

Editorial of the Day – 30.03.2026

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1. Administrative Hub of Iron Age Kingdom?

ASI Dig at Bihar's Balirajgarh Seeks Answers on Ancient Mithila History (IE)

GS Paper I – Indian Culture & Ancient History

Topic – Ancient Indian Civilizations, Urbanization, and Archaeological Sites.

Sub-Topic – Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Mandate, Mithila/Videha History, and Stratigraphic Sequences

1. Introduction

In a landmark move to bridge the gap between Vedic literature and physical evidence, the ASI has launched a large-scale scientific excavation at Balirajgarh (Madhubani district, Bihar). Spanning approximately 176 acres, this site is often hailed as the "Gateway to Mithila." The project aims to uncover the urban complexity of a civilization that influenced Indian philosophy, trade, and politics from the Mauryan era through to the Pala period.

2. Archaeological Significance of Balirajgarh

Balirajgarh isn't just a mound of earth; it's a stratified library of Indian history.

Urbanization Evidence – Findings indicate a well-planned fortified settlement. The presence of massive brick fortifications suggests an advanced state of urban planning comparable to other early historic hubs like Pataliputra.

Historical Continuity – The site shows evidence of a "living" civilization that persisted through several dynasties – Mauryan, Sunga, Kushan, Gupta, and Pala.

The Videha Connection – Scholars believe this site is a primary center of the ancient Videha Kingdom, the legendary land of King Janaka and a crucible of early Indian thought.

Mythology Meets Science – Local lore connects the site to King Bali. While mythology provides the narrative, the excavation provides the empirical proof of a highly structured society.

3. The Role of the ASI – 21st Century Archaeology

The Archaeological Survey of India (established in 1861) has transitioned from shovels to sensors.

Scientific Precision – The ASI is employing satellite imagery, GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping, and trench excavation to ensure the integrity of the layers is maintained.

Mandate of Conservation – As a protected site since 1938 under the Ministry of Culture, the ASI balances the need for exploration with the duty of preservation.

Interdisciplinary Approach – By integrating anthropology, environmental science, and history, the ASI is reconstructing not just "what" was there, but "how" they lived.

4. Cultural & Historical Context of the Mithila Region

Mithila has long been the "think-tank" of ancient India.

Center of Scholarship – Historically, this was a hub for Vedic learning and the birthplace of the Nyaya school of philosophy.

Artistic Legacy – The region's aesthetic influence continues today through Madhubani painting and classical Sanskrit literature.

Economic Hub – The discovery of punch-marked coins and beads indicates that Mithila was a significant node in ancient trade networks, connecting the plains to the Himalayas.

5. Material Culture – Findings and Implications

The "trash" of the ancient world is the "treasure" of the modern historian.

Technological Markers – Discovery of terracotta figurines, copper objects, and bone tools reflects a society that mastered metallurgy and artisanal crafts.

Administrative Proof – The massive fortifications and structural remains hint at a strong central authority and sophisticated drainage systems.

Iron Age Links – Scientific dating of current findings could potentially push back the timeline of organized habitation in this region, linking it more firmly to the Iron Age.

6. Contemporary Relevance – Heritage as an Asset

Archaeology in 2026 is as much about the future as it is about the past.

Economic Catalyst – Developing Balirajgarh into a cultural tourism hub could revitalize the local economy in Bihar, creating jobs in infrastructure and hospitality.

Soft Power – Showcasing a continuous, sophisticated civilization enhances India's global cultural standing—often termed "Cultural Diplomacy."

The Challenges – Environmental – A high-water table in the region makes deep excavation difficult.

Logistical – Encroachment and high conservation costs remain significant hurdles for the ASI.

