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# Current Affairs Today – March 15, 2026

15 March 2026

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UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator •

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## ▼ On this Page

### 01 R. Vairamuthu Receives 60th Jnanpith Award...

- About R. Vairamuthu
- About the Jnanpith Award

### 02 New Plant Species Found in Manas...

- The Species
- About Manas National Park

### 03 PM Modi Inaugurates Haldia Bulk Terminal...

- Key Details
- Why This Matters

### 04 PM Modi Launches ₹23,550 Crore Projects...

- Why Barak Valley Is Strategically Significant

### 05 Zydus' Desidustat Gets China NMPA Approval...

- About the Drug
- Why This Is UPSC-Relevant

### 06 Persons in News

- Madhu Malhotra (1953/1954–2026)
- Phil Campbell (1961–2026)

## WHY IN NEWS

March 15, 2026 saw several significant developments: Tamil lyricist R. Vairamuthu received the 60th Jnanpith Award; a new plant species was discovered in Manas National Park and named after musician Zubeen Garg; PM Modi inaugurated India's first fully automated dry bulk terminal at Haldia and launched ₹23,550 crore projects in Silchar; Zydus Lifesciences received China's approval for its kidney-disease anaemia drug Desidustat; and veteran Hindi film actress Madhu Malhotra passed away at 72.

## R. VAIRAMUTHU RECEIVES 60TH JNANPITH AWARD (2025)

Tamil poet, lyricist, and writer **R. Vairamuthu** has been conferred the **60th Jnanpith Award for the year 2025** — India's highest literary honour. The award was announced on March 15, 2026.

### About R. Vairamuthu

Born on **July 13, 1953**, in Mettoor village, **Theni district, Tamil Nadu**, Vairamuthu has been one of the most prolific figures in Tamil literature and cinema over the past four decades. He has authored more than **37 books** spanning poetry collections, essays, and novels. His major literary works include *Kallikattu Ithikasam*, *Karuvachi Kaaviyam*, *Thanneer Desam*, and *Moondraam Ulagapor*. As a film lyricist, he has written thousands of songs for Tamil cinema across four decades.

Vairamuthu has won the **National Film Award for Best Lyrics seven times**, received the **Sahitya Akademi Award** (2003) for *Kallikattu Ithikasam*, the **Padma Shri** (2003), and the **Padma Bhushan** (2014). He is the **third Tamil writer** to receive the Jnanpith Award, after **P.V. Akilan** (1975) and **D. Jayakanthan** (2002).

### About the Jnanpith Award

The **Jnanpith Award** is India's highest literary recognition, conferred annually since **1965** by the **Bharatiya Jnanpith** trust. It is awarded to an Indian citizen for an **outstanding contribution to Indian literature** written in any of the **22 Scheduled languages** under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution (plus English).

The award carries a **cash prize of ₹11 lakh**, a **citation**, and a **bronze statuette of Vagdevi** (the goddess Saraswati). The selection is made by the Bharatiya Jnanpith Selection Committee — in this cycle chaired by writer **Pratibha Ray** (herself the 2011 Jnanpith laureate).

**UPSC Angle — Prelims & GS-1:** The Jnanpith Award tests two things simultaneously: knowledge of Indian languages covered under the Eighth Schedule, and knowledge of significant Indian literary figures.

Vairamuthu's award also signals the ongoing contribution of Tamil to India's literary heritage — Tamil being the first of India's eleven Classical Languages (Tamil was declared in 2004; followed by Sanskrit in 2005; Telugu and Kannada in 2008; Malayalam in 2013; Odia in 2014; and Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit, and Assamese in October 2024).

## NEW PLANT SPECIES FOUND IN MANAS NATIONAL PARK, NAMED AFTER ZUBEEN GARG

Botanists from **Gauhati University** have discovered a previously unknown plant species in the grasslands of **Manas National Park**, Assam. The species has been formally named ***Osbeckia zubeengargiana*** in honour of Assamese singer and musician **Zubeen Garg**.

### The Species

*Osbeckia zubeengargiana* belongs to the family **Melastomataceae**. It is a **perennial shrub** growing 2.5–3.5 metres tall, bearing distinctive **pink flower clusters** of 2.5–3 cm. Its flowering period runs from **mid-September to January**. The species was discovered during systematic botanical surveys conducted between **2021 and 2025** by researchers **Barnali Das, Namita Nath** (Gauhati University), and **Prasobh Pulpra** (NSS College, Kerala). The findings were published in the taxonomic journal ***Phytotaxa***.

