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BELIEVERS MANTRA

- ✓ **EU Parliament Resolution:**
A Misguided Diagnosis of the Manipur Issue
- ✓ **Urban Flooding:**
A Growing Menace Amid Changing Climate Patterns
- ✓ **India-France Strategic Partnership**
- ✓ **Digital Personal Data Protection Bill**



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HISTORY AND ART AND CULTURE

India's Demographic Transition: Unravelling the Transformative Journey of Women

Context:

India's population, which burgeoned from 340 million at Independence to a staggering 1.4 billion, has been deeply influenced by advancements in public health, receding starvation, and medical breakthroughs. This decline in mortality rates has not only resulted in longer life expectancies for men, reaching an average of 69 years but has also triggered an unforeseen shift in reproductive patterns. Consequently, as India witnesses a decline in fertility rates from 5.7 in 1950 to 2.1 in 2019, it becomes imperative to examine the multifaceted impact of this demographic transition, particularly on women.

Relevance:

GS-01 (Role of women, Social empowerment, Issues related to women)

Prelims:

- Glass Ceiling
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
- Ujjawala Yojna
- Swadhar Greh
- One Stop Centre
- Constitutional Provisions Related to Women's Empowerment

Mains question:

- Assess the implications of early marriage and early childbirth on women's labour force participation. Analyze the factors that hinder women from accessing skilled occupations and gaining work experience. (250 words)

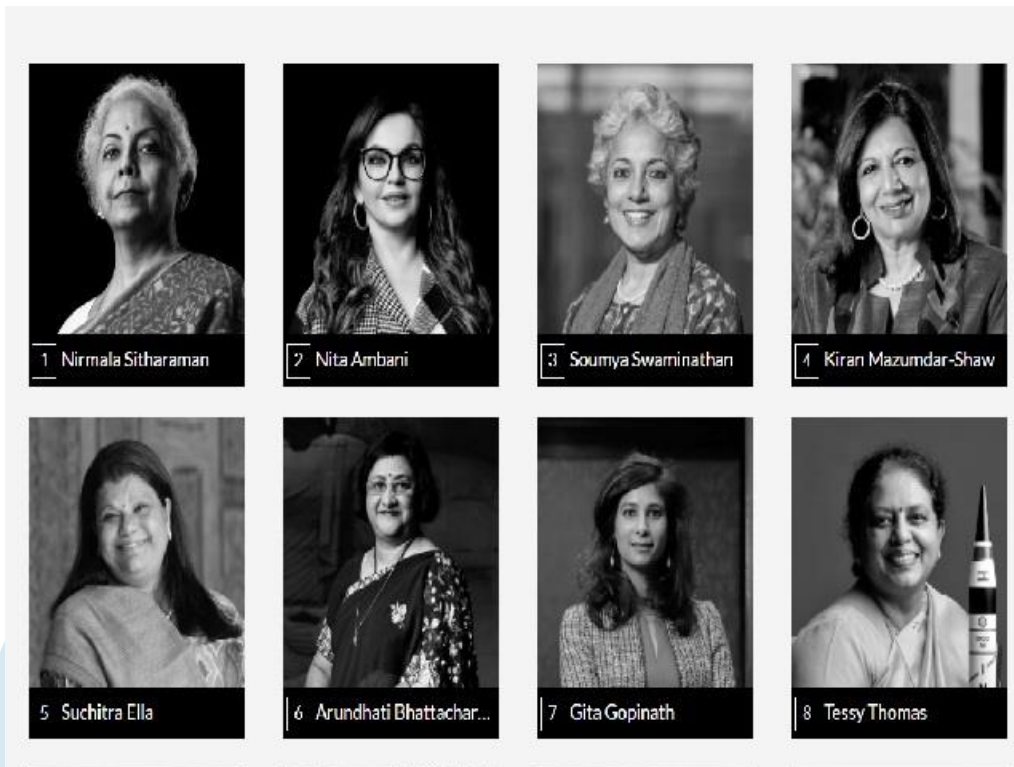
Dimensions of the Article:

- Change for Indian Women
- Implications of Declining Fertility Rates
- Implications at Older Ages
- Harnessing the Gender Dividend
- Practical Strategies for Enhancing Childcare Access

Change for Indian Women:

- The traditional preference for sons becomes challenging due to declining fertility rates and smaller family sizes- Previously, with four children, the likelihood of not having a son was only 6%, but with the shift towards smaller families of two children, this probability has surged to 25%. This shift poses a significant challenge to the fulfilment of the traditional preference for at least one son.
- Increase in sex-selective abortions and neglect of ailing daughters- In response to the growing difficulty in ensuring the birth of a son, social norms, patrilocal kinship patterns, and financial insecurities have reinforced the preference for sons. Consequently, parents have resorted to sex-selective abortions, leading to a decline in the sex ratio of girls to boys aged under five from 96 to 91 between 1950 and 2019.

Implications of Declining Fertility Rates:



- Reduced time spent actively mothering, creating opportunities for education and employment- As fertility rates decline and families have fewer children, women have more time available for pursuits beyond active mothering. This has opened up opportunities for women to pursue education and engage in the workforce, thereby expanding their horizons beyond traditional domestic roles.
- Decrease in years spent caring for children under five (14 years to 8 years) and children aged six to 15 (20 years to 14 years). With declining fertility rates, the duration women spend caring for young children has significantly decreased. This shift allows women to allocate their time and energy to other endeavours such as education, skill development, and career growth.
- Early marriage and early childbirth continue to dominate women's lives, hindering labour force participation and skilled occupations. Despite the positive changes brought about by declining fertility rates, early marriage and early childbirth persist as prevailing practices.
- This cultural phenomenon restricts women's opportunities for higher education, skill acquisition, and meaningful participation in the labour force, limiting their access to skilled occupations and economic empowerment.

Implications at Older Ages:

- The remarkable improvements in public health and increased life expectancies have led to a significant demographic shift, with a larger proportion of women living beyond the age of 65.
- Widowed women face financial dependence on children, perpetuating son preference. Women generally marry older men and are more likely to outlive their husbands.

- Consequently, a significant number of women find themselves widowed in their older years, often facing financial challenges and a lack of access to savings and property. This dependence on children, predominantly sons, reinforces the cycle of son preference and limits the autonomy and well-being of older women.

Harnessing the Gender Dividend:

- Addressing deeply entrenched **patriarchal norms** requires sustained efforts to empower women and reduce their reliance on sons.
- Enhancing women's access to employment opportunities, assets, and resources can break the cycle of gendered disadvantage.
- However, unlike East Asian nations that have experienced delayed or forgone marriages and childbirth, early marriage and early childbearing remain prevalent in Indian women's lives, necessitating focused interventions.

Practical Strategies for Enhancing Childcare Access:

- **Recognizing staffing crèches as acceptable work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS)** can improve access to childcare services.
- Leveraging the self-help group movement to establish community-based childcare centres in urban and rural areas can enhance accessibility.
- Ensuring affordable and quality childcare facilities is crucial for promoting women's labour force participation and reducing barriers to employment.

Conclusion:

India's demographic transition has undeniably reshaped the lives of its citizens, especially women. The decline in fertility rates has brought about both positive and negative consequences, altering societal expectations and creating opportunities for education and employment. However, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms continue to impede progress, maintaining early marriage, and early childbirth as predominant forces in women's lives. Breaking free from this cycle necessitates empowering women through enhanced access to childcare facilities, education, and assets. By embracing these strategies, India can truly unlock its demographic and gender dividends, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all its citizens.

Repatriating Colonial Artefacts - A Moral Imperative

Context:

The recent announcement that the Netherlands will return 484 stolen artefacts to Indonesia and Sri Lanka, including the renowned "Lombok treasure" and the bronze-and-gilt cannon of Kandy, has reignited the debate on the rightful ownership of cultural artefacts plundered during the era of colonialism. The analysis delves into the complexities surrounding the issue and examines whether colonial countries should continue to retain these treasures or take the moral path of restitution.

Relevance:

GS-01 (History)

Mains Question:

- Discuss the ethical dimensions of retaining cultural artefacts looted during colonial times. Should colonial countries return these artefacts to their original homelands? Substantiate your views with relevant examples and arguments.

