disclosing personal data, these social audits may become impossible to carry out effectively. This could potentially result in less accountability in government programs and services.

### Right to Information (Amendment) Act 2019

The Right to Information (Amendment) Act 2019 granted the Union Government the power to decide the tenure and salaries of information commissioners. Information commissioners are crucial in the RTI framework as they hear appeals against unsatisfactory or absent RTI responses.

Granting the Union Government unilateral power in these matters raises concerns about the potential for political interference and compromise of the independence of these commissioners. An independent and impartial information commission is essential for ensuring the fair and transparent functioning of the RTI Act.

### Implementation and Subordinate Rules

The effectiveness of the RTI Act depends not only on the central law but also on the rules and practices set by the Union and State Governments. One practical issue is the variation in payment methods accepted for RTI applications. For example, some states, like Tamil Nadu, do not accept Indian Postal Orders (IPOs), which are a convenient and widely accessible payment method. Instead, they may require alternative, less convenient methods like court fee stamps or demand drafts, which can be burdensome for applicants. These disparities in payment methods can create inequalities in access to the RTI process.

### Appointments

Delays in appointing members to information commissions, both at the central and state levels, have a detrimental impact on the RTI framework. Information commissions are responsible for hearing appeals, and significant delays can lead to a backlog of cases. For example, the absence of commissioners in the Jharkhand State Information Commission (SIC) since May 2020 has essentially paralyzed the ability to appeal administrative issues related to the RTI Act in that state. Timely appointments are crucial for maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the RTI system.

## Online RTIs

While online filing of RTI applications can simplify the process and reduce barriers for citizens, its implementation varies across states. Many states do not have online RTI portals, which means citizens in those regions may not have access to this convenient option. Additionally, even in states with online portals, some government bodies may not be registered on these platforms, limiting the scope of online RTI applications.

Technical issues with the Union Government's RTI portal, such as the disappearance of past application data and changes in user account features, have created challenges for users.

## Dissatisfaction

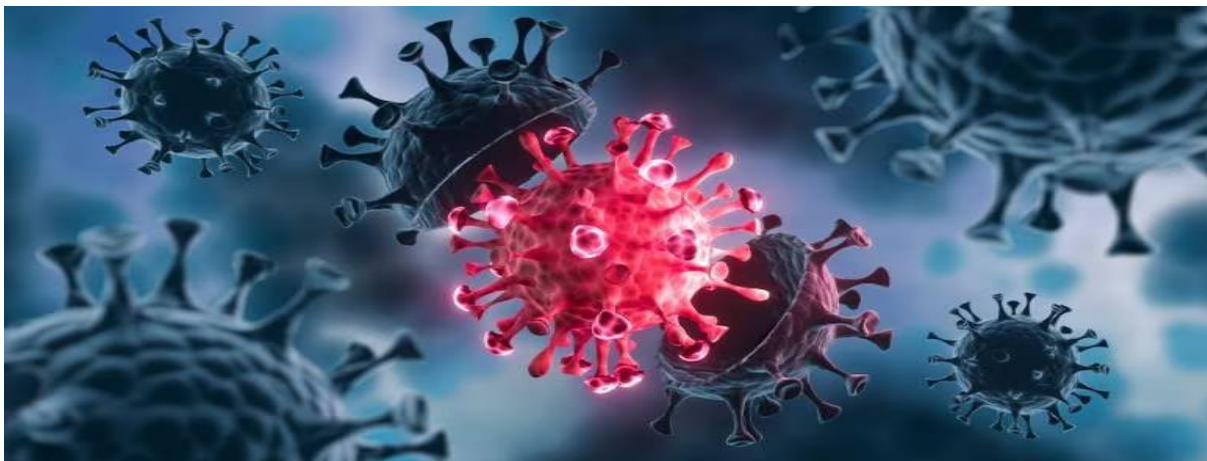
The growing number of first appeals indicates that citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with the information they receive from public officials in response to their RTI requests. This dissatisfaction suggests that there may be issues with the quality or completeness of the information provided, potentially undermining the RTI Act's objective of promoting transparency and accountability.