Conclusion

The Balirajgarh excavation is a vital step in mapping the "lost" chapters of the Videha Kingdom. By combining modern satellite mapping with traditional stratigraphic analysis, the ASI is ensuring that India's civilizational legacy is not just remembered, but scientifically validated. A balanced "heritage-first" development model can transform these ruins into a vibrant center of knowledge and regional growth.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/administrative-hub-of-iron-age-kingdom-asi-dig-at-bihars-balirajgarh-seeks-answers-on-ancient-mithila-history-10608595/>

Question

"The transition from textual history to empirical evidence is essential for a holistic understanding of India's civilizational continuity. Elucidate this statement with special reference to the recent archaeological excavations at Balirajgarh and their significance for the Mithila region." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

For decades, the Videha Kingdom and the Mithila civilization were primarily known through Vedic texts, the Brahmanas, and the Epics. The recent large-scale scientific excavation by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at Balirajgarh (Bihar) marks a pivotal shift, providing tangible, stratigraphic evidence for an urban settlement that spanned over a millennium—from the Mauryan to the Pala periods.

2. Bridging Literature and Empirical Evidence

The excavation at Balirajgarh provides the physical "proof" for the scholarly and political descriptions found in ancient literature –

Fortified Urbanism – While texts mention the grandeur of King Janaka's Mithila, the discovery of massive brick fortifications across 176 acres confirms the existence of a highly organized, administrative center.

Cultural Sequence – Stratigraphic layers provide a "timeline" that literary traditions often lack. The evidence of habitation from the Mauryan (3rd century BCE) to the Pala (12th century CE) periods proves the region's long-term socio-political stability.

The Videha Link – By uncovering Iron Age and early historic phase indicators, archaeology is moving closer to identifying the specific material culture associated with the Vedic-era Videha Kingdom.

3. Socio-Economic and Technological Insights

The material culture found at the site paints a vivid picture of ancient life –

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Trade and Economy – The discovery of punch-marked coins and beads signifies that Mithila was a significant node in ancient trade routes, linking the Gangetic plains with the Himalayan foothills.

Artisanal Mastery – Terracotta figurines, copper objects, and bone tools reflect a society with a high degree of specialization in metallurgy and arts, paralleling the region's known history as a center of learning and philosophy.

Urban Infrastructure – Structural remains and drainage indicators suggest an advanced understanding of public health and civic planning, consistent with the "Second Urbanization" of India.

4. Role of Modern Scientific Techniques

The ASI's use of 21st-century technology has refined the historical narrative –

Precision Mapping – Satellite imagery and GIS mapping allow for a non-invasive understanding of the site's layout before a single trench is dug.

Interdisciplinary Study – Integrating anthropology and environmental studies helps reconstruct the ancient climate and diet, providing a holistic view of how the Mithila region sustained its population for centuries.

5. Contemporary Significance – Soft Power and Development

Beyond history, the excavation has modern strategic value –

Cultural Diplomacy – Validating the antiquity of the Mithila region enhances India's global "soft power" by showcasing a continuous and sophisticated civilization.

Regional Growth – Transforming Balirajgarh into a protected heritage hub can drive **cultural tourism**, providing a sustainable economic engine for Northern Bihar.

6. Conclusion

The Balirajgarh excavation is more than a search for artifacts; it is a reconstruction of India's intellectual and political heartland. By grounding the literary traditions of Mithila in empirical archaeological fact, the ASI is ensuring that the legacy of the Videha Kingdom is preserved not just in memory, but in science. Such endeavors are essential to building a cohesive national identity based on proven civilizational continuity.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/administrative-hub-of-iron-age-kingdom-asi-dig-at-bihars-balirajgarh-seeks-answers-on-ancient-mithila-history-10608595/>

2. Neighbours first – On India-Nepal ties (TH)

GS Paper II – International Relations

Topic – Bilateral, regional, and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub-Topic – India-Nepal Strategic Ties, Boundary Disputes, and the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship.

1. Introduction

The relationship between India and Nepal is unique, defined by an open border and the "Roti-Beti" (bread and daughter) connection. However, the rise of Balendra Shah as a significant political force represents a departure from the traditional Brahmin-Chhetri elite dominance. For India, the challenge lies in engaging this "New Nepal"—which is more nationalistic and less tied to legacy political movements—while safeguarding strategic interests against external influences.

2. The Shift – Rise of a New Leadership

Nepal's political DNA is evolving rapidly with the emergence of a Gen-Z leadership –

Balendra Shah (35) – Represents a shift from the traditional political guard (Congress/Maoists).

Identity Shift – As the first major Madhesi leader to break the traditional elite dominance, his rise signals a change in domestic power dynamics.