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Moral Obligation of Restitution
- Beyond Financial Reparations
- Symbolic Value and Historical Injustice
- A Comprehensive Approach

The Moral Obligation of Restitution:

- The refusal of colonial powers to return precious artefacts, such as the Elgin Marbles and the Rosetta Stone, showcases their reluctance to acknowledge the misappropriation that occurred during the colonial period.
- While some concessions, like repatriating the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, have been made, the British, in particular, have been reticent about returning Indian artefacts.
- This raises the question of whether colonial countries should relinquish their hold on these stolen cultural treasures and full fill their moral obligation to their former colonies.



Beyond Financial Reparations:

- It is essential to recognize that returning stolen property does not absolve the trauma and atrocities inflicted during colonialism. The agony endured by the colonized populations cannot be erased through belated restitution alone.
- However, repatriation serves as a moral obligation owed by the West to its colonies. Just as financial reparations symbolize acknowledging the wealth amassed through colonial exploitation, returning cultural artefacts represent a semblance of justice and atonement.

Symbolic Value and Historical Injustice:

- The return of looted treasures from India, such as the Kohinoor diamond and sculptures from the Amaravati stupa, would serve as a potent symbolic gesture. While the financial reparations extracted from India have been spent, these individual pieces of art hold immense symbolic value.
- The restitution of Nazi-era art to rightful owners exemplifies the principle of returning looted cultural objects. Likewise, retaining the Kohinoor on the Queen Mother's crown perpetuates the narrative of colonial plunder and misappropriation, underscoring the need for its return.

A Comprehensive Approach:

- Merely returning stolen artefacts is insufficient to address the repercussions of colonialism. To achieve true atonement, a multifaceted approach is imperative.
- British colonial history should be taught unadulterated in schools across the United Kingdom, fostering an understanding of the country's colonial legacy.
- Allocating British tax money to establish a museum in the capital that chronicles the horrors and iniquities of colonialism would serve as a constant reminder of the past.
- A formal apology from the British government to the victims of colonialism, akin to Willy Brandt's gesture in Warsaw, would demonstrate a willingness to confront historical responsibility.

Way Forward:

To rectify the injustices of colonialism, colonial countries must prioritize true atonement over financial compensation. This entails returning stolen cultural artefacts, teaching accurate colonial history, establishing a museum dedicated to colonialism, and expressing sincere apologies. Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's apology for the Komagata Maru incident offers a valuable precedent. However, the British government's intransigence and fear of setting a precedent hinder progress. Britain must emulate Trudeau's example and embark on a genuine path of moral atonement.

Conclusion:

The restitution of cultural artefacts looted during the colonial period represents a moral imperative for colonial countries. Repatriation alone cannot undo the deep-rooted trauma caused by colonialism, but it serves as a crucial step towards acknowledging historical wrongs. By returning stolen treasures, teaching accurate colonial history, establishing a museum, and expressing genuine apologies, colonial powers can embark on a journey of true atonement. The world watches with hope, as the restoration of justice and reconciliation is long overdue.

Revisiting the Indus Waters Treaty: A Path to Sustainable Water Management

Context:

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960, is an agreement between India and Pakistan regulating the use of the Indus River and its tributaries.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (India and its Neighbourhood) (Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests)

Prelims:

- Article IX of the IWT.
- Indus and its tributaries.

Mains Questions:

- Examine the recent judicial recourse taken by Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) and its implications for India-Pakistan water relations and discuss the challenges posed by climate change to the current water allocation mechanisms under the IWT. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:



- The Indus Waters Treaty - Cooperation Amid Tensions.
- Addressing Disputes through Judicial Recourse.
- Future Water Supply Concerns.
- The Flawed Partitioning Logic.
- Embracing Equitable and Reasonable Utilization (ERU) and No Harm Rule (NHR).
- Prioritizing ERU and NHR.
- Revisiting the Indus Waters Treaty.

The Indus Waters Treaty - Cooperation Amid Tensions

- The Indus Waters Treaty (1960) has stood the test of time, fostering cooperation between India and Pakistan despite their strained relations.
- It has survived multiple conflicts and offered a detailed framework for dispute resolution. However, recent years have witnessed an increase in judicial recourse to settle disputes arising from India's construction of hydroelectric projects on the Indus tributaries.

Addressing Disputes through Judicial Recourse

- Recently, Pakistan initiated arbitration at the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration concerning the design elements of two hydroelectric projects on the Kishanganga and Chenab rivers.
- India objected, preferring a neutral expert process. Nevertheless, the court ruled in favour of Pakistan, asserting its competence to address the disputes.

Future Water Supply Concerns

- While the recourse to judicial measures may appear rational in a climate of mistrust, it is insufficient to meet the growing industrial, food, and energy needs of both countries.
- The IWT provides some certainty for future water supplies but lacks the flexibility to adapt to changing water availability due to climate change.

The Flawed Partitioning Logic

- The IWT's partitioning of the rivers into eastern and western basins overlooks the need to treat the entire river basin as one unit to enhance resource capacity.
- This approach, rooted in optimal water use, clashes with Pakistan's perspective of uninterrupted water flow to its side.

Embracing Equitable and Reasonable Utilization (ERU) and No Harm Rule (NHR)

- Reconciling divergent approaches can be achieved by incorporating the principles of ERU and NHR into the IWT.
- ERU aims for fair and reasonable water utilization, considering factors like climate change.
- The NHR obliges riparian states onto undertaker projects with transboundary effects to prevent harm to other riparian states.

Prioritizing ERU and NHR

- Both India and Pakistan claim their water uses align with the IWT. However, in times of conflicting interests, Article 10 of the 1997 Convention suggests prioritizing "vital human needs" concerning ERU and NHR.
- Although debatable, including these principles in the IWT could foster greater alignment.

Revisiting the Indus Waters Treaty

- Considering the lack of trust between India and Pakistan, the World Bank, a party to the IWT, can play a vital role in forming a transnational alliance of epistemic communities to develop convergent state policies.
- This collaboration may lead to the inclusion of ERU and NHR in the IWT, enhancing predictability for both nations.

Way Forward:

Revisiting the Indus Waters Treaty is an essential step towards ensuring sustainable water management in the region. By incorporating the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization and the no-harmful, India and Pakistan can move towards a shared vision of responsible water use, addressing future challenges posed by climate change and promoting cooperation.

Conclusion:

The Indus Waters Treaty has been a beacon of cooperation amidst the tensions between India and Pakistan. However, the increasing reliance on judicial recourse to resolve disputes highlights the need for a more flexible and adaptable approach. Integrating the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization and the non-harmful into the IWT can pave the way for sustainable water management and foster greater understanding between the riparian states. As the region faces the challenges of a changing climate, revisiting the treaty becomes an imperative step in securing a water-secure future for both nations.

Gita Press a living faith, no less than a temple, says PM Modi

Context:

On Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the Gita Press' centenary celebrations in Gorakhpur. He compared the publishing business to "not less than any temple" during the concluding ceremony. In his words, the publisher is "guiding humanity" with its work.

All about Gita Press

- The **largest publisher of Hindu holy books worldwide** is an Indian publishing house called **Gita Press**.
- To advance the ideals of **Sanatana Dharma** (everlasting duty or virtue), **Jaya Dayal Goyanka and Ghanshyam Das Jalan** established this organisation in **1923**.



- **Hanuman Prasad Poddar** also referred to as "**Bhaiji**," founded and served as the journal "**Kalyan**"'s longtime editor.
- With an **initial readership of 1,600 copies**, Gita Press **began its publishing operations in 1927**.
- **Gita Press grew significantly over time; by 2012**, their print order had risen to 250,000 copies.
- Over **3,500 manuscripts**, including more than **100 translations of the famed Hindu text Bhagavad Gita**, can be found in the Gita Press

archives.

- Under the **Societies Registration Act, of 1860** (now controlled by the **West Bengal Societies Act, 1960**), Gita Press works as a division of **Gobind Bhawan Karyalaya**.
- The **Bhagavad Gita** and the **Ramcharitmanas**, an **epic poem by Tulsidas**, have both been distributed at heavily discounted prices by the organisation more than 140 million and 100 million copies, respectively.

Why did the Indian government award the Gita press with International Gandhi Peace Prize?