Despite researchers observing “a relatively large population” during field surveys, the IUCN has classified it as “**Data Deficient**” due to limited long-term ecological data — a classification that underlines the gaps in India’s grassland biodiversity documentation.

### About Manas National Park

**Manas National Park** is located in **Baksa district, Assam**, on the foothills of the Bhutan Himalaya. It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** (inscribed 1985), a **Project Tiger Reserve** (since 1973), a **Project Elephant Reserve**, and a **Biosphere Reserve**. The park is renowned for its population of the **Golden Langur, Pygmy Hog** (the world’s smallest wild pig), **Hispid Hare**, and the **Indian Rhinoceros**. Its grassland ecosystem — the type of habitat where *Osbeckia zubeengargiana* was found — is among the most biodiverse in the Northeast.

**UPSC Angle — Prelims & GS-3:** Manas is a frequently examined site in Prelims — candidates must know its UNESCO/Biosphere/Tiger status, its location (Assam, Beki and Manas rivers), and its key endemic species. The discovery of a new species here reinforces the importance of protecting grassland ecosystems, which lack statutory protection under Indian law (no equivalent to the Forest Conservation Act exists for grasslands).

## PM MODI INAUGURATES HALDIA BULK TERMINAL — INDIA’S FIRST FULLY AUTOMATED DRY BULK TERMINAL ON HOOGLY

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** inaugurated the **Haldia Bulk Terminal** on March 15, 2026 — described as **India’s first fully automated dry bulk handling terminal on the Hooghly River**.

## Key Details

Parameter	Details
<b>Location</b>	Haldia Dock Complex, <b>Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port</b> , Kolkata
<b>Operator</b>	<b>APSEZ</b> (Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd) via HDC Bulk Terminal Ltd
<b>Annual capacity</b>	<b>4 million metric tonnes (MMTPA)</b>
<b>Cargo handled</b>	Dry bulk: coal, bauxite, limestone (for power, steel, aluminium industries)
<b>Concession model</b>	<b>DBFOT</b> (Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer) — 30-year concession
<b>Construction</b>	July 2023 – March 2026
<b>Draft capacity</b>	8.5 metres
<b>Railway connectivity</b>	1.54 km dedicated railway line + 2,000-tonne wagon loading system

The terminal includes a **2.10 km conveyor system**, two **mobile harbour cranes**, and two **stacker-cum-reclaimers** — the equipment combination that enables fully automated bulk handling without manual intervention at the berth.

## Why This Matters

**Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (formerly Kolkata Port)** handles approximately **60% of India's dry bulk imports** for the eastern region. Coal and bauxite are critical inputs for power plants and the aluminium industry in Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal. The automation reduces turnaround time — a persistent constraint at Haldia — and increases throughput without expanding the physical footprint of the port.

**APSEZ** (Adani Ports) is already India's largest private port operator, running **15 domestic ports across 7 maritime states** (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha), plus 4 international ports. The DBFOT model, where a private operator builds and operates before transferring the asset back to the government after 30 years, is the standard PPP model used across Indian port infrastructure.

**UPSC Angle — Prelims & GS-3:** Key facts: Haldia is part of Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (not Kolkata Port Trust — it was renamed on 12 January 2020). APSEZ = Adani Ports and SEZ — India's largest private port operator with 15 ports across 7 maritime states. DBFOT is one of several PPP models (alongside BOT, BOO, BOOT). The Hooghly is a distributary of the Ganga — the Bhagirathi splits from the Ganga at Giria and becomes the Hooghly at Nabadwip after joining the Jalangi — which affects draft depth (siltation is a chronic issue at Haldia).

**PM MODI LAUNCHES ₹23,550 CRORE PROJECTS IN SILCHAR TO DEVELOP BARAK**

## VALLEY AS TRADE HUB

Prime Minister Modi launched infrastructure projects worth **₹23,550 crore** in **Silchar, Assam**, on March 15 — aimed at transforming **Barak Valley** into a major **trade and logistics hub** for Northeast India.

### Why Barak Valley Is Strategically Significant

**Barak Valley** in southern Assam (districts: Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi) is geographically distinct from the Brahmaputra Valley. The **Barak River** — which flows into Bangladesh as the Surma — makes the valley flood-prone but also integral to India's **Act East Policy** connectivity framework. The valley shares borders with **Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Bangladesh**, positioning Silchar as a natural logistics node for goods moving into the Northeast and into Bangladesh via the Sutarkandi Land Port.

