







Daily CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Khichan and Menar Wetlands

Why in the News?

In 2024-25, the Khichan and Menar wetlands of Rajasthan were recognised under the Ramsar Convention as wetlands of international importance.

This recognition not only acknowledges their ecological value but also highlights the vital role of local community stewardship in preserving biodiversity hotspots in arid zones.

The move comes amid a global push to strengthen the protection of inland freshwater ecosystems, particularly those in vulnerable ecological regions like deserts and semi-arid zones.

The listing also serves as a timely reminder during global environmental days (such as World Wetlands Day and World Migratory Bird Day) about the urgent need to protect wetland ecosystems amid mounting threats like water scarcity, land-use change, and biodiversity loss.

Background

- Rajasthan is often associated with arid landscapes and dry scrublands. However, tucked within its Thar Desert and semi-arid zones are thriving wetland ecosystems that are oases for migratory birds, aquatic species, and endemic flora and fauna.
- Khichan Wetland, situated in Phalodi tehsil of Jodhpur district, has gained global fame for hosting tens of thousands of migratory demoiselle cranes each year.
- Menar Wetland, located in the Udaipur district, is a freshwater monsoon wetland formed by a combination of natural ponds and farmlands. It supports critically endangered vultures and many water birds.



These wetlands demonstrate how traditional water management systems, cultural reverence for wildlife, and proactive village-level conservation efforts can co-exist to create sustainable ecosystems.

Features Menar Wetland

- Location: Menar village, Udaipur district, Rajasthan.
- Type: Monsoon-fed freshwater wetland complex.
- Components: Composed of three main ponds – Braham Talab, Dhand Talab, and Kheroda Talab. Seasonal agricultural land forms ecological corridors.
- Avifauna: Hosts over 150 species of birds, including critically endangered white-rumped vultures (Gyps bengalensis) and long-billed vultures (Gyps indicus).
- Flora: Over 70 plant species, including native varieties and mango trees (Mangifera indica), which also support a large Indian flying fox (Pteropus giganteus) population.
- Community Model: The villagers actively discourage poaching and fishing, leading to a strong example of community-led conservation

Khichan Wetland

Location: Phalodi, Jodhpur district, Rajasthan.

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- Type: Inland desert wetland ecosystem.
- Components: Includes Ratri Nadi (a seasonal river), Vijaysagar Talab, scrubland, and riparian vegetation.
- Migratory Fame: Known for large congregations of demoiselle cranes(Anthropoides virgo) – over 22,000 individuals arrive annually during winter.
- Flora: Dominated by xerophytic species suited to the desert ecology, providing ideal nesting grounds and cover.
- Ecotourism: Attracts birdwatchers, students, researchers, and tourists, forming a vibrant local ecotourism economy.

Challenges

- Climate Variability and Water Scarcity
- Both wetlands lie in arid and semi-arid zones of Rajasthan, making them vulnerable to erratic monsoon patterns and prolonged dry spells. Reduced rainfall can shrink water bodies, affecting migratory bird populations and aquatic biodiversity.

Land Use Change and Encroachment

Expanding agriculture, infrastructure projects, and urbanisation in nearby areas threaten the integrity of wetland ecosystems. Seasonal farmland that supports ecological corridors is increasingly being converted for permanent cultivation or real estate purposes.

Pollution and Agrochemical Runoff

The use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in surrounding farmlands contaminates water quality, affecting both aquatic flora and avifauna. Invasive weeds and eutrophication have been observed in some parts of the Menar wetland.

- Unregulated Tourism and
 Disturbance to Wildlife: While
 ecotourism brings revenue, the
 absence of carrying capacity
 assessments, regulated pathways, or
 awareness among visitors can lead to
 trampling of vegetation, noise
 disturbance, and littering,
 threatening sensitive species like
 cranes and vultures.
- Inadequate Institutional Support and Policy Lag: Despite their Ramsar recognition, there is a gap in implementing scientific management plans, regular monitoring, and integration with national wetland conservation programmes. Institutional overlap between forest, water, and tourism departments often leads to administrative inertia.
- Poaching and Vulture Mortality from Diclofenac: Although community efforts have significantly reduced poaching, sporadic incidents continue. Critically endangered vultures face mortality due to exposure to banned veterinary drugs like diclofenac used in cattle carcasses.