- In 2023, Gita Press celebrated its 100th anniversary. On May 4, 2023, former President Ram Nath Kovind officially launched the celebrations.
- The **centenary of Gita Press** was acknowledged in 2023 by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi**.
- One of the **biggest publishers in the world**, **Gita Press** is renowned for putting out religious and philosophical works, including the **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita**.
- In **14 languages**, **41.7 billion volumes**, including **16.21 billion copies of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita**, have been produced.
- To generate cash for its publications, Gita Press does not rely on advertisements.
- The institution, along with the organisations it is linked with, strives to improve everyone's quality of life.
- **Gita Press** has been chosen as the **Gandhi Peace Prize recipient** for 2021 by the panel, which is **chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi**.
- The honour recognises Gita Press's extraordinary commitment to nonviolent and other Gandhian techniques for social, economic, and political development.
- **Gita Press** received **praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi** for its **advocacy of Gandhi's principles of social justice and peace**.
- **Gita Press** receiving the **Gandhi Peace Prize** on the occasion of its 100th anniversary is **considered an acknowledgement of the institution's work in charitable activity**.

What is International Gandhi Peace Prize?

- **Establishment:** To commemorate the 125th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, the Government of India established the **International Gandhi Peace Prize in 1995**.
- **Purpose:** The prize honours those who have contributed to **social, economic, and political change via nonviolence and Gandhian principles** and **pays homage to the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi**.
- **The award consists of** The cash reward for the award is one crore rupees (\$130,000), which can be exchanged for any other currency. In addition, a plaque and a citation are included.
- **Eligibility:** No matter a person's country of origin, colour, religion, or gender, they are eligible to receive the honour.
- **Process of Nomination:** Typically, proposals from knowledgeable people are requested to propose candidates for the award. A proposition, however, is not automatically deemed invalid just because its author lacked competence.
- **Withholding of the prize:** The jury has the option to withhold the prize for that specific year if they decide that none of the proposed proposals deserves to be recognised. This occurred between 2006 and 2012, during which time the award was not given.
- **Consideration of Timeframe:** For the prize, only accomplishments from the ten years just before the nomination are taken into consideration. However, an older work might also be taken into consideration if its significance has recently come to light.
- **Recognition of Gandhian Principles:** The **International Gandhi Peace Prize** is a venue for **celebrating and advancing Mahatma Gandhi's values of nonviolence, peace, and social transformation**.
- **Impactful Contributions:** In keeping with Mahatma Gandhi's teachings and philosophy, the award honours people and organisations that have made remarkable nonviolent contributions to society, the economy, and politics.

Who selects the recipients, and who are the prior winners?

- **Selection Jury:** The selection of the awardee is made by a jury consisting of the following members:
 1. **Prime Minister of India**
 2. **Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament)**
 3. **Chief Justice of India**
 4. **Speaker of the Lok Sabha**
 5. **One other eminent person**
- The **inaugural Gandhi Peace Prize was awarded to Julius Kambarage Nyerere**. He was a politician from Tanzania who presided over Tanganyika and Tanzania from 1960 until his retirement in 1985.
- In the past, important entities including the **ISRO, Ramakrishna Mission, Grameen Bank of Bangladesh**, and people like **Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Vaclav Havel** have received the honour.

Archaeologists come up with rare findings in Tamil Nadu

Context:

In Tamil Nadu's Pudukottai district, where the State Archaeology Department has started excavation this year, archaeologists have found a gold stud, a bone point, and a carnelian bead.

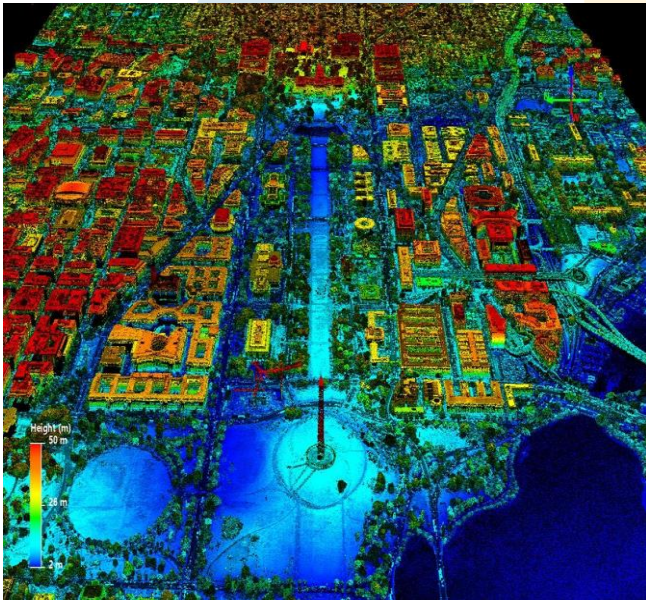
What were the artefacts found in Pudukottai?

Gold Stud:

- In one of the trenches, it was discovered at a depth of 133 cm.
- has a six-petal flower pattern.
- It is reported to have been used as a nose stud and weighs 0.26 grammes.
- reveals the Sangam Age's cultural customs.

Bone Point:

- Found in another trench at a depth of 140–160 cm.
- has carved pointy tips on both sides.
- probably employed in weaving.



Carnelian Bead:

- A broken fragment of this red, spherical carnelian bead was found between 140 and 160 centimetres below the surface.
- Domestic trade is linked to carnelian beads.
- Gujarat-made beads with a similar design have been discovered in other Tamil Nadu sites.

Where were the digs that uncovered all of these artefacts?

- About 6.5 km to the east of Pudukottai town is Porpanaikottai.
- The location was chosen for excavation based on earlier research utilising Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), a technique for distant sensing, which revealed the existence of

a fort.

- Within the fort, a 1.26-hectare dwelling mound is the subject of the ongoing excavation.
- Eight trenches have been created, six of which are in three different people's homes.
- The excavation is being carried out by 35 labourers and research academics A. Sudhakar, S. Munusamy, and S. Bharath under the direction of Mr Thangadurai, the Excavation Director.

What is LIDAR used in these excavations?

- (Light Detection and Ranging) technique for locating far-off objects and figuring out their location, speed, volume, or other details by examining the pulsed laser light that bounces off of their surfaces. Position of an object or person about true north; also known as LADAR.
- There are two types of LIDARs used.
- Airborne LiDAR
 - LiDAR sensors are mounted to drones or aircraft for airborne LiDAR.

- The target surfaces emit laser beams that are then reflected by them.
 - Distances are calculated by measuring the amount of time it takes the laser to return.
 - **Accurate 3D models of the terrain or objects are produced when GPS and inertial measurement devices** are combined.
 - Archaeologists **can find hidden cultural features** by using **airborne LiDAR, which can cut through vegetation.**
 - It offers comprehensive aerial panoramas of the entire archaeological site.
 - **Using LiDAR data**, archaeologists can **spot trends**, comprehend the **context of the surrounding environment, and organise focused digs.**
 - It **aids in the tracing of ancient cities, highways, and buried constructions.**
 - Analysis of the relationships between various features inside a place is aided by **airborne LiDAR data.**
 - It offers a **non-intrusive and effective way to gather data across vast distances.**
- **Ground-based LiDAR:**
 - **Portable LiDAR systems** mounted on tripods or moving objects are used in **ground-based LiDAR.**
 - It enables exact **three-dimensional reproductions of historic buildings or artefacts.**
 - A variety of scan angles are used to **produce thorough 3D representations of the target.**
 - LiDAR which is based on the **ground can provide precise details** on an **object's dimensions, shape, and spatial relationships.**
 - It makes it possible to survey and record archaeological sites precisely.
 - **LiDAR data** can be used to **document failing or vulnerable structures** digitally for preservation purposes.
 - Ancient structures can be **virtually reconstructed** with the **help of ground-based LiDAR.**
 - It helps with **architectural analysis, comprehending building methods,** and researching cultural elements.
 - Archaeologists can use **LiDAR to spot minute changes in the topography or surface features** that might point to buried or concealed structures.

So Concluding, The **Sangam Age fort at Porpanaikottai** in Tamil Nadu structural details, commercial ties, and cultural practices are all well-understood via the lens of these discoveries.

People Stranded In The Lahaul-Spiti District

Context:

Even as torrential rain stopped on Wednesday, speeding up the rescue efforts, at least 293 people remained stranded in the Chandertal Lake region in the Himachal Pradesh tribal district of Lahaul-Spiti. To assess the damage brought on by the persistent rain, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu flew over Sissu, Chandertal, and Losar in the tribal Lahaul-Spiti district and Manali region of Kullu district.

