

Highlights of 16 August 2026 Current Affairs

- Major General Sunil Kumar Razdan (Retd), a Kirti Chakra and Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM) awardee who was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, passed away at the age of 70 in **New Delhi**. Decorated for his leadership during a 1994 counter-terrorist operation in Jammu & Kashmir with 7 PARA (SF), he made history as the Indian Army's first wheelchair-borne General.
- The Karnataka Cabinet approved the **Sandhya Kiran Scheme**, a contributory cashless health coverage initiative under Ayushman Bharat–Arogya Karnataka (AB-ArK) for state pensioners under 70 and their dependents. Implemented by the Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust, the scheme offers ₹5 lakh in annual cashless secondary and tertiary medical coverage to nearly 5 lakh beneficiaries via a shared 70:30 beneficiary-state funding framework.
- The Andhra Pradesh Government signed a ₹140-crore agreement with the Hyderabad-headquartered CSIR–National Geophysical Research Institute (CSIR-NGRI) for detailed exploration of critical mineral deposits (Lithium and Gallium) in the Vempalle region of the Kadapa Basin. Entirely funded by the National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET), the project builds on preliminary NGRI findings indicating concentrations of up to 1,000 ppm Lithium and 250 ppm Gallium. Additionally, the state partnered with IIT (ISM) Dhanbad–TEXMiN to establish a Centre of Excellence for mining technology and research in Andhra Pradesh.
- A US White House report on shadow transshipment networks identified India's **Pune–Gujarat–Chennai industrial corridor** as a key transit route allegedly used to reroute China-linked pumps and compressors (HS codes 8413–8414) into the US market. In response, the New Delhi-based Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) refuted the claims using trade data, demonstrating that India possesses robust, legitimate domestic manufacturing capabilities—exporting \$1.61 billion in liquid pumps (\$414.5 million to the US vs. \$326.4 million imported from China) and \$1.48 billion in air pumps/gas compressors (\$335.4 million to the US) in FY2026.
- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) performance audit (covering 16 States/UTs from FY 2015–16 to 2024–25) flagged critical implementation gaps in the **National Mission for a Green India (GIM)**:
 - **Massive Physical Shortfalls:** Against a 1.4-million-hectare target for forest quality improvement, only 0.11384 million hectares were achieved (a 91.87% shortfall). Expansion of forest cover reached just 0.03409 million hectares against a 1.4-million-hectare target (a 97.57% shortfall).
 - **Financial & Structural Bottlenecks:** Budgetary receipts amounted to ₹1,149.14 crore (only 47.88% of expected support) due to poor convergence with schemes like CAMPA, MGNREGS, and Nagar Van Yojana, posing challenges to achieving India's NDC target of an additional 2.5–3 billion tonnes \$CO_2\$ equivalent carbon sink by 2030.
- The Union Government formally opposed extending the "creamy layer" principle to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) reservations. Pushing back against petitions seeking income-based exclusion following observations in the 2024 *State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh* judgment, the Centre detailed key legal and social grounds for its stance:

- **Nature of Backwardness:** SC/ST reservations address centuries of historical oppression, untouchability, and deep-rooted social stigma rather than mere economic deprivation. Economic mobility does not eliminate systemic caste-based discrimination.
- **Separation of Powers:** Under Articles 341(2) and 342(2), only Parliament holds the authority to alter or modify Presidential lists of SCs and STs. The executive maintained that judicial directions cannot dictate affirmative action policies without explicit empirical studies and legislative action.