

APPSC Current Affairs 17 October 2026

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1 Gandikota Gorge and Heritage Conservation

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Syllabus — Group-1 Mains Paper V - Environment and problems of the State: conservation of natural heritage sites, sustainable tourism, ecological degradation

Prelims — Group-1 Prelims Paper I - Current affairs of regional, state and national importance; geography and natural landmarks of Andhra Pradesh



Gandikota's landscape faces modern-day pressures

The government's efforts to recognise Gandikota's tourism potential has put this geologically significant site back in the spotlight. However, with renewed activity, it is experiencing poor waste management that takes a toll on the environment. Furthermore, it continues to struggle with heavy foot traffic, natural weathering, systemic neglect

Supplied newspaper clipping. Use the corrected notes below for figures, terminology and status.

WHY IN NEWS

The accompanying Hindu report examines tourism pressure at Gandikota, including litter, construction and deterioration of the fort. The Union government sanctioned ₹77.91 crore in November 2024 for the Gandikota fort-and-gorge project under Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI). The report renews calls for coordinated conservation and explores aspirations for UNESCO recognition; it does not announce a UNESCO designation.

What Makes Gandikota Significant

- Located in **Jammalamadugu mandal, Kadapa district**, Andhra Pradesh, Gandikota is widely called the **'Grand Canyon of India'** — the Penna River has carved a dramatic gorge through red sandstone and quartzite cliffs about 300 feet deep.
- The exposed rocks belong to the ancient Cuddapah Basin. The newspaper describes a geological record spanning an estimated 1.2 billion years; this should not be read as a precise age for the present gorge or the river's incision.
- The medieval fort has associations with the Kakatiya and Vijayanagara periods and contains defensive walls, temples and other historic structures. The district government's Gandikota account traces the fortress tradition to 1123; individual surviving structures belong to different periods.
- The newspaper discusses aspirations for UNESCO World Heritage and UNESCO Global Geopark recognition. These are distinct programmes with separate criteria and procedures; neither label follows automatically from tourism investment.

State-Backed Tourism Push and Its Triggers

- The ₹77.91 crore project, Enriching the Fort and Gorge Experience in Gandikota, was sanctioned under SASCI in November 2024. PIB listed it at the implementation stage in January 2026, so this is an existing sanction rather than a new October 2026 award.
- The Andhra Pradesh government organised a **Gandikota festival** that drew large crowds, providing a financial boost to local guides, transport operators, and artisans — demonstrating tourism's livelihood potential.
- The report raises a conservation question: how can visitor spending support local livelihoods while waste management, construction controls and maintenance protect the site? It does not quantify the festival's environmental impact.
- According to the newspaper, growing camping and visitor activity is accompanied by litter, unplanned camping and rushed tourism construction. These reported pressures require site-level monitoring and enforcement.

Pressures Threatening the Site

- **Poor waste management** is the most visible damage: plastic water bottles, snack wrappers, and unmanaged camping waste accumulate across the gorge and fort precincts.
- The newspaper warns that construction near cliff edges could destabilise terrain. Heavy visitor movement, natural weathering and neglect create additional conservation pressures; site-specific engineering assessment is needed to establish the scale of each risk.
- Careless wandering near steep drops poses **safety hazards**, and the absence of marked walking trails or building exclusion zones leaves both visitors and the landscape unprotected.
- **Systemic neglect** of the fort — independent of tourism pressure — means natural weathering, vegetation encroachment, and lack of conservation funding compound the new pressures.