What do we know of Lahaul-Spiti?

- **Kyelang in Lahaul** serves as the **administrative hub**.
- Before the merger, the capitals of Lahaul and Spiti were respectively Dhankar and Kardang.
- Geographically, the district is situated between the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayas.
- Through the **Rohtang Pass and the Kunzum Pass**, it is connected to Manali and the Spiti Valley, respectively.
- With an average elevation of 4,270 meters, **Spiti is a deserted, arid alpine region**.
- Southeast of the Sutlej River, the Spiti River passes through a gorge.
- The **region shares a strong cultural bond with Tibet's Ngari Prefecture**.
- The Lahaul and Spiti district is renowned for its historic monasteries, charming rural communities, and lively regional celebrations.
- It has a **low population density and is the fourth least populated district in India**.



Which Tribes are situated in Lahaul-Spiti?

1. Origin and population:

1. The Lahaula tribal group is mainly concentrated in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti districts.
2. They are of mixed ancestry and are thought to have Tibetan and indigenous Munda tribe ancestry.
3. The community can be found in places like Lahaul Valley, Pattan, Chamba-Lahaul, and the lower Mayar valleys.

2. Language and dialects:

1. The Lahaula community uses the Manchati, Manchad, Patni, Chamba, Chamba Lahuli, Lahuli, Swangla, and Changsapa Boli languages.
2. Additionally, several Lahaula tribal tribes speak various varieties of this language.

3. Trade:

1. The bulk of the Lahaula community works in agriculture as their main line of work.
2. Some residents of the hamlet are also involved in trading, sending goods to cities like Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) such wheat, barley, and 'Kuth', a type of herb.

4. Social Class:

1. There are top and lower classes in the Lahaula society, which is composed of people from the Brahmin, Thakurs, Lohar, and Dagi tribes.
2. In the Lahaula tribal society, conjugal unions between members of the same clan are permitted.

5. Religion and customs:

1. The majority of the population of the Lahaula group practice a blend of Buddhism and Hinduism.
2. An important religious landmark that is frequented by both Hindus and Buddhists is the Trilokinath temple.

6. Traditional Attire and Ornaments:

1. The Lahaula people have a distinctive sense of style and dress in vibrant clothing as part of their traditional customs.
2. Within their culture, traditional decorations have also been given significance.

7. Cultural Significance:

1. The Lahaula tribal community has a rich cultural past, which includes a variety of dance styles, music genres, fairs, and festivals.
2. The distinctiveness and beauty of their community are reflected in these cultural customs.

8. Scheduled Tribe Status:

1. The Lahaula community has been recognized by the Indian government's reservation policy as a Scheduled Tribe as of 2001.
2. They are eligible for specific benefits and affirmative action policies in terms of political representation, employment, and education thanks to this designation.
3. The reservation program attempts to close the socioeconomic gap and improve the social and economic conditions of neglected people, especially tribes.

What is happening in that region now?

1. The situation in the Lahaul-Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, the area around Chandertal Lake:

1. Due to significant snowfall and rain, at least 293 individuals were left stranded in the Chandertal Lake region.
2. To evaluate the damage brought on by the rain, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu performed an airborne inspection of the impacted areas, including Sissu, Chandertal, Losar, and Manali.
3. The State administration was maintaining the security of the camps housing the trapped people.
4. The administration was trying to help and rescue the stranded people despite the difficult circumstances.

5. The majority of the tourists and residents stranded in the Spiti Valley had already been evacuated, and it was anticipated that the last few people would soon be saved.

2. Rescue and relief efforts:

1. Chief Minister Sukhu was personally keeping an eye on the situation and making sure that the stranded individuals received the necessary aid.
2. 52 Kullu-bound schoolchildren were successfully rescued by the administration from Sissu, Lahaul.

3. Impact of Heavy Rainfall in Himachal Pradesh:

1. From June 24 to July 11, Himachal Pradesh saw 32 instances of flash flooding and 51 landslides.
2. 88 individuals died as a result of the natural disasters, and 16 more were listed as missing.

A fascinating fusion of rock art in A.P.'s Rudragiri

Context

The remarkable fusion of Mesolithic prehistoric rock art and beautiful Kakatiya dynasty artwork is revealed at the Rudragiri hilltop location. The significance of this undiscovered treasure was clarified by D. Kanna Babu, former Superintending Archaeologist of the Temple Survey Project (Southern Region) at the Archaeological Survey of India. He shared his findings with The Hindu.

What paintings were found at the RudraGiri sites?

At the slopes of Rudragiri, five naturally occurring rock shelters once housed people during the Mesolithic era. Prehistoric rock art from that time can be seen in these shelters.

- **First Cave:** Beginning at the southern tip of the hillock, the first cave displays a narrative fresco illustrating the fierce conflict between the Vanara brothers, Vali and Sugriva.
- **Middle Cave:** A magnificent drawing of Hanuman, the venerable monkey god, clutching the Sanjivani hill in his palm as a representation of his quest to save Lakshmana's life, can be seen there. The sacred conch (Sankha) and fire altar (Yagna Vedi) emblems are presented beside the drawing.
- **Third cave:** Prehistoric rock art from the Mesolithic period is kept in the third cave. Curiously, the Kakatiya artist used the same rock shelter to superimpose the image of Hanuman in the unusual "Anjali" pose, with his hands folded in a prayerful offering.

What did we know of the Kakatiya period?

- **Background Information:** From the 12th through the 14th century, the Telugu-speaking Kakatiya dynasty dominated the majority of present-day India's eastern Deccan region.
- **Area:** The Kakatiya territory included a large portion of what is now Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, as well as slivers of eastern Karnataka, northern Tamil Nadu, and southern Odisha.

- **Capital:** Orugallu, presently known as Warangal, served as their capital city.
- **Early monarchs:** For more than two centuries, the Rashtrakutas and Western Chalukyas were feudatories of the early Kakatiya monarchs.



- **Prataparudra I rule:** In 1163 CE, the Kakatiyas consolidated their control over the Telangana region by putting down other Chalukya subordinates.

- **Ganapathi Deva:** Under Ganapati Deva (r. 1199–1262), the Kakatiya domains were greatly expanded in the 1230s. He gave Kakatiya power over the Telugu-speaking lowland delta regions near the Godavari and Krishna rivers.

- **Decline and Consequences:** After the Kakatiya kingdom fell, there was

chaos and instability under numerous alien kings. The Telugu clans were eventually united by the Musunuri Nayaks, who also liberated Warangal from the Delhi Sultanate.

- **Cultural unification:** The Kakatiyas were instrumental in bringing the distinctive upland and lowland civilizations of Telugu territories together. As a result, Telugu speakers began to experience a sense of cultural kinship.
- **Reservoirs for irrigation:** The Kakatiyas were renowned for building reservoirs known as "tanks" for highland irrigation. These tanks are still in use in large numbers today.
- **Unique Architecture:** During the Kakatiya era, a unique architectural style that enhanced and innovated on preexisting styles arose. The Thousand Pillar Temple at Hanamkonda, the Ramappa Temple in Palampet, the Warangal Fort, the Golconda Fort, and the Kota Gullu in Ghanpur are notable examples. These buildings are outstanding illustrations of Kakatiya's architectural accomplishments.

What do we understand of the Mesolithic life led here?

- **Mesolithic Rock Paintings:** At the foothills of Rudragiri, five naturally occurring rock shelters once housed people during the Mesolithic era. Prehistoric rock art from that time can be seen in these shelters.
- **Artistic Techniques:** The Mesolithic rock paintings were made utilizing the creative methods of the time, and they provide important insights into the way of life, the culture, and the aesthetic expressions of the Mesolithic people.

What does the art found in this region tell us?

- In addition, the Kakatiya dynasty, which governed the area in the 13th century A.D., **left beautiful murals in two natural caves at the southern end of the mound.**
- The Kakatiya artworks are examples of the time's best artists. Even while some paintings have deteriorated over time from exposure to the elements, surviving sketches and outlines show the Kakatiya artists' amazing artistry.
- The **Kakatiya paintings are decorated with a range of hues** made from white kaolin and various pigments, enhancing their brightness and richness.

