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WHY IN NEWS

March 4, 2026 kept the focus on engineering-led development, obesity as a systems challenge, frontier genomic AI, and the practical role of local water bodies in climate resilience. The date also coincided with World Engineering Day and World Obesity Day, giving two major international policy frames to the day's discussions.

WORLD ENGINEERING DAY 2026 LINKED TECHNOLOGY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development is observed every year on **4 March** under the aegis of **UNESCO** and the **World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO)**. UNESCO proclaimed the day on **25 November 2019** at its General Conference, based on a proposal by WFEO. The **2026 theme** was **"Smart engineering for sustainable future through innovation and digitalisation"**, and the main celebration was co-organised by WFEO and the **Institution of Engineers Indonesia** with UNESCO support in **Jakarta, Indonesia** (3-5 March 2026).

The importance of the observance lies in the way it pushes engineering out of a narrow technical frame and into public policy. In India's case, engineering capacity underpins highways, railways, renewable energy, semiconductors, urban water systems, digital public infrastructure, and climate-resilient construction. A country can talk about infrastructure ambition only to the extent that it can design, build, maintain, and regulate complex systems.

For UPSC, the topic is useful because it joins together **GS-3 infrastructure**, **science and technology**, and the **SDG framework**. It also invites analytical questions about whether India is producing enough high-quality engineers in core sectors such as civil works, power systems, manufacturing, chip design, and environmental engineering.

WORLD OBESITY DAY 2026 HIGHLIGHTED A PUBLIC-HEALTH SYSTEMS FAILURE

World Obesity Day is observed every year on **4 March** (moved to this date in 2020; previously observed on 11 October). The **World Obesity Federation's 2026 campaign** — themed **"8 Billion Reasons to Act on Obesity"** — continued to stress that obesity is not simply an individual lifestyle issue; it is shaped by food systems, urban design, income patterns, marketing practices, and health-system capacity. The **World Obesity Atlas 2026**, released alongside, focused on **childhood obesity**, finding that over **one in five (20.7%) school-age children (5-19 years)** worldwide are living with obesity or overweight, up from 14.6% in 2010.

This framing matters for India because the country faces a **double burden of malnutrition**. Undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, and stunting still persist in large populations, while obesity and overweight are rising in both cities and smaller towns. That combination increases the burden of **diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, fatty liver disease, and some cancers**.

The policy response therefore cannot be limited to awareness campaigns. It has to include better food labelling, school nutrition rules, safer walkable cities, primary healthcare screening, and action against the commercial drivers of unhealthy diets. This is the broader public-policy angle that makes obesity relevant for exam writing.

EVO 2 BROUGHT GENOMIC AI INTO THE MAINSTREAM POLICY CONVERSATION

The release and discussion around **Evo 2**, developed through work involving the **Arc Institute**, researchers from **Stanford University**, **UC Berkeley**, **UC San Francisco**, and **NVIDIA**, signalled how quickly artificial intelligence is moving into life sciences. Released on **19 February 2025** and published in **Nature**, Evo 2 was trained on over **9.3 trillion nucleotides** from more than **128,000 whole genomes** across all domains of life, using over **2,000 NVIDIA H100 GPUs**. Unlike text-generation models trained mainly on language, genomic AI models are trained on large biological datasets to study mutation patterns, gene regulation, and the functional behaviour of DNA sequences. In tests with the **BRCA1** gene (linked to breast cancer), Evo 2 predicted with **90% accuracy** whether previously unrecognised mutations would affect gene function.

This matters because such tools can accelerate biomedical research, precision medicine, crop science, and synthetic biology. At the same time, they raise policy concerns around **biosecurity**, **sensitive genetic data**, **computational concentration**, and the ethics of designing or predicting biological behaviour at scale.

For India, which is simultaneously investing in **IndiaAI**, biotechnology, health research, and digital governance, this is an early warning that science policy can no longer treat AI and biotech as separate silos.

WATER BODIES NEED BETTER MAPPING, RESTORATION, AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The policy conversation on **water bodies** remained important even though there was no basis for describing the exercise as a "sixth census." What is officially available is the **first Census of Water Bodies**, conducted in **2018-19** (reference year 2017-18) and published by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**, which enumerated **24,24,540 water bodies** across 33 States/UTs. Of these, **97.1% (23,55,055)** are in rural areas and only **2.9% (69,485)** in urban areas; **78% are man-made** and **22% are natural**. The top five states by water body count — **West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Assam** — account for about **63%** of the national total.

That data matters because small water bodies are central to **groundwater recharge**, **minor irrigation**, **fisheries**, **flood moderation**, and **heat resilience**. Many are also under stress from encroachment, pollution, siltation, and fragmentation of local governance responsibilities. In practice, local ponds and tanks are often the first water-security buffer for villages and small towns.

The policy takeaway is straightforward: mapping is useful only when it is followed by restoration, community participation, desiltation, wetland protection, and convergence with programmes such as **Amrit Sarovar**, watershed development, and rural livelihoods missions.

UPSC RELEVANCE

World Engineering Day, UNESCO, WFEO, SDGs; World Obesity Day, World Obesity Federation, double burden of malnutrition; Evo 2, Arc Institute, Stanford, NVIDIA, genomic AI; first Census of Water Bodies, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Amrit Sarovar.

MAINS GS-2:

Preventive public health and evidence-based local governance.

MAINS GS-3:

Engineering capacity, science policy, AI-biotech convergence, water-resource management.

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WORLD ENGINEERING DAY:

Observed every year on **4 March**

Proclaimed by **UNESCO General Conference** on **25 November 2019**, based on a proposal by **WFEO**

2026 theme: **"Smart engineering for sustainable future through innovation and digitalisation"**

2026 main event co-organised in **Jakarta, Indonesia** (3-5 March 2026)

WORLD OBESITY DAY:

Observed every year on **4 March** (moved from 11 October in 2020)

Led globally by the **World Obesity Federation**

2026 theme: **"8 Billion Reasons to Act on Obesity"**

World Obesity Atlas 2026: over **20.7%** of 5-19 year-olds worldwide living with obesity/overweight (up from 14.6% in 2010)

India faces a double burden: undernutrition plus rising obesity

EVO 2 AND GENOMIC AI:

Developed by **Arc Institute**, **Stanford**, **UC Berkeley**, **UCSF**, and **NVIDIA**

Released **19 February 2025**, published in **Nature**

Trained on **9.3 trillion nucleotides** from **128,000+ whole genomes** using **2,000+ NVIDIA H100 GPUs**

Predicted **BRCA1** mutation effects with **90% accuracy**

Uses: mutation prediction, biological discovery, health research, crop science

Concerns: biosecurity, ethics, genetic-data governance, concentration of compute power

WATER BODIES IN INDIA:

First Census of Water Bodies: conducted **2018-19** (reference year 2017-18), published by **Ministry of Jal Shakti**

Total: **24,24,540 water bodies** across 33 States/UTs

Rural: **97.1%** (23,55,055); Urban: **2.9%** (69,485)

78% man-made, **22% natural**

Top 5 states: West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Assam (~63% of total)

Core functions: recharge, irrigation, fisheries, flood moderation, local climate resilience

Linked programmes: **Amrit Sarovar**, watershed development, local wetland restoration

Sources: UNESCO, World Federation of Engineering Organizations, World Obesity Federation, Arc Institute, Ministry of Jal Shakti

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