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# Current Affairs Today – March 13, 2026

13 March 2026

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# Current Affairs Today — March 13, 2026

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## WHY IN NEWS

March 13, 2026 saw significant developments across multiple sectors: India surpassed China as the largest cotton supplier to the United States; two new lichen moth species were discovered in the eastern Himalayas by the Zoological Survey of India; NASA confirmed asteroid 2024 YR4 will not hit the Moon; Chhattisgarh approved a Freedom of Religion Bill; Shailesh Kumar won gold at the World Para Athletics Grand Prix; and India launched the world's first Autonomous Maritime Shipbuilding and Systems Centre.

## INDIA BECOMES LARGEST COTTON SUPPLIER TO THE UNITED STATES

India has surpassed China as the **largest supplier of cotton products to the United States in 2025**, according to data from the **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**. Indian cotton product exports to the US reached approximately **0.6 million tonnes**, while Chinese exports fell to **0.5 million**

tonnes.

The shift is primarily driven by **US tariffs on Chinese goods** — ranging from 10% to 125% — which have incentivised American importers to diversify their supply chains. India, with its large textile manufacturing base and competitive labour costs, has been the primary beneficiary of this trade diversion.

**UPSC Angle — GS-3 & IR:** This is significant for India's trade balance, textile sector employment, and the broader theme of supply chain de-risking. India's textile exports contribute approximately **\$45 billion/year** (calendar year 2024). The US is India's largest single export destination. This shift is driven by two factors: US tariffs on Chinese goods and the **Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), 2021** — which restricts imports of goods linked to forced labour in China's Xinjiang region, where ~20% of the world's cotton is produced. India's vertically integrated textile supply chain (cotton → yarn → fabric → garment) gives it a structural advantage in meeting US traceability and compliance standards.

## TWO NEW LICHEN MOTH SPECIES DISCOVERED IN EASTERN HIMALAYAS

Scientists from the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)** have discovered two previously unknown lichen moth species in the eastern Himalayan region:

***Caulocera hollowayi*** — found near **Golitar, Sikkim**

***Asura buxa*** — found at **Panijhora, West Bengal** (near Buxa Tiger Reserve)

Both belong to the **lichen moth** group — a category of moths whose caterpillars feed on lichens and are considered **bioindicators of air quality and ecosystem health**. Their presence in an area signals clean air and a healthy ecosystem because lichens themselves are highly sensitive to air pollution and disappear from polluted environments. The species were described in the international taxonomic journal **Zootaxa** (published 2 March 2026), identified through detailed morphological analysis, wing pattern studies, and microscopic reproductive structures.

**UPSC Angle — GS-3 (Environment & Biodiversity):** ZSI regularly discovers new species in biodiversity-rich zones of the Himalayas and Northeast India. Bioindicator species — organisms whose presence or absence indicates environmental conditions — are frequently examined in Prelims. Key facts: ZSI is headquartered in Kolkata; Buxa Tiger Reserve (West Bengal) is also a Project Elephant reserve and lies on the India-Bhutan border.

## ASTEROID 2024 YR4 WILL NOT HIT THE MOON — NASA CONFIRMS

NASA has confirmed that asteroid **2024 YR4** will **not collide with the Moon in 2032**, resolving earlier uncertainty that had briefly made this object one of the most closely monitored near-Earth asteroids.

The asteroid was originally discovered by the **ATLAS (Asteroid Terrestrial-impact Last Alert System)** telescope located in **Chile**. It is classified as an **Apollo-type asteroid** — a category of near-Earth asteroids whose orbits cross Earth’s orbit. The object measures approximately **174–220 feet (53–67 metres)** in diameter and is believed to have originated from the **Main Asteroid Belt** between Mars and Jupiter.

**UPSC Angle — GS-3 (Science & Technology):** Near-Earth Objects (NEOs) and asteroid monitoring are recurring topics in UPSC Prelims. Key institutions: NASA’s Planetary Defense Coordination Office (PDCO) monitors NEOs; ATLAS is an asteroid impact early warning system funded by NASA. Apollo asteroids cross Earth’s orbit; contrast with Amor (orbit outside Earth’s, inside Mars’s) and Aten (orbit mostly inside Earth’s) asteroids.