What Experts Say Must Happen

- Experts call for a **comprehensive master plan** that treats the gorge, river, fort, and surrounding villages as a single, living heritage ecosystem — not a piecemeal set of picnic facilities.
- UNESCO Global Geoparks link geological heritage with education and sustainable development. World Heritage inscription follows a separate process. Geopark status is not itself a new statutory protected-area category; protection must operate through applicable domestic law and management arrangements.
- Practical interventions demanded include **clearly marked walking trails, strict building bans in sensitive zones, reliable public restrooms, and proper trash collection** — basic carrying-capacity management tools.
- The site is positioned as a **model for responsible tourism in Rayalaseema**, with the implicit argument that preserving the landscape is the precondition — not the obstacle — for long-term tourism revenue.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- **Location** — Gandikota gorge, Jammalamadugu mandal, Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh
- Geological context - Ancient Cuddapah Basin; the newspaper's estimated 1.2-billion-year record refers to geology, not a precisely dated gorge
- **Gorge depth** — About 300 feet from rim to river level
- **River** — Penna River flows through the gorge
- Fort association - Medieval fort with Kakatiya and Vijayanagara connections; the district account traces its origins to 1123
- Central assistance - ₹77.91 crore under SASCI; sanctioned November 2024
- **Popular nickname** — Grand Canyon of India
- Recognition - Conservation aspirations for UNESCO labels, not an announcement of designation

VALUE ADDITION

DATA YOU CAN QUOTE

Gandikota SASCI project sanction - ₹77.91 crore in November 2024; implementation-stage status reported by PIB in January 2026

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

UNESCO Global Geoparks, within the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme

UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972 (UNESCO)

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

Hampi, Karnataka, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site associated with the Vijayanagara Empire. It is a useful comparative example for discussing heritage management, visitor pressure and protection of an archaeological landscape.

Lonar Lake, Maharashtra, is a Ramsar Site designated on 22 July 2020. Its meteorite-impact geology and wetland ecology illustrate overlapping conservation interests. Ramsar designation should not be confused with UNESCO Global Geopark status.

Source checks: PIB tourism sanction | PIB sanction chronology | Kadapa district Gandikota profile | UNESCO Hampi

2 Rayalaseema Geoheritage and the Geopark Proposal

Paper-V · Prelims + Mains · Geoheritage conservation, Andhra Pradesh · The Hindu

Syllabus — Group-1 Mains Paper V - Science, Technology, Environment and problems of the State

Prelims — Group-1 Prelims Paper I - Current affairs of regional, state and national importance



Preserving the past, securing the future

Rayalaseema region's rich geological past is reflected in its basement rocks, which formed more than 2.5 billion years ago. Today, this ancient foundation faces severe pressure from quarrying, road construction, and unregulated tourism. Fearing irreversible damage, geologists believe securing UNESCO Global Geopark status can help preserve them

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CHITTOOR

Across the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, fragments of a historically-rich landscape stand amid rocky hills, river valleys, and expanding settlements. Forts that once guarded strategic routes, temples that drew generations of devotees, and monuments bearing the imprint of successive dynasties offer vivid glimpses into the region's political, cultural, and religious history. Today, however, these sites face severe pressure from quarrying, road construction, and unregulated tourism.

Geologists aptly describe this landscape as a library of deep time, preserving natural events spanning billions of years. Much of Rayalaseema lies within the Cuddapah Basin and the ancient Dharwar Craton—one of India's oldest crustal blocks. Its basement rocks formed more than 2.5 billion years ago during the Precambrian era.

This ancient foundation stands in stark contrast to the young, restless Himalayas, which were born from the collision of tectonic plates and remain seismically active.

Prof. E. Suresh from the Department of Geology at Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, explains this profound difference: "The southern heartland of Andhra Pradesh is the weathered, unyielding skeleton of an ancient Earth. Solely sitting on the Dharwar Craton and the Cuddapah Basin, this region was formed 2.5 billion years ago. While the Himalayas strive restlessly toward the sky, Rayalaseema rests in profound structural calm."

For those who know where to look, this ancient stillness is hidden in plain sight, along the ghat road up to Tirumala, that mysterious calm is written in stone. Exposed on a steep, dusty road cut that thousands of pilgrims pass without a second glance lies the Eparchaean Unconformity—one of the world's most significant geological breakdowns. There, light layers of 1.5-billion-year-old Nagari quartzite rest directly on dark, 2.5 billion-year-old archaean granite.

Further south, the Nagari Hills dominate Chittoor and Tirupati. Their flat-topped profiles are classic mesas—silica-hard quartzite on ancient granite bases. Formed 1.5 billion years ago, these peaks were strategic lookout posts during the British Raj and the two World Wars. Today they are spiritual sentinels. The sharpest is Nagari Nose, standing at 2,805 feet and visible within a radius of 70 kilometres.