- **Ramayana is shown in the Kakatiya paintings**, which offer insights into the **cultural themes and oral traditions of the time**. These paintings generally show enthralling scenes from the epic Ramayana. The paintings are embellished with various colours made from white kaolin and other pigments.
- The **Kakatiya dynasty's art reflects their worldview**, which was predominantly **Hinduism. Hindu deities' temples** were built, and they were ornamented with reliefs and sculptures showing **scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata**, among other Hindu epics. These pieces of **art shed light on the important mythical stories and religious rituals of the time**.

In conclusion, the Rudragiri hilltop is a notable archaeological site that exhibits Mesolithic rock art as well as the artistic genius of the Kakatiya dynasty. Visitors can dig into the region's ancient past with its remarkable fusion of historical accounts and creative manifestations.





DEFENCE AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Artificial Intelligence

Context:

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has brought forth concerns about its potential impact on job security.

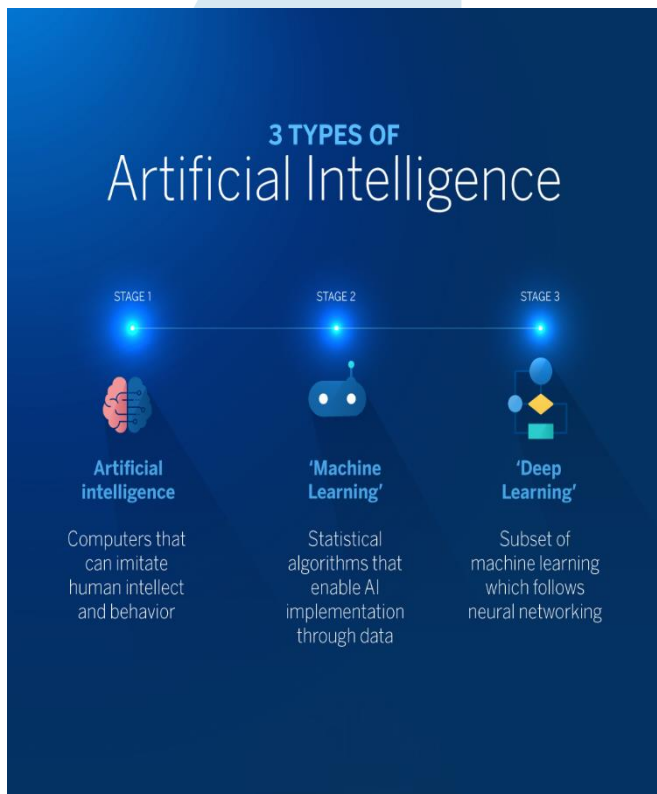
Relevance:

GS-03 (Artificial Intelligence, IT & Computers, Scientific innovations & discoveries)
GS-02 (Government Policies & Intervention)

Mains Questions:

- Discuss the potential adverse impacts of AI on employment and income distribution, providing evidence and highlighting the challenges it poses to society and the way forward. (250 words)

What is AI?



- AI, short for Artificial Intelligence, refers to the capacity of computers or robots controlled by computers to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence and judgment.
- While there is currently no AI system that can replicate the broad range of capabilities possessed by humans, certain AI technologies can match or even surpass humans in specific tasks.
- One of the key characteristics of artificial intelligence is its ability to reason and make decisions aimed at achieving a particular objective.
- Machine Learning (ML) is a subset of AI that plays a significant role in this regard. ML algorithms leverage techniques such as Deep Learning (DL) to autonomously learn and process vast volumes of unstructured data, including text, images, or videos.
- This automatic learning process enables AI systems to extract meaningful insights and patterns from complex datasets.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Positive effects of AI adoption
- Employment Challenges and Distributional Concerns

I. Positive effects of AI adoption:

The advent of Large Language Models and Generative AI has sparked global interest, with platforms like ChatGPT captivating users with their versatile applications. Ethical debates surrounding generative AI have subsided as users realize the productivity advantages they

hold over non-users. However, concerns regarding worker replacements and economic repercussions echo the transformative nature of AI, much like the early days of the internet.

- **Boosting Productivity: A Paradigm Shift:**

In a study titled "**Generative AI at Work**," MIT economists demonstrated that AI tools elevated worker productivity by 14% and led to improved customer satisfaction among over 5,000 customer support agents in the Philippines. This positive impact suggests that AI may not replace employees outright, but rather empower those who embrace upskilling through the use of generative AI.

- **Transforming Workforce Dynamics: Views from the Field**

A recent survey conducted among employees of LinkedIn's top 50 companies in the United States revealed that nearly 70% of respondents experienced AI-powered tools enhancing their speed, intelligence, and overall productivity. Furthermore, 32% anticipated even greater gains from AI over the next five years. MIT Professor Erik Brynjolfsson emphasizes the need for restructuring business processes and increased investments to fully leverage AI's potential for enhanced productivity.

- **A Global Economic Impetus: Projections and Possibilities**

Numerous studies paint an optimistic picture of AI's impact on global growth. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) forecasts a 14% increase in global GDP, amounting to \$15.7 trillion by 2030, driven by ongoing advancements in AI technology. Goldman Sachs Research suggests that generative AI alone could raise global GDP by 7%, approximately \$7 trillion, over the next decade. It emphasizes the potential of generative AI to break communication barriers between humans and machines, thereby fostering positive macroeconomic effects.

- **Diverse Perspectives: Experts on AI's Economic Implications**

The Forum for the Kent A. Clark Center for Global Markets surveyed economic experts from the United States and Europe on the impact of AI on per capita income. Results indicate that 44% of U.S. experts and 34% of European experts anticipate a substantial increase in per capita income due to AI's influence. However, concerns linger as 46% of U.S. experts and 42% of European experts remain uncertain about the effects. Only a meager 2% believe that AI will have no significant impact. The potential hindrance of a ban on generative AI chatbots, acknowledged by 62% of European experts, further emphasizes the importance of innovation in this domain.

II. Employment Challenges and Distributional Concerns:

While the positive impacts of AI adoption are undeniable, experts caution against its potential adverse effects on employment and income distribution.

- **Labour Replacement: Automation and Its Consequences**

AI technologies, capable of automating repetitive tasks and even creative endeavors through generative AI, raise concerns about job displacement. Research conducted by MIT and Boston University suggests that **robot adoption has had a negative effect on workers, leading to reductions in labor share, employment rates, and wages.** The adverse effects disproportionately affect blue-collar workers and those with lower levels of education.

- **Wage Inequality and Automation: A Dual Relationship**

Studies indicate that changes in the U.S. wage structure over the last four decades are closely linked to automation and the decline of routine tasks. The reduced labor share and wages, particularly when productivity gains from automation are minimal, contribute to rising wage inequality. Distributional concerns arise as automation deepens the technological divide among firms, potentially leading to a winner-takes-all scenario.

- **Displacement and the Middle Class: Assessing the Impact**

AI's disruptive potential extends beyond the displacement of lower-paid jobs to middle-class, white-collar occupations. A Goldman Sachs analysis suggests that 15%-35% of U.S. jobs are exposed to automation. However, historical data indicates that

technological advancements have consistently created new positions, leading to employment growth. The precise impact of AI on the labor market remains uncertain.

Way Forward:

To navigate the complex terrain of AI's implications, governments must proactively address the challenges it presents. Key steps include:

1. **Cyber Regulations:** Strengthening policies and regulations to address the new challenges posed by AI, including data privacy, security, and ethical considerations.
2. **Balancing Returns:** Exploring tax measures to strike a balance between capital and labor returns, mitigating displacement and distributional effects.
3. **Embracing Education:** Focusing on AI education and training, harnessing the demographic dividend, and leveraging online learning platforms to seize new opportunities.

Conclusion:

Artificial intelligence has emerged as a transformative force across various sectors, driving productivity gains and fostering economic growth. While its positive impact on society is evident, concerns surrounding employment, income distribution, and societal challenges loom large. Governments and stakeholders must proactively address these challenges through effective regulations, balanced policies, and investments in education and training. By equipping ourselves with the latest tools and knowledge, we can harness the power of AI for the collective advancement of humanity, allaying fears of an impending robotic apocalypse.

Moving away from the 'take-make-dispose' model.