Foreign Policy Uncertainty – Not shaped by older movements like the Panchayat or anti-monarchy struggles, his diplomatic stance remains pragmatic yet strongly nationalistic.

Nationalistic Posturing – Earlier apprehensions in New Delhi were raised by his use of the "Greater Nepal" map, reflecting a desire for a more assertive Nepali identity.

3. Strategic and Deep-rooted Connections

Despite political shifts, the structural foundations of the tie remain immutable –

Shared Heritage – Deeply rooted in shared culture, familial ties, and religious history.

Geographical Interdependence – As a landlocked nation, Nepal is fundamentally dependent on India for trade, transit, and access to sea lanes.

Energy Symbiosis – India's regional energy grid plans are the primary vehicle for Nepal's prosperity, offering a platform to export hydropower and generate significant revenue.

4. Historical Frictions and Challenges

The past decade has been marked by "trust deficit" events that continue to shadow the relationship –

Constitutional Issues – Tensions arising from Nepal's 2015 Constitution and the subsequent perceived border blockade.

Territorial Disputes – Lingering disagreements over border regions that have occasionally flared into diplomatic standoffs.

Sovereignty Concerns – A growing sensitivity in Kathmandu regarding Indian influence, often leveraged by external actors to create a "zero-sum" game in the Himalayas.

5. Economic Vulnerabilities in 2026

Nepal is currently navigating a precarious economic environment, exacerbated by global shifts –

Energy & Food Security – Shortages in fuel and fertilizer due to the ongoing West Asia crisis.

Remittance Dependency – Nearly 14% of the population works abroad, making the economy highly sensitive to global labor market fluctuations.

Tourism – A critical sector that requires stable regional connectivity to flourish.

6. Way Forward – A "Non-Intrusive" Partnership

To reinforce trust, India must adopt a proactive and sensitive diplomatic posture –

Action Category	Specific Policy Recommendation
Connectivity	Grant overflight access for newly constructed Nepali airports to boost tourism.
Energy Trade	Ease restrictions on Nepali power imports to facilitate their hydropower growth.
Diplomatic Engagement	Extend an early invitation to Balendra Shah for a high-profile visit to New Delhi.
Treaty Reform	Be open to updating the 1950 Bilateral Friendship Treaty to reflect 21st-century realities.
Emergency Support	Provide priority assistance for fuel and fertilizer to cushion Nepal from West Asian shocks.

Conclusion

India-Nepal relations stand at a critical juncture where "Big Brother" diplomacy must give way to a "Supportive Partner" model. By addressing past frictions with sensitivity and supporting Nepal's economic stability during global crises, India can ensure that its "Neighbourhood First" policy is not just a slogan, but a strategic reality. Proactive engagement with the new generation of leadership will be the key to maintaining a stable and influential presence in the Himalayas.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/neighbours-first/article70799573.ece>

Question

"Examine the significance of the 'Energy-Connectivity' nexus in redefining India-Nepal relations against the backdrop of shifting political leadership in Kathmandu and global economic volatility in 2026." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India-Nepal relations have historically been viewed through the prism of shared culture and the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. However, in March 2026, the ascent of a nationalistic, Gen-Z

leadership under Balendra Shah—Nepal's first prominent Madhesi leader—has shifted the focus toward a more pragmatic, functional partnership. The "Energy-Connectivity" nexus has now emerged as the most critical pillar for stabilizing bilateral ties and countering external strategic influences.

2. Shifting Political Landscape – The Gen-Z Factor

Departure from Legacy – The new leadership is not tethered to the anti-monarchy or Panchayat-era political baggage. Their approach is rooted in sovereign pragmatism and a desire to reduce economic dependence.

Assertive Nationalism – The use of "Greater Nepal" maps by the new guard highlights a shift toward a more assertive identity, making "Big Brother" diplomacy in New Delhi counterproductive.

Economic Urgency – The ongoing West Asia crisis has hit Nepal hard through fuel and fertilizer shortages, forcing the new leadership to look toward India for immediate economic cushions.