## CHHATTISGARH APPROVES FREEDOM OF RELIGION BILL

The **Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly** passed the **Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantrya Vidheyak (Freedom of Religion Bill), 2026** during the state’s Budget Session in March 2026. The Bill is designed to prevent religious conversions effected through **coercion, inducement, fraud, misrepresentation, or undue influence**. Under the new law, those carrying out illegal mass conversions face **life imprisonment**. The opposition boycotted the house session, arguing that such matters are pending before the Supreme Court.

Several states have enacted similar legislation — commonly called “anti-conversion laws” — including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. These laws generally require prior notice to district authorities before conversions and prescribe penalties for forced conversions.

**UPSC Angle — GS-2 (Polity & Governance):** Freedom of religion laws engage **Articles 25–28** of the Constitution (Right to Freedom of Religion). The Supreme Court in **Rev. Stainislaus v. State of MP (1977)** upheld the validity of state anti-conversion laws, holding that the right to “propagate” religion does not include the right to convert others. However, critics argue these laws restrict the freedom of conscience and choice, particularly of those wishing to convert. This is a recurring Mains GS-2 and GS-4 topic.

## SHAILESH KUMAR WINS GOLD AT WORLD PARA ATHLETICS GRAND PRIX

**Shailesh Kumar** (Bihar) won the **gold medal in Men’s High Jump T63** at the **World Para Athletics Grand Prix** held in **New Delhi** on March 13, 2026, with a jump of **1.84 metres**. The T63 classification refers to athletes with a single below-knee amputation or equivalent impairment who compete using a running prosthesis.

Kumar’s personal best stands at **1.91 metres**, and he has been targeting qualification for the **Asian Para Games**.

**UPSC Angle — Prelims (Persons in News / Sports):** Para athletics classifications: T = Track/Field; F = Field only; numbers indicate impairment category (40s = short stature/amputee, 50s = cerebral palsy/coordination, 60s = limb deficiency/prosthesis, 70s = intellectual). **World Para Athletics** is governed by the **International Paralympic Committee (IPC)**, headquartered in Bonn, Germany — it is NOT under World Athletics (formerly IAAF). India has been performing strongly at recent Paralympic Games — Paris 2024 yielded India’s best Paralympic haul (29 medals: 7 gold, 9 silver, 13 bronze). Shailesh Kumar is the reigning world champion in T63 high jump.

## PURPLE FEST AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN — CELEBRATING DIVYANGJAN

**Purple Fest** was organised at **Rashtrapati Bhavan** on March 13, 2026 by the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** — a celebration recognising the **talent, achievements, and aspirations of Divyangjan** (persons with disabilities). Over **8,000 Divyangjan** visited Amrit Udyan, which was opened exclusively for them. President **Droupadi Murmu** graced the evening cultural performances at the Open Air Theatre. The event is part of the government’s broader outreach under the **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)**, launched on **3 December 2015** (International Day of Persons with Disabilities).

“Divyangjan” — a term coined by Prime Minister Modi — replaced the earlier term “Viklang” and reflects a change in social framing from disability as limitation to difference as a form of divine ability.

**UPSC Angle — GS-2 (Social Justice):** Key legislation: **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** (replaced the 1995 Act); increased categories of recognised disabilities from 7 to **21**. India is a signatory to the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**. The **Unique Disability ID (UDID)** portal provides centralised disability certificates.

## PMFME INCUBATION CENTRE INAUGURATED AT TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

Union Minister for Food Processing Industries **Chirag Paswan** inaugurated a **Common Incubation Centre at Tezpur University**, Sonitpur district, Assam. The centre was established with full financial support from the Ministry of Food Processing Industries under the **Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme**.

The centre aims to strengthen **food processing innovation, entrepreneurship, and skill development** in the Northeast.

**UPSC Angle — GS-3:** PMFME Scheme was launched in 2020 under the **AatmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan** with an outlay of **₹10,000 crore over 5 years (2020–25)**. It operates on a **One District One Product (ODOP)** approach. Tezpur University is a **central university** established in 1994, known for its science and technology programmes and Northeast focus.

## ASSAM'S GI-TAGGED JOHA RICE EXPORTED TO UK AND ITALY

**Assam** achieved a significant agricultural export milestone when its **Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged Joha rice** was exported to the **United Kingdom and Italy** — marking the first international commercial export of this heritage aromatic rice variety.