Context:

The article emphasizes the importance of decoupling resource utilization from economic growth and the need to shift from the traditional 'take-make-dispose' model to the more sustainable 'reduce-reuse-recycle' approach.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (Government Policies & Interventions)

GS - 03 (Environmental Pollution & Degradation) (Growth & Development) (Conservation)

Prelims:

- Circular Economy
- e-Waste Management Rules 2022
- EPR Certificates
- Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana

Mains Questions:

"Embracing Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy for Sustainable Development".
Comment. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Transitioning to a Circular Steel Sector

- Recycling, Bioeconomy, and Biofuels: Nurturing a Sustainable Waste Management System
- Industry Coalition

Transitioning to a Circular Steel Sector:

- In pursuit of net-zero ambitions and greenhouse gas emission reduction, most G-20 member nations are committed to environmentally responsible resource consumption. Recognizing the critical role of steel in infrastructure development and the surging demand in economies like India, it becomes imperative to enhance steel's efficient utilization.
- Currently, iron and steel production contribute approximately 7% of global energy sector emissions. A transformative shift towards a circular steel sector holds the key to address this environmental challenge.
- Encouraging collaboration among G-20 member countries is vital for knowledge sharing, technology co-development, and technology transfer. The blueprint for "Circular Economy in the Steel Sector," outlined in the G-20 presidency document, presents a potential pathway to achieve net-zero emissions in the steel industry.
- This strategic approach aims to reduce resource utilization and minimize wastage. Additionally, India's G-20 presidency emphasizes the significance of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework to integrate circularity throughout the value chain.
- The exchange of best practices among G-20 nations is crucial to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy.

Recycling, Bioeconomy, and Biofuels: Nurturing a Sustainable Waste Management System

- Effective implementation of the EPR framework plays a pivotal role in promoting recycling infrastructure growth and streamlining waste collection. India's impressive EPR framework boasts over 20,000 registered Producers, Importers, and Brand Owners (PIBOs), along with more than 1,900 plastic waste processors on the central portal. With a combined EPR obligation of over 3.07 million tons, India demonstrates its commitment to responsible waste management.
- The escalating consumption of biological resources in G-20 countries, which has surged 2.5 times since 1970, has sparked global concerns over biowaste management. Burning biowaste like municipal and industrial waste and agricultural residue causes pollution, biodiversity loss, and global warming. However, adopting a circular bioeconomy approach presents a sustainable solution. By utilizing biowaste as primary raw materials and substituting mineral resources, the need for virgin resource extraction can be significantly reduced.
- India has taken commendable steps towards biofuel adoption. The **Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana** offers financial support for second-generation (2G) ethanol projects that produce bioethanol from waste feedstock like crop residues and municipal solid waste. This initiative adds value to otherwise discarded resources. Furthermore, India has mandated coal-burning thermal power plants to blend 5% biomass pellets with coal, promoting greener practices.
- The **GOBAR Dhan scheme's** launch facilitates the conversion of cattle dung and organic waste into compost, biogas, and biofuels, fostering sustainable agriculture and pollution reduction. The Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Scheme accelerates the bioenergy sector's development by promoting Compressed BioGas (CBG) as an alternative green transportation fuel.



BUDGET 2018-19



Health

Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBAR-DHAN)

- ❑ For management and conversion of cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, fertilizer, bio-gas and bio-CNG
- ❑ To make our villages open defecation free and aimed at improving the life of our villagers



Industry Coalition:

- Industries play a pivotal role in advancing resource efficiency and circular economy practices. In line with this vision, India envisions an industry coalition to foster technological collaboration, enhance capabilities across sectors, mobilize de-risked finance, and promote proactive private sector engagement.
- This coalition seeks to fortify circular economy practices and drive sustainable development.

Way Forward:

In the quest to tackle triple planetary challenges, global platforms like the G-20 hold significant importance. Recognizing the potential of resource efficiency and circular economy as key solutions, India's G-20 presidency has placed significant emphasis on these approaches. By fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, and adopting a circular mindset, nations can pave promising pathways towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Conclusion:

As we strive for sustainable development, the adoption of resource efficiency and circular economy strategies emerges as a crucial endeavor. India's G-20 presidency exemplifies the commitment to these principles, focusing on transitioning to a circular steel sector, promoting recycling, bioeconomy, and biofuels, and envisioning an industry-led coalition for sustainability. By embracing these approaches with a collaborative spirit, nations can march towards a greener, more prosperous, and environmentally conscious future.

Controlled Human Infection Studies - Pioneering Ethical Frontiers in Medical Research

Context:

The Bioethics Unit of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has unveiled a visionary consensus policy statement on CHIS, sparking spirited discussions on the prospects and ethical implications of such studies within the scientific community.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Science and Technology)

GS-02 (Health)

Prelims:

Controlled Human Infection Studies (CHIS)

Mains Questions:

- What are Controlled Human Infection Studies (CHIS) and how have they been historically utilized in medical research? (150 words)
- What are the key ethical challenges associated with CHIS, and how can they be addressed? (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Historical Perspective of Controlled Human Infection Studies (CHIS)
- The Role of CHIS in Vaccine Development
- Ethical Challenges Surrounding CHIS

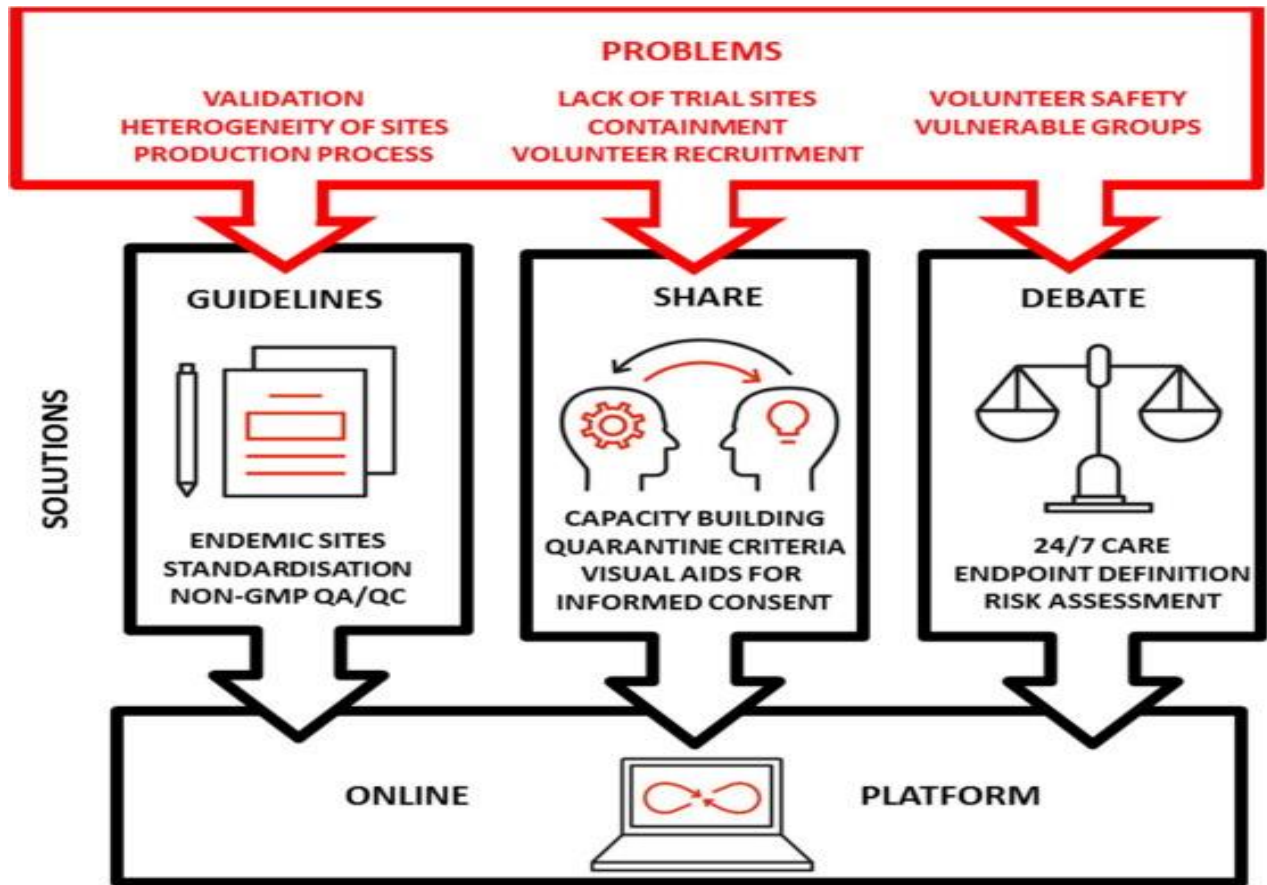
The Historical Perspective of Controlled Human Infection Studies (CHIS)

- In the realm of medical research, Controlled Human Infection Studies, also known as human challenge studies, have been a **significant tool for understanding infectious diseases**.
- One such landmark study dates back to the early 1900s, where a yellow fever study demonstrated the transmission of the virus through mosquitoes. Throughout history, researchers have employed less virulent strains of microbes to study diseases with established treatment options.
- These studies, conducted on a limited number of healthy volunteers, aimed to gain insights into various aspects of infection and disease progression. Moreover, they have occasionally acted as catalysts in expediting the development of medical interventions.