The projects align with India's broader **PM GatiShakti National Master Plan** — the infrastructure coordination framework that seeks to integrate road, rail, waterway, and air connectivity under a single planning layer.

**UPSC Angle — GS-2 & GS-3:** The Barak Valley development is directly linked to Act East Policy (connectivity to Southeast Asia via Northeast India), the Land Ports Authority of India (Sutarkandi border crossing), and PM GatiShakti. The region is also significant for GS-1 (Barak River system, Northeast rivers).

## ZYDUS' DESIDUSTAT GETS CHINA NMPA APPROVAL FOR CKD ANAEMIA

**Zydu Lifesciences** (Ahmedabad) has received marketing approval from China's **National Medical Products Administration (NMPA)** for **Desidustat** — an oral drug for treating **anaemia in Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)** patients not on dialysis.

### About the Drug

**Desidustat** belongs to the **HIF-PHI class** (Hypoxia-Inducible Factor–Prolyl Hydroxylase Inhibitors) — a new category of drugs that stimulate the body's natural red blood cell production pathway by increasing **erythropoietin** levels, lowering **hepcidin**, and improving **iron availability**. Unlike conventional injectable erythropoiesis-stimulating agents (ESAs), Desidustat is **orally administered** — a significant practical advantage for CKD patients who already carry a heavy injection burden from dialysis and other treatments.

Desidustat has been marketed in **India since 2022** under the brand name **Oxemia**, with over **1,00,000 patients** treated domestically. The China commercialization will be handled by **CMS International Development** (subsidiary of China Medical System Holdings).

## Why This Is UPSC-Relevant

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India has approximately **13.8 crore CKD patients** (chronic kidney disease, 2023 data) — the second-highest burden globally; China leads with approximately **15.2 crore** cases. The approval demonstrates Indian pharmaceutical companies competing in the **innovation segment** (not just generics) in global markets. Zydus developed Desidustat in-house — making it one of relatively few entirely India-originated molecules to receive multi-country regulatory approval.

**UPSC Angle — Prelims & GS-3:** NMPA = China’s drug regulator (equivalent to India’s CDSCO — Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation). HIF pathway drugs represent a new therapeutic class — worth knowing for science-technology questions. Zydus Lifesciences (formerly Cadila Healthcare) is one of India’s top 5 pharma companies by revenue.

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## PERSONS IN NEWS

### Madhu Malhotra (1953/1954–2026)

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Veteran Hindi film actress **Madhu Malhotra** passed away on **March 13, 2026**, in Mumbai at the age of **72**. Her funeral was held at Oshiwara Crematorium on March 14. Known for her work in over 100 films in supporting and character roles, she is best remembered for her appearance in the song “**Lambi Judaai**” in **Hero (1983)** — directed by **Subhash Ghai** and featuring the voice of Pakistani folk singer **Reshma**. She also appeared in **Satte Pe Satta (1982)** and other Ghai productions including *Vishwanath* (1978), *Karz* (1980), and *Vidhaata* (1982).

### Phil Campbell (1961–2026)

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Welsh rock guitarist **Phil Campbell**, the longtime lead guitarist of the legendary heavy metal band **Motörhead**, passed away at age **64** on **March 13, 2026**, following a major operation. Campbell joined the band in **1984** (replacing Brian Robertson) and remained until Motörhead disbanded following frontman **Lemmy Kilmister’s** death in December 2015 — serving 31 years as lead guitarist. After Motörhead, he founded Phil Campbell and the Bastard Sons with his three sons.

**UPSC RELEVANCE**

Jnanpith Award (Bharatiya Jnanpith, 60th edition, Eighth Schedule languages, Vagdevi statuette); Vairamuthu (Tamil, third Tamil Jnanpith winner); Osbeckia zubeengargiana (Melastomataceae, Manas NP, Gauhati University, Phytotaxa); Manas NP (UNESCO WHS, Tiger Reserve, Biosphere Reserve, Baksa district, Assam); Haldia Bulk Terminal (APSEZ, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, DBFOT, 4 MMTPA, Hooghly); Desidustat (Zydus, NMPA, HIF-PHI class, CKD anaemia, Oxemia brand); NMPA vs CDSCO; Barak Valley (Cachar, southern Assam, Sutarkandi).

**MAINS GS-1:**

Classical Languages of India; Indian literary tradition.

**MAINS GS-3:**

Infrastructure (PPP models, port development); pharma innovation; biodiversity and grassland ecosystem gaps.