**Joha rice** (*Oryza sativa*) is a short-grain aromatic variety indigenous to Assam, known for its distinctive fragrance and nutritional properties. It received its **GI tag in 2017** under the **Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**. The first consignment of **25 metric tonnes** was facilitated by the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in collaboration with the Assam Agriculture Department. Earlier, APEDA had facilitated smaller trial exports — 1 MT to Vietnam and 2 MT to five Middle Eastern countries (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia). Joha rice is cultivated on approximately **21,662 hectares** with annual production of **~43,298 metric tonnes** (FY 2024-25).

**UPSC Angle — GS-3 (Agriculture & Trade):** GI tags protect origin-linked products under the **TRIPS Agreement** (WTO). India has the highest number of GI-tagged products in South Asia. Other notable Assam GIs: Assam (Orthodox) Tea, Muga silk, Joha rice. GI registration in India is administered by the **Geographical Indications Registry** under the **Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks (CGPDTM)**, Chennai.

## INDIA LAUNCHES WORLD'S FIRST AUTONOMOUS MARITIME SHIPBUILDING AND SYSTEMS CENTRE

**Sagar Defence Engineering**, a Mumbai-based defence technology company founded in 2015, laid the foundation stone on 12 March 2026 for the **world's first Autonomous Maritime Shipbuilding and Systems Centre** at **Juvvaladinne fishing harbour, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh**. The Phase I facility spans **29.58 acres** along the Bay of Bengal and will integrate autonomous shipbuilding, testing infrastructure, an R&D centre, a ship maintenance and repair (MRO) facility, and a training hub within a single campus. The centre will develop **Unmanned Surface Vessels (USVs)** and **Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUVs)** for maritime surveillance, coastal security, logistics, and environmental monitoring. Commercial operations are targeted for **November 2026**, with an expected creation of **~300 direct jobs**.

The initiative aligns with India's **Maritime India Vision 2030** and the broader push for indigenisation under **Make in India** in the defence sector.

**UPSC Angle — GS-3 (Defence & Security):** India's shipbuilding sector is anchored by public sector entities: **Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL)**, **Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE)**, **Hindustan Shipyard Ltd (HSL)**, and **Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL)**. Maritime India Vision

2030 targets India among the top 10 nations in maritime trade. The **Indian Maritime University** is headquartered in Chennai.

## US-IRAN CONFLICT: TWO WEEKS IN

Two weeks into the US military conflict with Iran, the United States had spent more than **\$10 billion** on the operation. The conflict had claimed the lives of more than **1,000 Iranians** and **7 American service members** as of March 13, 2026. UNESCO-listed heritage sites in Iran sustained damage during military strikes — an issue that implicates the **1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict**.

**UPSC Angle — GS-2 (International Relations):** The Strait of Hormuz — the critical chokepoint for ~20% of global oil trade — runs through the Persian Gulf near Iranian territorial waters. Any US-Iran conflict directly threatens India's energy security (India imports ~85% of crude oil; ~10–12% from the Gulf corridor). India's diaspora in the Gulf numbers approximately 9 million. The 1954 Hague Convention and its protocols on cultural property protection during war are examined in Ethics and IR papers.

### UPSC RELEVANCE

India-US cotton trade, USDA, UFLPA; ZSI, lichen moths (bioindicators), *Caulocera hollowayi*, *Asura buxa*, *Zootaxa*; ATLAS telescope (Chile), asteroid 2024 YR4, Apollo-type asteroid; Chhattisgarh Freedom of Religion Bill 2026, *Rev. Stainislaus v. State of MP (1977)*, Articles 25-28; Shailesh Kumar, T63 classification, World Para Athletics Grand Prix, IPC; Purple Fest, Divyangjan, RPwD Act 2016, Ministry of Social Justice; PMFME Scheme, ODOP, Tezpur University, APEDA; Joha rice (GI, 2017), GI Act 1999, CGPDTM; Sagar Defence Engineering, Juvvaladinne (AP), Autonomous Maritime Shipbuilding Centre, Maritime India Vision 2030; US-Iran conflict, Strait of Hormuz, Hague Convention 1954.

#### MAINS GS-2:

Freedom of religion — constitutional provisions, judicial interpretation.

#### MAINS GS-3:

India's textile exports; biodiversity monitoring; energy security and West Asia.

