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 Thursday, March 19, 2026

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**English**



## Top Stories of The Day

- *Parliament Passes Appropriation Bill 2026, Authorising Withdrawal from Consolidated Fund for FY 2025–26 Expenditure*
- *PNGRB Announces Temporary Waiver of Imbalance Charges in Natural Gas Sector Amid Supply Disruptions Till June 2026*
- *Government Introduces Reforms in PMFBY to Enhance Transparency and Ensure Timely Crop Insurance Claim Settlement*
- *US Counterterrorism Chief Joe Kent Resigns in Protest Against Iran Conflict, Citing Policy Disagreement*
- *UK and Germany Decline NATO Role in Strait of Hormuz, Stress Diplomatic Approach Amid West Asia Tensions*
- *Indian Navy Participates in US-led Sea Dragon 2026 Exercise, Strengthening Anti-Submarine Warfare Capabilities*
- *Assam Police Officer Dr. Partha Sarathi Mahanta Wins Best Director Award at New York Short Animation Festival*
- *Odisha Tops Fiscal Health Index 2026 Released by NITI Aayog, Showcasing Strong Fiscal Discipline Among States*
- *Arun Mammen Re-elected ATMA Chairman, Leadership Changes Announced in India's Tyre Industry Body*
- *Asia's Largest Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden Opens in Srinagar, Marking Start of Spring Tourism Season*

## Parliament Passes Appropriation Bill, 2026



- The Indian Parliament has passed the Appropriation Bill, 2026, completing a crucial stage of the Union Budget process.
- The Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha).
- It authorizes the withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India for government expenditure in FY 2025–26.

### Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that:

- Government budgeting is transparent and realistic.
- India's economy is in a strong position.
- ₹57,000+ crore allocated towards Economic Stabilisation Fund.
- Capital expenditure has increased 4.2 times (2017–18 to 2026–27).

### What is an Appropriation Bill?

- It is introduced under Article 114 of the Constitution.
- It allows the government to withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- It is a Money Bill → Rajya Sabha can only recommend changes (cannot reject).

### Consolidated Fund of India

- Defined under Article 266(1).
- Includes:
  - All revenues received by the Government
  - Loans raised

- Receipts from loans
- No money can be withdrawn without parliamentary approval.

### Budget Process:

- Budget Presentation (Article 112)
- Demand for Grants (Lok Sabha only)
- Appropriation Bill (expenditure approval)
- Finance Bill (tax proposals)

### Capital Expenditure (CapEx)

- Refers to spending on infrastructure, assets, and development projects.
- In Budget 2026–27, CapEx is about ₹12.2 lakh crore, reflecting infrastructure push.

### Fiscal Indicators (Budget 2026–27)

- Fiscal Deficit target: 4.3% of GDP
- Focus areas:
  - Infrastructure
  - Manufacturing
  - Energy security
  - MSMEs

## PNGRB Announces Temporary Waiver of Imbalance Charges



- The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has announced a temporary waiver of imbalance charges for entities, shippers, and consumers in the natural gas sector.

## Key Highlights

- The waiver has been introduced due to the ongoing geopolitical crisis in the Gulf region affecting energy supplies.
- It addresses disruptions in supply, logistics, and market conditions in the gas sector.
- No imbalance charges will be levied for:
  - Gas scheduling
  - Offtake
  - Transportation
  - Balancing
- The relief measure will remain applicable till 30 June 2026.
- Entities must still comply with other operational and regulatory requirements.

## What are Imbalance Charges?

- These are penalties imposed when actual gas usage deviates from scheduled quantities.
- Ensures grid stability and efficient pipeline operations.
- Applicable in gas transportation and distribution networks.

## PNGRB – Key Details

- Established under PNGRB Act, 2006
- Functions:
  - Regulation of petroleum and natural gas sector
  - Ensuring fair trade and competition
  - Authorizing pipelines and city gas distribution (CGD) networks

## Natural Gas in India

- Target: Increase share of natural gas in energy mix to 15% by 2030
- Considered a cleaner fossil fuel (lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than coal & oil)

## Major uses:

- CNG (transport)
- PNG (household cooking)

- Fertilizer & power sector

## City Gas Distribution (CGD) Network

- Expands supply of:
  - CNG stations
  - PNG connections
- Regulated and authorized by PNGRB
- Key for urban energy transition & pollution reduction

## India's Energy Security Context

- India imports a large share of hydrocarbons
- Supply disruptions (e.g., Gulf region tensions) impact:
  - Prices
  - Availability
- Hence, regulatory interventions like waivers help stabilize the market

## Government Modifies PMFBY to Ensure Transparency & Timely Claims



- The Government of India has introduced key modifications in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) to improve transparency, accountability, and ensure timely settlement of insurance claims for farmers. The reforms aim to strengthen the implementation mechanism and address delays in claim disbursement.