3. The Energy Nexus – Hydropower as a Strategic Bridge

From Aid to Trade – Nepal's massive hydropower potential is its primary ticket to middle-income status. India's regional energy grid provides a guaranteed market for Nepali power exports.

Revenue Generation – By easing restrictions on power imports, India allows Nepal to generate substantial revenue, reducing its trade deficit and fiscal dependence on remittances (currently 14% of its population).

Grid Stability – For India, Nepali hydro-power acts as a clean "base-load" that complements its own renewable energy targets for 2030.

4. The Connectivity Nexus – Open Borders to Open Skies

Logistical Sovereignty – Granting overflight access for Nepal's newly built international airports is a high-value diplomatic gesture that supports Nepal's vital tourism sector.

Infrastructure Integration – Cross-border railways and Integrated Check-Posts (ICPs) are essential for ensuring that the landlocked nation remains "land-linked" to the global economy via India.

Transit Security – In 2026, as global supply chains are disrupted, the reliability of Indian transit corridors is the primary deterrent against Nepal seeking riskier, less-efficient alternatives.

5. Strategic Challenges and Way Forward

Treaty Modernization – New Delhi must investigate a revision of the 1950 Treaty to address Nepali concerns about sovereignty while protecting India's security interests in the Himalayas.

Non-Intrusive Support – Moving away from "political engineering" in Kathmandu and focusing on timely delivery of projects (Fertilizer supplies, Rail links) to prove India's reliability as a partner.

Proactive Engagement – Personalizing diplomacy by engaging directly with young leaders like Balendra Shah to bridge the "trust deficit" inherited from the 2015 constitutional crisis.

6. Conclusion

The "Energy-Connectivity" nexus represents a transition from a security-centric approach to a prosperity-centric one. While historical and cultural ties provide the "soul" of India-Nepal relations, functional cooperation in power and transit provides the "sinews" for a resilient 21st-century partnership. In 2026, a sensitive and supportive "Neighbourhood First" policy is the only way to ensure that Nepal remains a stable, sovereign, and friendly buffer in the Himalayas.

Source - <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/neighbours-first/article70799573.ece>

3. We must rethink insider lending in cases of corporate insolvency (MT)

General Studies Paper II – Governance & Polity

Topic – Banking sector and NPAs

Sub-Topic – Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

Introduction

India's insolvency framework under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) seeks to balance efficient resolution of stressed assets with equitable treatment of creditors. However, the treatment of

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related-party (insider) creditors raises concerns about fairness, transparency, and potential misuse of the system.

1. Concept of Insider/Related-Party Creditors

1. Includes promoters, directors, or entities with close links to the debtor company.
2. They may provide loans during distress but also possess informational and control advantages.
3. Their claims are treated alongside other financial creditors under the IBC.

2. Current Legal Position

Equal Treatment Principle

1. Courts have generally upheld that IBC does not differentiate between creditors of the same class.

Committee of Creditors (CoC) Dominance

1. Financial creditors control resolution decisions.

Judicial Interpretation

1. Emphasis on commercial wisdom of creditors rather than rigid legal distinctions.

3. Key Issues and Concerns

Conflict of Interest

1. Insider creditors may influence decisions to protect their own interests.

Fairness to External Creditors

1. External lenders may be disadvantaged due to information asymmetry.

Potential Misuse

1. Risk of promoters regaining control through structured insider lending.

4. Comparative Perspective

Subordination of Insider Claims

1. Many countries subordinate insider debt to protect external creditors.

Equity-like Treatment

1. Insider loans sometimes treated closer to equity rather than debt.

5. Challenges in Reform

Genuine vs Strategic Lending

1. Difficulty in distinguishing bona fide rescue financing from opportunistic lending.

Maintaining Credit Flow

1. Over-regulation may discourage legitimate financial support during distress.

Legal Complexity

1. Changes may affect predictability and investor confidence.

6. Way Forward

Subordination Framework

1. Consider subordinating insider claims in specific circumstances.

Enhanced Disclosure

1. Improve transparency in related-party transactions.

Case-by-Case Assessment

1. Evaluate insider claims based on intent, timing, and impact.

Strengthening CoC Oversight

1. Ensure decisions are aligned with overall creditor interests.

Conclusion

A balanced approach is required to address the role of insider creditors in insolvency. While protecting the integrity of the resolution process, reforms must ensure fairness without discouraging genuine financial support to distressed firms.