The Role of CHIS in Vaccine Development

- A vital application of human challenge studies is in the domain of vaccine development. However, it is crucial to note that CHIS should never serve as a replacement for phase-3 efficacy trials. Rather, they complement conventional phase-3 clinical trials by providing valuable information about candidate vaccines' safety and immune responses.
- Subsequently, phase-3 trials following CHIS often require fewer volunteers, streamlining the overall development process. For instance, in recent decades, CHIS studies have played a significant role in accelerating vaccine development against diseases such as typhoid and cholera.

- Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, CHIS was leveraged at the Imperial College London, with 36 volunteers, to study facets of the SARS-CoV-2 infection. The World Health Organization (WHO) itself recognized the potential of CHIS in expediting COVID-19 vaccine development, further validating its importance.



Ethical Challenges Surrounding CHIS

- While CHIS holds immense promise in advancing medical research, it is essential to acknowledge the ethical challenges that accompany this approach. Robust and well-trained systems are vital for ensuring the ethical conduct of these studies.
- Collaborations with reputable institutions and experienced scientists become imperative in navigating the complex ethical minefield. Past experiences, such as the HPV vaccine trial in Andhra Pradesh, have underscored the need for stringent oversight to avoid ethical violations.
- The magnitude of ethical challenges during CHIS is considerably higher, amplifying the risk of potential misuse. Monetary dimensions may tempt unscrupulous actors, necessitating a cautious approach in managing volunteer involvement. To mitigate such risks, any implementation of CHIS in India should strictly adhere to studying diseases with established safe and effective treatment.

Way Forward:

Gradual Implementation of CHIS for Novel Microbes/Diseases

- While the potential of CHIS in understanding novel diseases is undeniable, a prudent approach dictates that India should exercise caution in its implementation. It is crucial for Indian scientists to attain expertise in this domain before embarking on CHIS endeavors for diseases with limited medical intervention.

- This prudent waiting period allows for the establishment of robust institutional structures and mechanisms to uphold ethical standards and safeguard the well-being of volunteers.

Emphasizing Collaborations and Knowledge Exchange

- India's journey towards embracing CHIS should be complemented by fostering collaborations with international institutions and scientists who possess invaluable experience in conducting controlled human infection studies.
- Knowledge exchange and learning from established experts will pave the way for India to create a strong foundation for ethically sound and scientifically rigorous CHIS practices.

Conclusion:

Controlled Human Infection Studies (CHIS) represent a significant advancement in medical research, promising to unravel critical insights into infectious diseases and bolster vaccine development. However, as India contemplates embarking on this frontier, it must tread cautiously, prioritizing robust institutional mechanisms and stringent ethical oversight. Collaborations and knowledge exchange with reputable institutions and experts will enhance India's capabilities in this field. With steadfast commitment to ethical practices and patient safety, India can stride confidently towards a future where CHIS plays a pivotal role in advancing public health and medical interventions

Rethinking the Bhima Koregaon Case

Context:

The recent Supreme Court's decision to grant bail to activists Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira in the Bhima Koregaon case has brought to light the complexities of dealing with stringent anti-terrorism laws and the denial of bail.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (Fundamental Rights, Judgements & Cases, Judiciary, Government Policies & Interventions, Transparency & Accountability)

Prelims:

- Types of Offences
- Power to grant bail
- CrPC
- IPC
- Supreme Court Judgements

Mains Question:

What are the key provisions of Section 43D(5) in the UAPA, and how does it affect the bail decisions for those arrested under serious charges? (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Unpacking the Bail Order
- The Conundrum of Section 43D(5) in UAPA
- "Broad Probabilities" and Bail Decisions
- The Supreme Court's Debunking of the Case
- Precedents of Release and Skepticism of Prosecution Claims

Unpacking the Bail Order:

- The recent Supreme Court order that granted bail to Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira has opened new avenues of legal interpretation in cases governed by the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).
- This watershed moment highlights how a preliminary assessment can expose weaknesses in the police's case, challenging the norm of bail denial for individuals accused under stringent anti-terrorism laws.

The Conundrum of Section 43D(5) in UAPA

- **Section 43D(5) of the UAPA poses a formidable obstacle for those seeking bail, as it mandates that bail cannot be granted if there are reasonable grounds to believe the accusation to be true.**
- The Court's decision to grant bail despite this provision sheds light on the importance of scrutinizing evidence and reevaluating the merits of the case at hand.

"Broad Probabilities" and Bail Decisions

- In 2019, the apex court ruled that detailed evidence analysis should not be conducted at the bail stage. Instead, bail should be determined based on "broad probabilities" of the case.
- The recent bail order challenges this approach by emphasizing the need for a deeper examination of evidence, thereby offering a new perspective on bail decisions.

The Supreme Court's Debunking of the Case

- The bail order not only grants freedom to the accused activists but also casts doubt on the prosecution's case. The Court observes a lack of concrete evidence establishing the accused's involvement in the alleged conspiracy.
- The Court's comment on participation in seminars refutes the notion that mere attendance can constitute an offense under UAPA's bail-restricting provisions.

Precedents of Release and Skepticism of Prosecution Claims

- The Bhima Koregaon violence case has seen a mix of release orders and skepticism regarding the prosecution's claims.
- Sudha Bharadwaj's release on "default bail" and Telugu poet Varavara Rao's release on medical grounds highlight the complexities of the case.
- Additionally, Anand Teltumbde's release due to lack of evidence and the unfortunate demise of Father Stan Swamy in prison raise further questions about the credibility of the prosecution's case.

Way Forward:

The bail order's implications underscore the need for a comprehensive reexamination of the Bhima Koregaon case. It calls for thorough investigations into the alleged evidence manipulation and raises questions about the credibility of the prosecution's claims. A transparent and fair evaluation is essential to ensure justice and uphold the rule of law.

Conclusion:

The recent Supreme Court bail order in the Bhima Koregaon case signifies a turning point in how stringent anti-terrorism laws are applied in granting bail. The order's emphasis on scrutinizing evidence, questioning claims, and reevaluating the merits of the case demonstrates the Court's commitment to upholding justice. The complexities and fragility of evidence revealed in this order should prompt a thorough review of the case, ensuring that justice prevails, and human rights are protected.

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Knowledge Centre & Space Museum

Context :

Thiruvananthapuram's Kowdiar neighbourhood will soon be home to the Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Knowledge Centre and Space Museum.

India's first space tech park in Thiruvananthapuram

- **Location:** Thiruvananthapuram's Knowledge City, in the Indian state of Kerala, is where the space tech park will be built.



- **Initiating Organization:** The development of the space tech park will be carried out by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), a significant space research facility run by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- **Objectives:** The main goal of the space technology park is to turn Thiruvananthapuram into a centre for the production of space technology. It intends to make use of the chances offered by Space 2.0 and create high-tech employment possibilities in the area.
- **Infrastructure Elements:** The following infrastructure elements will be present in the space tech park:

A) **Manufacturing Hub:** The integrated complex's primary use will be as a manufacturing hub for businesses that use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other data systems related to space technology.

B) **Start-up Incubator:** The park will have a start-up incubator to help and develop start-ups in the field of space technology.