## Key Highlights of the Reform

- The government has focused on improving efficiency through digital and administrative

measures. Systems like the National Crop Insurance Portal (NCIP) and DigiClaim Module have been strengthened to enable faster and more transparent claim processing. A penalty provision of around 12% has been introduced on insurance companies for delays in claim settlement. Additionally, ESCROW accounts have been made mandatory for states (from Kharif 2025) to ensure timely release of subsidies. The reforms also promote the use of technology-based crop assessment tools, reducing manual errors and disputes.

### About PMFBY

- The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana was launched in 2016 by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare as a Central Sector Scheme. Its primary objective is to provide financial protection to farmers against crop loss due to natural calamities, pests, and diseases, while also stabilizing their income and encouraging modern agricultural practices.

### Premium Structure and Coverage

- Under PMFBY, farmers pay a very low uniform premium—2% for Kharif crops, 1.5% for Rabi crops, and 5% for commercial/horticultural crops, with the remaining premium subsidized by the government. The scheme provides coverage from pre-sowing to post-harvest stages, including risks such as drought, floods, cyclones, pests, diseases, and localized calamities like hailstorms and landslides.

### Role of Technology in Reforms

- Technology plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency. Initiatives such as YES-TECH (Yield Estimation System using Technology) and WINDS (Weather Information Network Data System) use remote sensing, satellite imagery, and weather data to improve accuracy in yield estimation. The DigiClaim Module ensures direct transfer of claims to farmers' accounts via PFMS, minimizing delays and leakages.

## US Counterterrorism Chief Joe Kent Resigns Amid Iran Conflict



- Joe Kent, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), resigned amid the ongoing US-Iran conflict. He stepped down citing disagreement with the government's decision to engage in the war.

### Key Highlights

- Joe Kent resigned in protest against the war with Iran.
- In his resignation letter, he stated that Iran posed no imminent threat to the United States.
- He alleged that the conflict was influenced by external pressure and misinformation.
- This marks a rare high-level resignation within the US administration over foreign policy disagreements.
- US President Donald Trump dismissed Kent's claims and defended the military action.

### About National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)

- Established after the 9/11 attacks (2001) to improve intelligence coordination.
- Works under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).

### Functions:

- Counterterrorism intelligence analysis
- Strategic planning against terrorism
- Inter-agency coordination in the US

- Background: Iran Conflict (2026)
- The US initiated military operations against Iran in February 2026.

### The conflict has led to:

- Rising tensions in the Middle East
- Global concerns over oil supply & security
- The issue has triggered political divisions within the US and internationally.

## UK & Germany Reject NATO Role in Strait of Hormuz Amid Rising Tensions



- Amid escalating tensions in West Asia due to the US-Iran conflict (2026), countries like the United Kingdom and Germany have rejected calls for a NATO-led military role in the Strait of Hormuz, emphasizing the need for restraint and diplomatic solutions.

### Key Highlights

- The US urged allies to support a naval mission to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, a key global oil route.
- UK, Germany, and other European countries refused to send warships or participate in military operations.
- Germany clearly stated that the conflict is “not NATO’s responsibility” and it will not join military action.
- The UK also ruled out being drawn into a wider Middle East war and stressed that any action should be collective and diplomatic.

- NATO allies highlighted that the alliance is a defensive organization, not meant for offensive interventions.
- Several countries (France, Japan, Italy, Spain) also declined participation, showing lack of consensus within NATO allies.

### About Strait of Hormuz

- A strategic chokepoint between Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman
- Handles about 1/5th (20%) of global oil trade

### Bordered by:

- Iran (north)
- Oman & UAE (south)
- Any disruption directly impacts global oil prices and energy security

### About NATO

- Full form: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- Established: 1949
- Nature: Military alliance for collective defence
- Secretary General: Mark Rutte
- Chair of the NATO Military Committee: Giuseppe Cavo Dragone
- Key principle: Article 5 → Attack on one member = attack on all
- Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium
- NATO operations outside its region require consensus among members, which is currently lacking.

### Why NATO Role Was Rejected

- Conflict seen as US-led, not collective NATO mission
- Fear of escalation into wider regional war
- Preference for diplomatic resolution over military action
- Strait of Hormuz lies outside NATO’s core geographical mandate

## Indian Navy Participates in US-led ‘Sea Dragon’ Exercise



- The Indian Navy has joined the US-led multinational Exercise Sea Dragon 2026, a high-end anti-submarine warfare (ASW) drill conducted in the Indo-Pacific region (Guam).
- The exercise is a two-week multinational naval drill focusing on submarine detection and tracking.
- India is represented by its P-8I long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft.