## Structural Problems

Beyond legislative changes, activists and experts argue that the effectiveness of the RTI Act is also impacted by the way various institutions and government bodies discharge their duties. This includes concerns about narrowing avenues for filing requests and obtaining information, as well as appeals falling on understaffed appellate bodies. These structural challenges can impede citizens' ability to exercise their right to access information and hold public officials accountable.

## PIROLA

The world is facing another wave of COVID-19 infections as a new variant, called "Pirola" or BA.2.86, spreads rapidly across the globe. The variant is a descendant of the Omicron strain, which emerged in 2021 and caused a devastating surge in cases and deaths.



Pirola has acquired several mutations that make it more transmissible and potentially more resistant to vaccines and treatments. The New York Times reports that health experts are

concerned about the impact of this variant on the already strained health systems and the effectiveness of the current vaccination campaigns.

### Key Highlights

Viruses, especially those with RNA as their genetic material, like coronaviruses, tend to mutate over time. Mutations occur during the copying of the virus's genetic material, and some of these mutations can be advantageous for the virus, making it more transmissible or better at entering human cells.

The Pirola variant has more than 30 mutations in its spike protein compared to the XBB.1.5 variant of Omicron. This high number of mutations is a point of concern because it's similar to the level of mutations seen when transitioning from the Delta variant to the Omicron variant.

The Pirola variant has been detected in several countries, including the US, the UK, and others. The fact that these cases are unrelated suggests some degree of international transmission, which is concerning.

The concern with such mutations is that they could potentially make the virus more transmissible or resistant to immunity gained from previous infections or vaccinations.

It's currently unclear whether Pirola could lead to more severe disease, hospitalization, or death. effectively.

## KOKBOROK

**The recent developments in Tripura regarding the Kokborok language and the strike called by the Twipra Students' Federation (TSF). Kokborok, also known as Tripuri, is an indigenous Tibeto-Burman language spoken primarily in the Indian state of Tripura and neighboring areas of Bangladesh.**



The Kokborok language has been a focal point of debate and activism in Tripura for several decades, particularly regarding the choice of script for writing the language.

### Script Debate and Recent Controversies

The debate over the script for writing Kokborok has been ongoing for decades. The language was officially recognized in 1979, and it is spoken as the first language by many of Tripura's tribal communities.



Two commissions, led by Shyama Charan Tripura and linguist Pabitra Sarkar, have examined the script issue.

The Roman script has been advocated by some as the preferred script for Kokborok.

Recent controversies have arisen regarding the imposition of Hindi script and the use of Bengali script in Kokborok exams, intensifying demands for the Roman script.

Kokborok Language: An Overview

### **Etymology**

The name "Kokborok" is derived from "kok," meaning "verbal," and "borok," meaning "people" or "human."

This name signifies the importance of the language as the means of communication among the Tripuri people.

### **History**

Kokborok has a rich historical heritage and has been attested since at least the 1st century AD.

The historical records of Tripuri kings were originally written in Kokborok using the "Koloma" script.

Later, these historical records were translated into Sanskrit and Bengali in the 19th century. Unfortunately, the original Kokborok versions of these chronicles are no longer available.

Over time, Kokborok transitioned from being a royal language during the rule of the Tripuri kings to a common people's dialect.

Writing System

**Traditionally, Kokborok had its own script called "Koloma."**

However, in contemporary times, it is primarily written in the Bengali script. The Koloma script is still used in some traditional contexts and among certain groups.

Grammar and Linguistic Features

Kokborok exhibits unique linguistic features:

Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order.

**Extensive use of postpositions.**

A complex system of noun and verb inflections to indicate tense, mood, aspect, and person.

A rich system of honorifics and politeness levels.

Vocabulary

Kokborok has a diverse vocabulary that reflects the culture, environment, and traditions of the Tripuri people.



It includes words related to agriculture, rituals, food, clothing, and more. Additionally, there may be borrowed words from neighboring languages and cultures.

### **Challenges and Preservation Efforts**

Kokborok faces challenges such as language shift towards dominant languages like Bengali, English, and Hindi.