Way Forward

• Scientific Wetland Management
Plans: Develop and implement
integrated management plans based
on hydrological studies, bird
migratory patterns, and ecological
indicators. These plans should
include seasonal water budgeting,
biodiversity monitoring, and invasive
species control.



 Strengthening Community-Led Conservation Models:

Institutionalise the role of local communities through communities through comanagement frameworks involving Gram Panchayats, ecoclubs, and bird conservation committees. Provide financial and technical incentives under schemes like Amrit Dharohar and Mera Gaon Mera Gauray.

- Eco-Sensitive Zoning and Land
 Use Regulation: Notify wetland
 buffer zones under the
 Environment (Protection) Act to
 prevent encroachments and
 regulate activities like agriculture
 expansion, waste dumping, and
 construction. Promote organic
 farming in the catchment to reduce
 agrochemical runoff.
- Responsible Ecotourism and Nature Education: Develop lowimpact ecotourism infrastructure such as bird hides, interpretation centres, and guided trails. Train local youth as nature guides and launch wetland festivals to promote awareness. Implement tourism codes of conduct based on carrying capacity.

- 3. Both Khichan and Menar Wetlands have been developed as Ramsar sites primarily through central government-led conservation initiatives.
- 4. The local community has played a key role in the protection and preservation of both wetlands.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 3 only B. 2 and 4 only C. 1, 2 and 3 only D. 2, 3 and 4 only

Correct Answer: B. 2 and 4 only

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is incorrect: Menar is a monsoon-fed freshwater wetland, not a desert wetland dominated by xerophytes.
- Statement 2 is correct: Khichan is indeed famous for hosting over 22,000 demoiselle cranes annually.
- Statement 3 is incorrect: While designated as Ramsar sites, the primary conservation efforts were community-led, not centrally driven.
- Statement 4 is correct: Both wetlands showcase strong community participation in conservation.

Q. Regarding the recently designated Ramsar sites in Rajasthan, consider the following statements:

- Menar Wetland is a desert wetland ecosystem fed by seasonal rivers and dominated by xerophytic vegetation.
- 2. Khichan Wetland is globally known for hosting large flocks of demoiselle cranes during the winter season.

Q.. "The recognition of Khichan and Menar Wetlands as Ramsar sites underscores the significance of community-led conservation in arid and semi-arid ecosystems." Critically examine the ecological and socio-economic importance of these wetlands and suggest measures to strengthen their conservation amidst emerging challenges.





World Wealth Report 2025

Why in the News

India witnessed an 8.8% increase in the wealth of high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) in 2024, with their total wealth reaching \$1.5 trillion, according to the World Wealth Report 2025, recently released by the Capgemini Research Institute. This increase brings India's HNWI count to 378,810 individuals, including over 4,290 ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) and a large segment of "millionaires next door." These figures position India among the fastest-growing wealth markets globally, alongside the United States and Japan.

Background What is the World Wealth Report?

Published annually by Capgemini since 1997, the World Wealth Report provides insights into global wealth trends, focusing specifically on HNWIs—individuals with investable assets exceeding \$1 million, excluding primary residences, collectables, consumables, and consumer durables. The 2025 edition covers 71 countries, accounting for over 98% of global gross national income and 99% of world stock market capitalisation.

Wealth Band Classification:

- Millionaires Next Door: \$1M-\$5M
- Mid-Tier Millionaires: \$5M-\$30M
- Ultra-HNWIs (UHNWIs): Above \$30M
- Centi-millionaires: Above \$100M
- Billionaires: Above \$1B
- India's Growing Wealth Landscape



Since liberalisation in the 1990s, India has seen an expansion of private enterprise, digital infrastructure, financial markets, and entrepreneurship, all contributing to wealth creation. Technology startups, equity markets, real estate, and familyowned businesses have become primary contributors to HNWI growth.