**Participating countries include:**

- United States (host)
- India
- Japan
- Australia
- South Korea

**Conducted at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam in the Indo-Pacific region.**

- The exercise involves advanced ASW training, including tracking simulated and real submarines.
- It includes over 200 hours of in-flight operational training.

**About Exercise Sea Dragon**

- It is an annual multinational Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) exercise.
- Hosted by the US Navy's 7th Fleet.
- Started as a bilateral exercise (US–Australia) and later expanded to include Indo-Pacific partners.

**Focuses on:**

- Detection and tracking of submarines
- Maritime surveillance
- Tactical coordination among partner navies

**About P-8I Aircraft:**

- Long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft used by the Indian Navy
- Based on Boeing P-8 Poseidon platform

**Key roles:**

- Anti-submarine warfare (ASW)
- Anti-surface warfare
- Surveillance and reconnaissance

**Related Naval Exercises:**

- MALABAR Exercise → India, US, Japan, Australia (Quad)
- MILAN Exercise → Multilateral naval exercise hosted by India
- RIMPAC Exercise → World's largest naval exercise (US-led)

**Assam Police Officer Wins Best Director Award at New York Animation Festival**



- Dr. Partha Sarathi Mahanta, a senior officer of Assam Police, has won the Best Director Award for his animated short film “CHYIMI” at the New York Short Animation Festival.
- Dr. Mahanta is currently serving as a senior Assam Police (IGP/Police Commissioner, Guwahati).

- The film “CHYIMI” received recognition for its artistic direction and storytelling through animation.
- The achievement is notable as it comes from a serving police officer, highlighting a blend of governance and creativity.
- The award showcases the growing global recognition of Indian and especially North-East storytelling.

### About New York Short Animation Festival (NYSAF)

- An international animation film festival that promotes:
- Creativity and originality
- Innovation in animated storytelling
- Provides a global platform for filmmakers from different countries
- Collaborates with institutions like Cine Universitario UACJ (Mexico) for wider screenings

### Fiscal Health Index 2026: Odisha Tops, States Ranked on Financial Strength



- The Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2026, released by the NITI Aayog, evaluates the financial performance of Indian states for FY 2023–24. The index ranks states based on their fiscal discipline, revenue generation, expenditure quality, and debt sustainability.
- According to the latest index, Odisha retained the top position, followed by Goa and Jharkhand, showcasing strong fiscal

management. Other states in the top 10 include Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh. At the lower end, states like Punjab, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala performed poorly, indicating concerns related to high debt and weak fiscal discipline.

### What is Fiscal Health Index (FHI)?

- The Fiscal Health Index is a composite index developed by NITI Aayog to assess the fiscal strength of states. It helps in benchmarking states and promoting better financial governance and cooperative federalism.

### Parameters Used in the Index

- The index evaluates states on key fiscal indicators such as:
- Revenue Mobilisation
- Quality of Expenditure
- Fiscal Prudence (Deficit Management)
- Debt Index
- Debt Sustainability
- These indicators collectively measure how efficiently a state manages its finances.

### Category-wise Classification

- States are grouped into categories based on performance:
- Achievers → e.g., Odisha, Goa, Jharkhand
- Front Runners
- Performers
- Aspirational States
- This classification helps identify best practices and areas needing improvement.

### Importance of Fiscal Health

- State finances are crucial because:
- States account for ~2/3rd of public expenditure in India
- Fiscal discipline ensures economic stability and growth

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- Poor fiscal health leads to high debt, deficits, and reduced development spending

- Chairman: K. M. Mammen
- MD: Rahul Mammen Mappillai

## Arun Mammen Re-elected Chairman of Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA)



- Arun Mammen, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of MRF Ltd, has been re-elected as Chairman of the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA), the apex industry body representing India's tyre sector.

### Along with his re-election, leadership changes were announced in ATMA:

- Rajarshi Moitra appointed as Vice Chairman
- Sanjay Chatterjee elevated as Director General, replacing Rajiv Budhraj (retiring March 2026)
- The move ensures continuity in leadership for India's tyre industry during a phase of growth and transition.

### About ATMA

- Established: 1975
- It is the national industry body of the automotive tyre sector in India
- Represents a \$12 billion+ industry
- Member companies account for over 80% of tyre production in India

### About MRF Ltd

- One of India's largest tyre manufacturers
- Founded by K. M. Mammen Mappillai
- Headquarters: Chennai

## Asia's Largest Tulip Garden Opens in Srinagar, Marking Arrival of Spring



- The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden—Asia's largest tulip garden—has been opened to the public with the inauguration of the Tulip Festival 2026 by Omar Abdullah, marking the onset of the spring tourism season in Jammu & Kashmir.