Efforts have been made to document, preserve, and promote the language, including the development of educational materials and language revitalization programs.

### **Literature and Oral Tradition**

Kokborok has a rich oral tradition with folktales, myths, and legends passed down through generations.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of written literature in Kokborok, including poetry, short stories, and even newspapers.

## **PULI KALI**

**Thrissur in Kerala** recently reverberated with the energetic beats of drums and the roars of a different kind – those of 'human tigers and leopards.'

More than 250 enthusiastic participants, adorned with vibrant stripes and spots, transformed the city into a spectacle of color and tradition during the exhilarating Pulikkali festival.

This rollicking show **served as the grand finale to the Onam celebrations**, creating a carnivalesque atmosphere in Thrissur.

Puli Kali, also known as "Puli Kali" or "Puli Kettu," is a vibrant and colorful traditional folk art form and cultural event that is celebrated primarily in the Indian state of Kerala.

**Puli Kali translates to "Tiger Play" or "Tiger Dance," and it involves performers painting their bodies to resemble tigers and leopards and dancing in the streets to the beat of traditional percussion instruments.**

### **History of Puli Kali**

The history of Puli Kali can be traced back to over two centuries.

It is believed to have originated in the 18th century in the Thrissur district of Kerala.

The credit for its creation is often given to Raja Rama Varma, also known as Sakthan Thampuran, the Maharaja of Kochi. He is said to have introduced this art form as a way to boost the festive spirit and add entertainment to the Onam celebrations.

Pulikkali, believed to have originated as a street dance form two centuries ago, eventually became an integral part of Onam celebrations.

Initially, it faced criticism for being rather obscene, but over time, certain rules regarding style and dance steps were introduced, enhancing its popularity and cultural significance.

In recent years, women have broken barriers in Pulikkali. In 2016, they stormed into what was traditionally a male-dominated arena.

### Significance of Puli Kali

**Cultural Significance:** Puli Kali is a celebration of Kerala's rich cultural heritage. It brings together people from various communities and backgrounds to participate in and witness the vibrant performances.

**Festival Highlight:** Puli Kali is one of the highlights of the Onam festival, which is celebrated to commemorate the return of the mythical King Mahabali. It adds excitement and enthusiasm to the festivities.

### Dance and Music

Puli Kali is a dance-based performance. The "tigers" dance to the rhythm of traditional percussion instruments like chenda and thakil. The synchronized movements and energetic dance routines are an integral part of the performance.

### National Carbon Registry

Recently, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has developed open-source software that allows countries to effectively manage national data and processes for trading carbon credits.



This software has recently been accredited as a digital public good (DPG).

As a DPG, the registry uses open-source code, which allows countries to replicate and adapt the information to fit their own needs and contexts.

The registry's modules, software and technical documentation can be reused and tailored by countries, which could potentially reduce production costs and implementation timelines.

The registry follows national and international best practices, which include UNDP, the World Bank, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

### Key Facts about the United Nations Development Programme

It is the United Nations' lead agency on international development.

It works in 170 countries and territories to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality.



It helps countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, and institutional capabilities and to build resilience to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Its work is concentrated in three focus areas: sustainable development, democratic governance and peacebuilding, and climate and disaster resilience.

### **Koraput Kalajeera Rice:**

**The farmers of Koraput district in Odisha have domesticated Kalajeera rice over generations.**

**It is known as the ‘Prince of Rice’ and is an aromatic variety of rice.**



The ancestors of the present tribal communities of Koraput district have domesticated the rice in the region for thousands of years, contributing to the conservation of the crop.

- It is popular among rice consumers for its black colour, good aroma, taste and texture.
- The ancient text explains that Kalajeera rice improves memory and controls diabetes.
- It is believed to increase haemoglobin levels and the body's metabolism.
- This fragrant grain has antispasmodic, stomachic, carminative, antibacterial, astringent and sedative properties.
- The rice is grown in Koraput district's Tolla, Patraput, Pujariput, Baliguda and Mohuli areas.