Feature India's HNWI Landscape (2024 Snapshot):

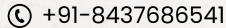
- Total HNWIs: 378,810
- Total HNWI Wealth: \$1.5 trillion
- Millionaires Next Door (USD 1-5M): 333,340 individuals with \$628.93 billion
- UHNWIs (>\$30M): 4,290 individuals with \$534.77 billion
- Mid-Tier Millionaires: Remaining 41,180 individuals, approximately

Comparison with Global Trends:

- The global HNWI population rose by 2.6% in 2024.
- The US added 562,000 millionaires, leading with 7.9 million HNWIs.
- Japan added 210,000 millionaires.
- China witnessed a 1.0% decline in the HNWI population.
- India performed exceptionally within the Asia-Pacific, reflecting a resilient economy.ech sectors



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Asset Allocation by HNWIs (Global Insights):

- Alternative investments (private equity, crypto, hedge funds): 15% of portfolio
- Equities: Major contributor due to bullish stock markets
- Real Estate: Increasingly prominent
- · Cash & Cash Equivalents: Declining share

Key Drivers of HNWI Growth in India:

- Bullish Stock Markets and Mutual **Fund Penetration**
- Digital Tech Boom and startup unicorns
- Improved Regulatory Frameworks (SEBI, RBI liberalisation)
- Renewed interest in alternative investments
- Real Estate Resurgence post-COVID
- Al optimism in tech sectors

Challenges

Despite the rising wealth numbers, India's wealth landscape faces several structural and policy-related challenges:

Rising Inequality:

- · While wealth is growing, its distribution is highly concentrated.
- As per Oxfam's reports, India's top 1% hold more than 40% of total wealth, while the bottom 50% own just 3%.

Under-Taxation of the Wealthy:

- India lacks a wealth tax or inheritance tax.
- Capital gains and dividend tax rates remain low compared to global standards.
- Tax evasion and aggressive tax planning among HNWIs remain issues

Shadow Economy and Informal Wealth:

- A considerable proportion of wealth in India remains undisclosed or parked in tax havens.
- · Real estate and gold markets still facilitate black money flows.

Volatility in Capital Markets:

- HNWI portfolios are vulnerable to stock market shocks, especially from geopolitical crises and monetary tightening.
- · Crypto investments, while rising, remain largely unregulated and highly volatile.

Limited Philanthropic Culture:

- · Despite rising wealth, India's charitable giving rate by HNWIs is relatively low.
- There is no strong culture of endowments, trusts, or institutional philanthropy compared to the West.

Social Backlash and Policy Risks:

- Rising visible inequality could lead to populist policy measures, social unrest, or punitive taxation.
- Wealth visibility in a poverty-stricken nation can become a flashpoint during elections.

Way Forward

To ensure that rising private wealth contributes positively to India's inclusive development, several reforms and strategic interventions are needed. Progressive Wealth Taxation Debate:

- Reconsidering the introduction of wealth or inheritance taxes for UHNWIs.
- Improving capital gains tax structures to ensure fairness.
- Aligning India's tax-to-GDP ratio with OECD standards.



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Data Transparency and Wealth Tracking:

- Enhancing wealth registration systems (property, digital assets).
- Increasing coordination between the IT Department, SEBI, and RBI to track and monitor wealth flows.

Boosting Philanthropy:

- Incentivising CSR beyond the mandatory 2%, especially for startups and unlisted entities.
- Promoting Indian endowment funds for education, health, and rural development on the lines of US universities and Rockefeller-type foundations.

Expanding Financial Literacy and Access:

- Encouraging democratized wealth creation through SIPs, REITs, and regulated crypto products.
- Bridging the gap between Tier-I and Tier-III cities in investment opportunities.

Ensuring Ethical Wealth Creation:

- Strengthening frameworks for ESGcompliant investments.
- Mandatory disclosures on the environmental and social impact of wealth-generating businesses.