**★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA**
**INDIA–US COTTON TRADE:**

India's cotton exports to US (2025): ~0.6 million tonnes (No. 1 supplier)

China's cotton exports to US (2025): ~0.5 million tonnes (displaced to No. 2)

Total US cotton product imports (2025): ~3.3 million metric tonnes

Drivers: US tariffs on China (10–125%) + Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), 2021

India's total textile exports: ~\$45 billion/year (calendar year 2024)

**NEW MOTH SPECIES (ZSI, MARCH 2026):**

*Caulocera hollowayi* — Golitar, Sikkim (eastern Himalayas)

*Asura buxa* — Panihpora, West Bengal (near Buxa Tiger Reserve)

Type: Lichen moths — bioindicators of air quality and ecosystem health

Discovered by: Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) — HQ: Kolkata

**ASTEROID 2024 YR4:**

Discovered by: ATLAS telescope, Chile (NASA-funded early warning system)

Type: Apollo-type asteroid (orbit crosses Earth's orbit)

Size: ~174–220 feet (53–67 m)

Origin: Main Asteroid Belt (between Mars and Jupiter)

Status: Will NOT hit Moon in 2032 (NASA confirmed)

**CHHATTISGARH FREEDOM OF RELIGION BILL, 2026:**

Full name: Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantrya Vidheyak, 2026

Prevents conversions via coercion, inducement, fraud, misrepresentation, undue influence

Penalty for illegal mass conversions: life imprisonment

Key case: Rev. Stainislaus v. State of MP (1977) — SC upheld anti-conversion laws

Constitutional articles: Arts. 25–28 (Right to Freedom of Religion)

Other states with similar laws: UP, MP, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka

**SHAILESH KUMAR — PARA ATHLETICS:**

Event: Men's High Jump T63 (below-knee amputee / prosthesis users)

Status: Reigning world champion in T63 high jump

Venue: World Para Athletics Grand Prix, New Delhi

Jump: 1.84 m (gold); Personal best: 1.91 m

State: Bihar

Governing body: World Para Athletics — under International Paralympic Committee (IPC), Bonn, Germany

India's Paris 2024 Paralympics haul: 29 medals (7G, 9S, 13B) — best ever

**PMFME SCHEME:**

Launch: 2020, under AatmaNirbhar Bharat

Outlay: ₹10,000 crore (2020–25)

Approach: One District One Product (ODOP)

Incubation Centre: Tezpur University, Sonitpur, Assam

Minister: Chirag Paswan (Ministry of Food Processing Industries)

#### JOHA RICE:

Type: Short-grain aromatic rice; indigenous to Assam

GI tag: Registered in 2017 under GI Act, 1999

Consignment: 25 metric tonnes to UK + Italy (largest international export)

Earlier trial exports: 1 MT to Vietnam; 2 MT to Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia

Facilitated by: APEEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority)

Cultivation: ~21,662 hectares; production ~43,298 MT (FY 2024-25)

GI Registry: Under CGPDTM, Chennai (Ministry of Commerce)

#### AUTONOMOUS MARITIME SHIPBUILDING CENTRE:

Status: World's first (foundation stone laid 12 March 2026)

Location: Juvvaladinne fishing harbour, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh

Developer: Sagar Defence Engineering (Mumbai-based, founded 2015)

Phase I: 29.58 acres; commercial operations targeted November 2026

Focus: USVs, AUVs, autonomous navigation, maritime sensors, C2 platforms

Policy context: Maritime India Vision 2030; Make in India (Defence)

Key Indian shipbuilders: MDL (Mumbai), GRSE (Kolkata), HSL (Visakhapatnam), CSL (Kochi)

#### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Purple Fest: Rashtrapati Bhavan event for Divyangjan (13 March 2026); organised by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment; 8,000+ Divyangjan attended; President Droupadi Murmu graced the event

Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan): Launched 3 December 2015 by PM; under Dept of Empowerment of PwDs, MoSJE

RPwD Act, 2016: 21 recognised disability categories (up from 7 in 1995 Act)

UNCRPD: UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities — India is a signatory

US-Iran conflict (as of Mar 13, 2026): 2 weeks old; US spent \$10B+; 1,000+ Iranian deaths; 7 US service members killed; UNESCO heritage sites damaged

1954 Hague Convention: Protects cultural property during armed conflict; two protocols (1954 and 1999)

Buxa Tiger Reserve (West Bengal): Also Project Elephant Reserve; on India-Bhutan border

Sources: [GKToday](#), [GKToday Quiz March 13](#), [BankersAdda](#), [PIB](#)

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