"Devout families from hundreds of villages surrounding the Nagari hills and neighbouring Tamil Nadu revere the peak and perform puja atop it on every full moon day," says Ramaraju Chalapathi, a former government schoolteacher and social activist in Nagari.

Now, mining activity is slowly climbing toward the peak, threatening Kagati Nose and other geological wonders—Three-Rocks-Mound (Moolu Ralla Bandu) and Bheemuni Palada rock, he says.

The Nagari Nose, in Chittoor district, served as the watchtower during the British period and two World Wars.

"Once a ridge is cut, its original structure can never be restored."

Similar damage was reported at Nemaligundlu on the Tirupati-Madanapalle highway. Rare breccia and sheared quartzite recording dynamic fault movements from over 1.5 to 1.9 billion years ago were blasted for road material during widening. "When road widening was underway a few years ago, we submitted a memorandum to the officials and senior politicians to preserve Nemaligundlu rocks and divert the road, but no one really cared. An influential political leader even got angry at us, rejecting the geological wonders as mere stones and chips," said a geology scholar, requesting anonymity.

Another site of interest is Moghili Ghat in Chittoor, which is approximately three billion years old. Prehistoric layers and ancient outcrops were flattened for a highway, illustrating how rapidly modern machinery can obliterate eons of history. "After the destruction of Moghili Ghat, the human-elephant conflict escalated at the tri-state junction. The natural migratory path has been ruthlessly disturbed. Although an elevated express corridor was constructed, the damage is already done," says a senior forest officer in Chittoor.

These ancient geological foundations also gave the region an acidic, iron-rich, and fast-draining soil that most flora cannot tolerate. Yet, nature adapted, transforming Rayalaseema into an evolutionary refuge. The Red Sanders tree, for instance, grows exclusively in the rugged, rocky hills of Kadapa, Tirupati, Chittoor, and Kolleru, drawing on the soil's high mineral content to develop its prized, deep-crimson heartwood.

This harsh terrain also fosters rare, highly specialised fauna. The Golden Gecko, a species of lizard, is restricted to the rocky savanas and quartzite caves of the Seshachalam Hills. Deep within the Sahkrasvaram range of Kadapa district, the critically endangered, nocturnal Jerdon's Courser depends entirely on the specific gravelly soil formed by 1.6-billion-year-old rocks.

Preserving these geological structures remains a key concern. Geologists believe that one way to strengthen the protection of these structures is by securing UNESCO Global Geopark status for several of these geological wonders. "Such recognition would establish strictly regulated tourist zones, protect the historical integrity of nearby forts, and introduce heritage education tours. It can transform these sites from simple tourist spots into protected world-class geological models," says Prof. T. Madhu, Head, Geology, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati.

"Rayalaseema's rocks have preserved chapters of Earth's history that no modern engineering project can recreate once destroyed. Protecting them is not a choice between development and conservation. It is an opportunity to make development more intelligent, tourism more meaningful, and scientific knowledge more accessible," he adds.

Supplied newspaper clipping. Use the corrected notes below for figures, terminology and status.

WHY IN NEWS

The accompanying Hindu report describes calls by geologists at Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, to conserve Rayalaseema's geological sites and pursue UNESCO Global Geopark recognition. It reports damage at Nemaligundlu and Moghili Ghat during road works and mining pressures around the Nagari Hills. This is an advocacy and conservation story, not confirmation that UNESCO status has been granted.

Geological Significance of Rayalaseema's Basement

- The region includes rocks of the Dharwar Craton and the Cuddapah Basin. Its ancient crystalline basement and younger sedimentary sequences preserve different stages of geological history; they should not all be assigned a single formation age.
- Compared with the actively deforming Himalayas, this is an ancient peninsular geological setting. Relative tectonic stability does not mean that the region is free from earthquakes, faults or other geological hazards.
- The Eparchaean Unconformity on the Tirupati-Tirumala ghat road is a recognised national geoheritage site. It marks a major gap in the geological record between older crystalline basement and overlying sedimentary rocks, making it valuable for understanding deep geological time.
- The newspaper describes flat-topped quartzite hills and prominent landforms such as Nagari Nose. It reports the peak's height as 2,805 feet and visibility up to 70 km; visibility depends on atmospheric and viewing conditions.
- The southern Eastern Ghats support distinctive species such as red sanders. Jerdon's Courser is associated with sparse scrub forest, particularly around Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary in Kadapa. Its conservation needs should not be reduced to an unverified requirement for soil of one precise geological age.