Global Competitiveness:

- Facilitating the ease of doing business for startups and family offices.
- Attracting Indian-origin wealth back from tax havens via incentives and amnesty schemes.

Conclusion

The rise in HNWI wealth in India reflects both economic vibrancy and emerging class dynamics. While this growth opens new opportunities for entrepreneurship, investments, and economic leadership, it also raises critical questions about equity, governance, and public responsibility.

SCO 173-174, Sector 17C Chandigarh Harnessing this wealth for inclusive and sustainable growth, while ensuring ethical wealth accumulation, is imperative for India to rise as a true economic superpower.

Q.. "The rise in the number and wealth of high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) in India reflects economic progress but also amplifies inequality and regulatory challenges." Critically examine this statement in light of the World Wealth Report 2025. Suggest policy measures to ensure that private wealth contributes to inclusive development.

Q. About the World Wealth Report 2025 released by Capgemini, consider the following statements:

- 1. High-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) are classified based on annual income, including their primary residence.
- 2. India recorded the highest growth in the HNWI population globally in 2024.
- 3. The report highlights that alternative investments like private equity and cryptocurrencies now comprise a notable share of HNWI portfolios.

The World Wealth Report 2025 covers more than 70 countries and accounts for over 98% of global gross national income.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only B. 2 and 3 only C. 3 and 4 only D. 1, 3, and 4 only

Answer: C. 3 and 4 only Explanation:

 Statement 1 is incorrect: HNWIs are classified based on investable assets, excluding primary residence, consumables, and collectables, not annual income.





- Statement 2 is incorrect: While India saw significant growth, the US added the highest number of HNWIs (562,000).
- Statements 3 and 4 are correct: The report confirms the growing role of alternative investments in HNWI portfolios and covers 71 countries accounting for 98% of global GNI.



Kulsi River

Despite warnings from environmentalists, the governments of Assam and Meghalaya have decided to build a 55 MW hydropower project on the Kulsi River. This river is important because it is a nesting ground for endangered river dolphins, and the project could harm their habitat.

About Kulsi River

 It is a south-bank tributary of the mighty Brahmaputra River.

Course:

- It is composed of three rivers, namely Khri, Krishniya, and Umsiri, all of which originate from the West Khasi hill ranges of Meghalaya from an elevation of over 1800 metres and flow north.
- The river is known as Khri in the upper catchments, and after being joined by two other tributaries, namely Krishniya and Umsiri, within the Khasi hills in Meghalaya, it flows northwest and enters Assam at Ukium.
- After that, it flows north up to Kulsi village through the plains of the Kamrup District of Assam.
- Finally, it flows into the Brahmaputra near Nagarbera.
- The river Kulsi drains a total area of 3770 sq. km. Out of the total catchment, 685 sq. km. is plain catchment in Assam, and 3085 sq. km. is hill catchment in Meghalaya and Assam.
- The total length of Kulsi from its source to outfall is about 220 km, out of which 100 km is in Meghalaya and the rest, 120 km, is in Assam.



 It is considered one of the last refuges of the endangered Gangetic dolphin (Platanista gangetica gangetica) in Assam.

Q. About the Kulsi River and its ecological importance, consider the following statements:

- 1. The Kulsi River is a north-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra River.
- 2.It originates from the West Khasi Hills in Meghalaya.
- 3.The Kulsi River is known as one of the last refuges of the endangered Gangetic dolphin.
- 4. The entire course of the Kulsi River lies within the state of Assam.

5.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

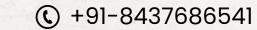
A. 1 and 4 only B. 2 and 3 only C. 1, 2, and 3 only D. 2, 3, and 4 only

Answer: B. 2 and 3 only Explanation:

- Statement 1 is incorrect: Kulsi is a southbank tributary of the Brahmaputra.
- Statement 2 is correct: It originates in the West Khasi Hills of Meghalaya.
- Statement 3 is correct: It is indeed a key habitat for the endangered Gangetic dolphin.
- Statement 4 is incorrect: The river flows through both Meghalaya and Assam, not just Assam



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Mount Etna

Why in the News?

