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Current Affairs Today - March 5, 2026

5 March 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED**ENVIRONMENT****SOCIAL ISSUES****SCIENCE & TECH****REPORTS & SCHEMES****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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WHY IN NEWS

March 5, 2026 revolved around four themes with direct policy value: the unresolved debate on thermal power plant emission norms, the systems warning carried by obesity reports, the scientific controversy over "dark oxygen" in the deep ocean, and the conservation-and-livelihoods challenge highlighted by World Wildlife Day 2026.

THERMAL POWER PLANT EMISSION NORMS REMAINED A TEST OF INDIA'S POLLUTION GOVERNANCE

India's debate over **thermal power plant emission norms** remained important because coal still plays a central role in the power mix, while air-pollution control compliance remains uneven. The **MoEFCC notification S.O.3305(E) dated 7 December 2015** — India's first emission norms for thermal power plants — set tighter limits on **sulphur dioxide (SO₂)**, **nitrogen oxides (NO_x)**, **particulate matter (SPM)**, **mercury**, and **water consumption**, and drove the push for **flue-gas desulphurisation (FGD)** systems. SO₂ limits were set at **600 mg/Nm³** for units below 500 MW (installed before 2017), **200 mg/Nm³** for units of 500 MW and above, and **100 mg/Nm³** for units installed after 1 January 2017. In May 2019, NO_x norms for units installed between 2004 and 2016 were diluted from **300 mg/Nm³ to 450 mg/Nm³**.

The policy tension is easy to see. Power producers argue that retrofitting older plants is expensive and time-consuming, and that tighter rules can raise tariffs or disrupt supply if deadlines are unrealistic. Compliance deadlines have been extended multiple times. Public-health and environmental groups counter that delays impose hidden costs through asthma, heart disease, crop damage, and acid deposition.

For UPSC, this is a classic governance problem: how to balance energy security, cost recovery, regulatory credibility, and the right to clean air.

OBESITY IS INCREASINGLY BEING TREATED AS A SYSTEMS FAILURE, NOT AN INDIVIDUAL FAILURE

The messaging around **World Obesity Day** and the **World Obesity Atlas** kept attention on the growing burden of non-communicable disease. The central argument from global public-health institutions is that obesity is shaped by the availability and pricing of food, aggressive marketing of high-sugar and high-fat products, sedentary urban design, and weak preventive-health systems.

That matters in India because rising obesity now coexists with undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency. The result is a fragmented health landscape in which the state must deal at once with anaemia, stunting, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular stress.

The exam value of the topic lies in its interdisciplinary nature. It connects **nutrition policy, urban planning, healthcare financing, school regulation**, and the broader debate on whether preventive healthcare receives enough attention in public policy.

“DARK OXYGEN” REOPENED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DEEP OCEAN AND SEABED MINING

Scientific discussion around **dark oxygen** drew attention because it challenges the conventional assumption that substantial oxygen generation is confined to photosynthesis in sunlight-rich environments. Research published in **Nature Geoscience** in **July 2024** linked the phenomenon to **polymetallic nodules** on the abyssal seafloor in the **Clarion-Clipperton Zone** of the Pacific Ocean. Scientists observed that oxygen increased over two days to more than three times the background concentration and hypothesised that nodules may act as natural **“geo-batteries”** — with voltage potentials up to **0.95 V** on their surfaces — splitting seawater into hydrogen and oxygen through an electrochemical reaction.

The finding remains scientifically contested: several teams using remotely operated vehicles have not replicated the result and have observed only oxygen consumption. Despite the controversy, the paper was discussed at the **International Seabed Authority’s 29th annual session**, given its implications for **deep-sea mining** regulation.

This is important not only as a science story but also because it intersects with the geopolitics of **deep-sea mining**. Polymetallic nodules contain valuable minerals such as manganese, nickel, cobalt, and copper, all of which are relevant to batteries and clean-energy technologies. If deep-ocean ecosystems are more complex and fragile than previously understood, the case for caution in seabed extraction becomes stronger.

For UPSC, this topic links **oceanography, resource extraction, biodiversity**, and the debate on how fast the world should move on marine mineral exploitation.

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY 2026 HIGHLIGHTED MEDICINAL AND AROMATIC PLANTS

World Wildlife Day, observed on **3 March** each year, commemorates the signing of the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)** on **3 March 1973**. The **2026 theme** was “**Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods**”, highlighting the vital role these plants play in sustaining human health, cultural heritage, and local economies. The **WHO** recognises that in developing countries, **70-95% of the population** relies on traditional medicine – much of it plant-based – for primary healthcare.

This matters for India because the country is one of the world’s richest repositories of medicinal plants, with an estimated **7,500-8,000 species** used in traditional medicine systems including Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and folk medicine. Biodiversity governance does not end with declaring national parks and sanctuaries. It also depends on sustainable harvesting, community-based conservation, corridor protection, and ensuring that the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities are protected alongside the ecosystems they depend on.

UPSC RELEVANCE

MoEFCC 2015 emission norms (S.O.3305(E)), SO₂, NO_x, SPM, mercury, FGD; World Obesity Day, World Obesity Atlas 2026; polymetallic nodules, dark oxygen, Clarion-Clipperton Zone, Nature Geoscience; World Wildlife Day, CITES, medicinal and aromatic plants.

MAINS GS-2:

Preventive public health and environmental regulation.

MAINS GS-3:

Air pollution, thermal power compliance, deep-sea ecosystems and mining regulation, biodiversity conservation and traditional medicine.

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THERMAL POWER EMISSIONS:

MoEFCC notification S.O.3305(E), dated 7 December 2015 — India's first TPP emission norms

Covers: **SO₂, NO_x, SPM, mercury, and water consumption**

SO₂ limits: 600 mg/Nm₃ (units <500 MW, pre-2017), 200 mg/Nm₃ (units ≥500 MW), 100 mg/Nm₃ (post-2017 units)

NO_x norms diluted in **May 2019** from 300 to **450 mg/Nm₃** for 2004-2016 units

FGD systems are used mainly to reduce sulphur emissions

Compliance deadlines have been extended multiple times

OBESITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH:

Obesity is linked to diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and some cancers

India faces a double burden: undernutrition plus rising obesity

World Obesity Atlas 2026: over **20.7%** of 5-19 year-olds globally living with obesity/overweight

Policy tools include food labelling, school nutrition standards, and screening

DARK OXYGEN AND DEEP-SEA MINING:

“Dark oxygen” refers to oxygen generation without sunlight-driven photosynthesis

Published in **Nature Geoscience, July 2024**; observed in the **Clarion-Clipperton Zone** (Pacific Ocean)

Hypothesised mechanism: nodules act as “**geo-batteries**” with voltage up to **0.95 V**, splitting seawater

Finding remains **scientifically contested** — not yet replicated by other teams

Discussed at the **International Seabed Authority's 29th session**

Nodules contain manganese, cobalt, nickel, and copper — critical battery minerals

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY:

Observed every year on **3 March** — commemorates signing of **CITES** on **3 March 1973**

2026 theme: “**Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods**”

WHO: **70-95%** of population in developing countries relies on traditional medicine for primary healthcare

India has an estimated **7,500-8,000 medicinal plant species** used in Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and folk medicine

Sources: [Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change](#), [World Obesity Federation](#), [Nature Geoscience](#), [United Nations](#), [Ministry of Power](#)

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