**★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA**
**JNANPITH AWARD:**

**Awarded by:** Bharatiya Jnanpith trust (founded 1944)

**First awarded:** 1965 (to G. Sankara Kurup, Malayalam)

**60th Jnanpith (2025):** R. Vairamuthu (Tamil)

**Prize components:** ₹11 lakh cash + citation + bronze statuette of Vagdevi (Saraswati)

**Languages eligible:** All 22 Eighth Schedule languages + English

**Tamil Jnanpith winners:** P.V. Akilan (1975), D. Jayakanthan (2002), R. Vairamuthu (2025)

**Vairamuthu's other awards:** Padma Bhushan (2014), Padma Shri (2003), Sahitya Akademi Award (2003), 7 National Film Awards for Best Lyrics

**Born:** 13 July 1953, Mettoor, Theni district, Tamil Nadu

**Selection Committee Chair (2025 cycle):** Pratibha Ray (Odia writer; 2011 Jnanpith recipient)

**OSBECKIA ZUBEENGARGIANA:**

**Family:** Melastomataceae

**Habit:** Perennial shrub, 2.5–3.5 m tall; pink flowers (2.5–3 cm); flowers Sep–Jan

**Location:** Manas NP grasslands, Baksa district, Assam

**Discovered by:** Gauhati University (Barnali Das, Namita Nath) + NSS College Kerala (Prasobh Pulpra)

**Survey period:** 2021–2025; published in *Phytotaxa*

**IUCN status:** Data Deficient

**Named after:** Zubeen Garg — Assamese musician and singer

**MANAS NATIONAL PARK:**

**Location:** Baksa district, Assam (foothills of Bhutan Himalaya)

**Rivers:** Manas, Beki (tributaries of Brahmaputra)

**UNESCO WHS:** Since 1985

**Project Tiger:** Since 1973 (one of the first 9 Tiger Reserves)

**Also:** Biosphere Reserve + Project Elephant Reserve

**Key species:** Golden Langur, Pygmy Hog (world's smallest), Hispid Hare, Indian Rhinoceros

**HALDIA BULK TERMINAL:**

**Location:** Haldia Dock Complex, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata

**Port renamed:** Kolkata Port Trust → Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port (12 January 2020)

**Operator:** APSEZ (Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd) via HDC Bulk Terminal Ltd

**Capacity:** 4 MMTPA (dry bulk: coal, bauxite, limestone)

**Concession:** DBFOT, 30 years

**First:** India's first fully automated dry bulk terminal on Hooghly River

**Eastern region handles:** ~60% of India's dry bulk imports

**Draft:** 8.5 metres

**DESIDUSTAT (ZYDUS):**

**Drug class:** HIF-PHI (Hypoxia-Inducible Factor–Prolyl Hydroxylase Inhibitor)

**Route:** Oral (tablets) — advantage over injectable ESAs

**India brand:** Oxemia (approved 2022); 1,00,000+ Indian patients  
**China approval by:** NMPA (National Medical Products Administration) — China’s drug regulator  
**India’s drug regulator:** CDSCO (Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation)  
**Indication:** Anaemia in CKD (Chronic Kidney Disease) — non-dialysis patients  
**Commercialised in China via:** CMS International Development (China Medical System Holdings)

#### BARAK VALLEY (SILCHAR PROJECTS):

**Districts:** Cachar (HQ: Silchar), Karimganj, Hailakandi  
**River:** Barak (enters Bangladesh as Surma River)  
**Key land port:** Sutarkandi (India–Bangladesh)  
**Borders:** Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Bangladesh  
**Projects:** ₹23,550 crore; goal = trade and logistics hub for Northeast India  
**Policy linkage:** Act East Policy, PM GatiShakti National Master Plan

#### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

India’s **eleven Classical Languages:** Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu (2008), Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013), Odia (2014), Marathi (2024), Bengali (2024), Pali (2024), Prakrit (2024), Assamese (2024)  
**Eighth Schedule** of the Constitution currently lists **22 languages**; originally had 14 (1950)  
**APSEZ** operates 15 domestic ports across 7 Indian maritime states + 4 international ports — India’s largest private port operator  
**DBFOT** = Design, Build, Finance, Operate, Transfer (one of several PPP models; contrast with BOT, BOO)  
**Hooghly River** is a distributary of the Ganga (not a tributary) — the Bhagirathi splits from the Ganga at Giria and becomes the Hooghly at Nabadwip after joining the Jalangi River, West Bengal  
 Zydus Lifesciences was formerly known as **Cadila Healthcare** (rebranded 2022)

Sources: [GKToday](#), [PIB](#), [Phytotaxa](#)

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

# Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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