Mount Etna, Europe's largest active volcano, has erupted, sending ash, smoke, and rock fragments several kilometres into the sky.

Why do Volcanoes Erupt?

Magma Formation: Deep within the Earth, high temperature and pressure melt rocks into magma.

Gas Expansion: Magma contains gases like water vapour, CO₂, and SO₂. As magma rises, the pressure drops, allowing these gases to form bubbles, increasing internal pressure.

Crustal Weaknesses: At tectonic boundaries or mantle plumes, cracks and faults in Earth's crust provide pathways for magma to escape.

Eruption Mechanism: As pressure builds, magma is pushed upwards.

If blocked, the gas expansion can explode through the crust, ejecting lava, ash, and gases.

Signals: If magma flow is suddenly stopped by solid rock, it may create low-frequency seismic waves (pre-eruption tremors).

About Mount Etna:

Location: Situated on the east coast of Sicily, Italy, near the city of Catania.

Type: Mount Etna is a stratovolcano (also called a composite volcano), which is formed from layers of hardened lava, volcanic ash, and rocks.

Height: It stands at approximately 3,300 meters, making it the tallest volcano in Europe south of the Alps.

Recognition: Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2013, with documented volcanic activity for at least 2,700 years.



Eruption Record: Etna is almost constantly active. Notable eruptions have occurred in 1400 B.C., 1669, 2001, 2018, 2021, 2024, and 2025.

Volcanic Activity Style: Known for Strombolian and effusive eruptions, with occasional Plinian eruptions (rare and more explosive).

Reasons Behind the June 2025

Nature of Eruption: The eruption is classified as either Strombolian or possibly Plinian, depending on interpretation.

Strombolian Eruption: Characterised by moderate explosive bursts, caused by gas bubbles in magma suddenly bursting at the surface.

Plinian Eruption: Some volcanologists suggest this classification due to the large ash column that may have reached the stratosphere.

Eruption Trigger: The eruption likely began due to pressure buildup from gas within the magma chamber, leading to collapse of the southeast crater and lava flows.

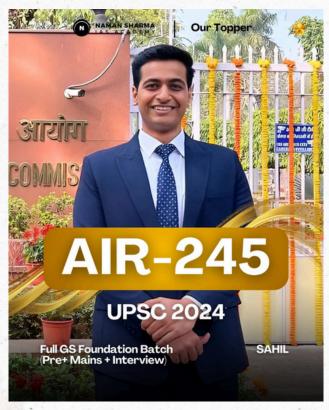
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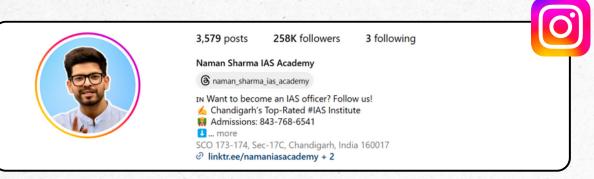
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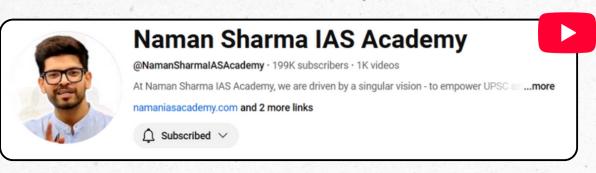


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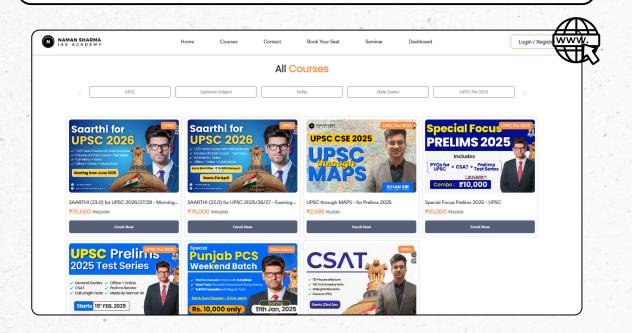






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