Source - <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/ibc-recovery-insider-lending-corporate-insolvency-cases-capital-debt-creditors-insolvent-firms-11774527190329.html>

Q. Discuss the challenges associated with the treatment of related-party (insider) creditors under India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Suggest measures to ensure fairness and efficiency in the resolution process. (250 words)

Introduction

The IBC aims to ensure time-bound resolution of stressed assets. However, the treatment of insider creditors raises concerns about fairness and conflict of interest.

Challenges

1. Conflict of Interest

1. Insider creditors may influence decisions.

2. Information Asymmetry

1. Advantage over external creditors.

Measures

1. Subordination Rules

1. Limit priority of insider claims.

2. Transparency

1. Enhance disclosure norms.

Conclusion

Reforms must balance fairness with efficiency. Strengthening safeguards against misuse while encouraging genuine lending will improve the insolvency framework.

Source - <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/ibc-recovery-insider-lending-corporate-insolvency-cases-capital-debt-creditors-insolvent-firms-11774527190329.html>

4. Return to Reality (TS)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic – Quality of governance and public service delivery

Sub-Topic – Role of civil services in democracy

Introduction

Effective governance in a democracy is not defined by optics or rhetoric but by **service delivery, accountability, and public trust**. The need to “return to reality” highlights the importance of reconnecting governance with **citizens’ everyday experiences and institutional credibility**.

1. Core Idea – Governance as Service

1. Governance must focus on delivery of essential public goods.
2. True success lies in improving citizens’ daily lives, not symbolic achievements.
3. Emphasises humility and responsibility in public office.

2. Disconnect Between Optics and Reality

Symbolic Governance

1. Excessive focus on announcements, events, and publicity.

Ground-Level Deficits

1. Persistent issues in basic services like water, roads, electricity, and healthcare.

Credibility Gap

1. Citizens lose trust when promises do not translate into outcomes.

3. Importance of Accountability

Institutional Responsibility

1. Systems must ensure answerability of public officials.

Democratic Accountability

1. Elected representatives are accountable to citizens, not just political leadership.

Performance-Based Governance

1. Outcomes should be measured by service delivery and impact.

4. Role of Bureaucracy

Neutral and Efficient Administration

1. Civil services must function with professionalism and integrity.

Implementation Focus

1. Shift from rule-based functioning to result-oriented governance.

Bridging Policy and Practice

1. Ensure policies translate into tangible benefits for citizens.

5. Challenges

Over-Centralisation

1. Decision-making concentrated at higher levels.

Weak Local Governance

1. Limited capacity of local institutions.

Lack of Feedback Mechanisms

1. Insufficient citizen participation in governance.

6. Way Forward

Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms

1. Use audits, transparency tools, and citizen feedback systems.

Improving Service Delivery

1. Focus on basic infrastructure and welfare services.

Decentralisation

1. Empower local bodies for context-specific solutions.

Ethical Governance

1. Promote values of integrity, humility, and public service.

Conclusion

Governance must return to its fundamental purpose—serving citizens effectively and transparently. By prioritising accountability, delivery, and trust, India can strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure inclusive and responsive governance.

Source - <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/return-to-reality-1503575322.html>

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. "Good governance is measured not by intent or announcements, but by outcomes and accountability." Discuss in the context of contemporary governance challenges in India. (250 words)

Model Answer

Introduction

Good governance in a democracy is defined by effective service delivery and accountability. Mere announcements without outcomes undermine public trust.

Analysis

1. Service Delivery Gap

1. Basic services often remain inadequate.

2. Accountability Deficit

1. Weak mechanisms for monitoring performance.

3. Over-Centralisation

1. Limits local responsiveness.

Measures

1. Strengthen Institutions

1. Enhance transparency and audits.

2. Citizen-Centric Approach

1. Focus on outcomes and feedback.

Conclusion

Bridging the gap between intent and outcomes is essential for effective governance. Accountability and service delivery must remain central to democratic functioning.

Source - <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/return-to-reality-1503575322.html>