Sites Already Damaged by Infrastructure Projects

- The newspaper reports destruction of ancient outcrops at Moghili Ghat during highway works and quotes a forest official linking disruption of an elephant route with conflict. These are attributed observations; the report does not establish that every conflict incident has a single cause.
- At Nemaligundlu on the Tirupati-Madanapalle highway, the newspaper reports that brecciated and sheared quartzite exposures were damaged during road widening despite objections from geologists. Its age estimates are newspaper-reported geological interpretations, not dates independently established in this edition.
- **Nagari Nose** and neighbouring geological wonders (Three-Rocks-Mound, Bheemuni Palada rock) now face slow encroachment from mining activity climbing toward the peak.
- Geologists quoted in the report stress that cutting a ridge can permanently destroy its original geological structures. Inventorying and protecting significant exposures before construction is therefore important.

Case for UNESCO Global Geopark Status

- UNESCO Global Geopark recognition can support coordinated geoconservation, education and sustainable local tourism. It requires a suitable management framework and internationally significant geological heritage; it does not automatically create statutory tourist zones or construction bans.
- UNESCO states that the defining geological sites must be protected under appropriate local, regional or national law. UNESCO does not take over management, and lawful economic activities are not automatically prohibited by the label.
- The practical policy aim is to integrate geological assessment into road, mining and tourism planning early enough to avoid irreversible damage. Local communities, researchers and public agencies should help design the management plan.
- The article quotes faculty from the Department of Geology at Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, among those advocating protection and geotourism. It does not establish that the department is the only or formally designated lead institution.

Broader Ecological Stakes for Andhra Pradesh

- Rock type, landforms, soils and water availability influence habitat conditions. Geoheritage and biodiversity planning can therefore reinforce each other, while species-specific ecological evidence remains necessary.
- The Indian golden gecko uses rocky habitats in the Eastern Ghats. Scientific records extend beyond the Seshachalam Hills, including sites in Tamil Nadu and Odisha; it is not restricted to Seshachalam alone. Quarrying can damage suitable rock habitats.
- The article discusses a wider southern Andhra landscape including Kadapa, Tirupati, Chittoor and Nellore. This geological and ecological grouping should not be treated as a precise definition of the historical Rayalaseema region.
- Conservation priorities include mapping important exposures, assessing alternatives before roads or quarries are approved, monitoring damage and developing local interpretation and guide services.

HIGH-YIELD FACTS

- Geological setting - Dharwar Craton basement and Cuddapah Basin sedimentary sequences preserve different geological ages
- **Eparchaean Unconformity location** — Along the ghat road to Tirumala, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh
- Nagari Nose - Prominent quartzite landform; the newspaper reports a height of 2,805 feet
- Geopark status - A conservation proposal; no designation announced in the supplied report
- Moghili Ghat - The newspaper reports road-related damage to outcrops and an elephant route
- Nemaligundulu - Reported damage to breccia and sheared-quartzite exposures on the Tirupati-Madanapalle route
- Jerdon's Courser - Critically Endangered bird associated with sparse scrub habitat; Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary is a key locality
- Institution quoted - Department of Geology, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati

VALUE ADDITION

REPORTS, BODIES AND INSTRUMENTS

UNESCO Global Geoparks - Protection, education and sustainable development; domestic legal protection and local management remain essential

EXAMPLES FOR THE ANSWER

The Eparchaean Unconformity is already included in the Government of India's geoheritage-site inventory. National geoheritage recognition and UNESCO Global Geopark designation are separate classifications.

Lonar Lake is a meteorite-impact crater lake and a Ramsar Site. Use it to illustrate links between geology and wetland conservation; do not describe it as a UNESCO Global Geopark or imply that Ramsar and UNESCO labels are interchangeable.

Source checks: UNESCO Geopark guidance | National geoheritage inventory | Golden gecko field records | WII Jerdon's Courser | Lonar Ramsar record

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