### Key Highlights

- The garden, spread over about 74 acres, showcases 70–75 varieties of tulips along with several other flowers, attracting tourists from across India and abroad.
- The annual Tulip Festival aims to promote tourism, floriculture, and local culture in the Kashmir Valley.
- Situated at the foothills of the Zabarwan Range overlooking Dal Lake, the garden offers a major boost to spring tourism in Srinagar.

### About the Tulip Garden

- The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden was established in 2007 to enhance floriculture and tourism in Jammu & Kashmir.
- It is Asia's largest tulip garden
- Houses around 1.5–1.7 million tulip bulbs
- Contains ~75 varieties of tulips and other flowers like daffodils and hyacinths

### Tulip Festival & Tourism Significance

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- The Tulip Festival is a major part of the “Bahaar-e-Kashmir” (Spring Festival) and plays a key role in:
- Boosting tourism and local economy
- Promoting Kashmiri handicrafts, cuisine, and culture
- Generating employment opportunities in the region
- The garden has recorded lakhs of visitors annually, making it one of the top tourist attractions in Jammu & Kashmir.

### Additional Key Facts

- Srinagar lies on the banks of the Jhelum River and is the summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir
- The garden is located near Dal Lake, a major tourist attraction
- Tulip bulbs were initially imported from Netherlands (Keukenhof Garden)
- Floriculture is part of horticulture sector, contributing to agricultural diversification

### Lets Revise

- ❖ Appropriation Bill is related to which purpose? **Withdrawal of money from Consolidated Fund of India**
- ❖ Under which Article is the Appropriation Bill provided? **Article 114**
- ❖ The Consolidated Fund of India is mentioned in which Article? **Article 266**
- ❖ Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board was established under which Act? **PNGRB Act, 2006**
- ❖ The term ‘imbalance charges’, sometimes seen in news, is related to \_\_\_\_: **Natural gas sector**
- ❖ Which system is used for direct transfer of insurance claims under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)? **PFMS**
- ❖ Who resigned as head of the US National Counterterrorism Center in 2026? **Joe Kent**
- ❖ Strait of Hormuz connects which two water bodies? **Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman**
- ❖ Approx. what share of global oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz? **About 20%**
- ❖ Exercise Sea Dragon is related to which type of warfare? **Anti-submarine warfare (ASW)**
- ❖ Sea Dragon exercise is hosted by which country? **United States**
- ❖ Who won Best Director Award at NYSAF 2026 for film ‘CHYIMI’? **Partha Sarathi Mahanta**
- ❖ Fiscal Health Index 2026 is released by which organization? **NITI Aayog**
- ❖ Which state topped Fiscal Health Index 2026? **Odisha**
- ❖ Who has been re-elected Chairman of ATMA in 2026? **Arun Mammen**
- ❖ Asia’s largest tulip garden is located in which city? **Srinagar**

Current affairs form the dynamic backbone of preparation for competitive examinations such as UPSC, SSC, and banking services. They bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and real-world developments, transforming static knowledge into practical understanding. In an age marked by rapid geopolitical changes, economic reforms, and policy innovations, a significant portion of these exams—often 30–35%—draws directly or indirectly from recent events.

Mastery of current affairs not only enhances scores but also cultivates analytical thinking, clarity of perspective, and decision-making skills—qualities indispensable for future administrators and professionals.

#### Key Dimensions of Importance

- **Syllabus Integration:** Current events seamlessly connect with core subjects like polity, economy, history, and geography. For instance, understanding constitutional provisions becomes more meaningful when linked to recent judicial reforms or landmark judgments.
- **Scoring Edge:** Many questions in prelims and mains are derived from contemporary developments. A well-prepared aspirant can secure quick and confident marks through accurate knowledge of high-yield topics from reliable news sources.
- **Interview Excellence:** In personality tests and interviews, panels evaluate awareness of pressing national and global issues—ranging from climate diplomacy to economic policy—requiring thoughtful, balanced responses.

As many toppers emphasize, current affairs are not a separate subject but the soul of exam preparation. Consistent engagement with credible sources like The Hindu, PIB releases, and Yojana magazine strengthens critical thinking and nurtures a well-rounded outlook, moving beyond rote memorization.

In a competitive landscape where millions aspire for limited opportunities, current affairs serve as a decisive differentiator. Adopting structured habits—daily news analysis, monthly revisions, and regular mock tests—empowers candidates to adapt confidently to evolving exam patterns. Ignoring this essential component is like navigating uncertain waters without direction—while mastering it ensures clarity, confidence, and a competitive advantage.

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