C) **Skill Training Systems:** To improve the technical proficiency of the workforce in the space technology industry, the park will incorporate skill training systems.

D) **Production Units:** To facilitate the production and assembly of space-related technologies, production units will be created within the space tech park.

- **Space Museum:** The facility will include a space museum that will be dedicated to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, former Indian president. Space science and technology-related exhibits will be on display at the museum.
- The necessary land has been allotted by the Kerala government to build the space tech park. The Kerala State Information Technology Infrastructure Ltd (KSITIL) would receive a 20.01-acre lease from the government to build the park. Out of this, KSITIL will de-notify 16.07 acres that are now designated as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Knowledge Centre and Space Museum

- **Location:** Kowdiar, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, would be the site of the information centre and museum.
- **Joint Initiatives:** The Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and the Kerala State government are working together on the project.
- **Tribute:** In honour of Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a former Indian president and distinguished scientist, a knowledge centre and museum bearing his name. This endeavour is thought to be a suitable homage to him.
- **Objective:** The project's goal is to help the state realise its objective of becoming a "knowledge society." The younger generation will gain from it.
- **Timeline for construction:** The project is anticipated to be finished in less than 18 months, indicating that it will be ready quickly.
- **Significance of Thiruvananthapuram:** Thiruvananthapuram has significance in Dr Kalam's life because that is where he spent his first years working for the Indian space programme. Therefore, it has a unique significance that the information centre and museum were established in this city.

What is the significance of the Space Museum?

- **Economic:** The companies that will be launched in this SEZ area will bring in a lot of money. The space museums will generate a considerable amount of revenue from a tourism standpoint.
- **Educational:** The Museum will be constructed close to Kowdiar Palace for educational purposes. This location offers the exceptional capacity to offer background information and instruction on both the historical significance of the location and the development of space exploration over time.
- **Scientific Advancement:** Numerous nations have shown that space is a promising area for investment and expansion. In these sectors, there are also a lot of private research organisations. These investments could help the nation advance scientifically more quickly than other nations.

Centre to issue norms against “dark patterns”

Context :

The Union Consumer Affairs Ministry has resolved to establish specific recommendations to limit the rising "dark patterns" of misleading marketing, creating fake urgency, confirm-shaming, forced action, subscription traps, and nagging on online platforms.

What are dark Patterns?

- **Dark patterns are immoral user interface designs that are made to trick and manipulate consumers.**
- They either **complicate the user's experience or make use of them to the advantage of the platform or business using them.**
- Dark patterns limit consumers' access to complete information about the services they are using and provide them less choice over their surfing experience.
- **Harry Brignull, a UI/UX researcher and designer,** first used the term "dark patterns" in about 2010.
- Dark patterns influence **users' behaviour or outcomes** by making use of **psychological biases and a lack of user knowledge.**
- **Websites, mobile applications, and email marketing** are just a few examples of the different digital interfaces where they can be found.
- Dark patterns frequently influence people to act or make decisions that are not in their best interests.
- Examples of dark patterns include **misdirection, hidden costs, forced continuity, roach motel, sneak into basket, privacy zuckering, and confirm-shaming.**

How is it being used by Multi-National Companies?

- **Dark patterns are design decisions made for user interfaces to deceive or coerce** users into acting in ways they might not have otherwise. The user experience or privacy is frequently sacrificed to advance the business. Some of the instances you gave to show how certain MNC firms have come under fire for using dark patterns:
 - A) Amazon's perplexing cancelling policy for Prime membership:** Users found it challenging to cancel their memberships because of the lengthy procedure, which could have resulted in accidental renewals and extra fees. After coming under fire from EU consumer watchdogs, Amazon eventually made the procedure simpler for online shoppers.
 - B) Unsolicited sponsored communications from influencers on LinkedIn:** Due to the complicated platform restrictions, it can be difficult to disable this option when influencers send users unsolicited messages. Users may find this practice intrusive and unpleasant.
 - C) Instagram's Suggested Posts and Scattered Sponsored Video Ads:** consumers complain about being offered suggested posts they didn't want to see, and sponsored video advertising is strewn across Instagram in a way that deceives consumers before exposing their sponsored status. This interferes with the user experience and may be deceptive.
 - D) Pop-Ups obscuring the final seconds:** YouTube's pop-ups hide the last few seconds of films as a way to entice users to subscribe to YouTube Premium, which may irritate viewers hoping for a seamless viewing experience.

What potential losses do users face as a result of dark patterns?

- **Confusing Users:** Users are misled or confused by dark patterns, which are created specifically to do so. They might do this by using deceptive language, deceptive imagery, or ambiguous instructions to influence users to act inappropriately or make poor decisions.
- **Online Obstacles:** Online impediments can be introduced by dark patterns, which can make routine tasks more difficult and time-consuming for users. They can require numerous steps, a lot of form filling, or perplexing navigation, all of which might irritate consumers and prevent them from effectively reaching their goals.
- **Unwanted Services and Products:** Users are tricked into signing up for undesired services or items using dark patterns: Some sneaky tactics force consumers to join up for services or buy things they don't need or want. To persuade users to make unintentional decisions, they can employ pre-selected checkboxes, deceptive descriptions, or hidden fees.
- **Sharing more information than intended:** Users are compelled by unintended dark patterns to spend more or divulge more sensitive information: Dark patterns might financially harm users or breach their privacy. They may utilise tricks to trick customers into spending more money or disclosing more personal information than they had originally meant, such as hidden fees, upselling techniques, or deceptive data-gathering practices.
- **Dark patterns in developing technologies:** According to the FTC report, if augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) platforms become more widely used, dark patterns could also start to appear in these brand-new channels. It emphasises the necessity of exercising caution and addressing any dark patterns that extend to developing technology.

What is India's stand in curbing these practices?

- The rise of dark patterns on online platforms, which deceive users and breach their rights, has the Union Consumer Affairs Ministry concerned. They view these actions as being **unfair business practices**.
- Dark patterns have a **severe impact on society**, and governments around the world have put rigorous rules in place to prevent them. The Ministry considers that the **Consumer Protection Act's** current rules are adequate to **manage these difficulties, but specific guidelines will be released to effectively restrict dark patterns**.
- The Ministry has written to significant internet platforms to warn them against using dark patterns in their user interfaces to engage in unfair business practices. The Ministry emphasises that these actions infringe on **Section 2(9) of the Consumer Protection Act's protections for consumers**.
- The following are a few dark patterns that the Ministry is particularly concerned about:
 - A) False urgency** is the practice of pressuring customers into making hasty decisions or purchases by instilling a sense of scarcity or time-sensitive offers.
 - B) Basket sneaking:** Placing extra goods or services in the user's shopping cart without their permission, may result in unexpected purchases.
 - C) Subscription traps:** Making it simple to subscribe to services, yet challenging for customers to cancel or unsubscribe.
 - D) Hiding extra costs:** It has been shown that some industries, including travel and tourism websites, hide extra prices, deceiving customers about the genuine cost of a good or service.

India, China ramp up infra on the north bank of Pangong Lake

Context :

There is a frenzied activity in the area from both sides three years after the bloody fight between Indian and Chinese soldiers in Galwan, which was followed by tanks facing off around the Pangong Tso, a lake crossing eastern Ladakh and western Tibet. China is working quickly to connect the north and south banks of the Pangong Tso with a bridge, while India is constructing a black-topped road on the opposite side of the river on the north bank.

What is the background behind Indo-China Skirmishes in 2020-2021?

- **Beginning of Standoff:** On May 5, 2020, intense confrontations, face-offs, and skirmishes broke out at several points along the Sino-Indian border, signalling the start of the standoff between China and India.
- **Locations:** Disputed Pangong Lake in Ladakh, the Tibet Autonomous Region, and the border between Sikkim and the Tibet Autonomous Region were the sites of the battles. There were more battles along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.
- **Objection to Road Constructions:** Chinese forces protested Indian road work in the Galwan River valley in late May 2020, which led to an increase in hostilities.
- **Casualties and Taken Prisoners:** On June 15–16, 2020, soldiers from China and India were killed in melee combat. Both sides of the conflict claimed to have captured soldiers, although official sources refuted these allegations.
- **Shifting Line of Actual Control:** Indian experts noted that the Line of Actual Control had moved westward at patrol post 17A (PP 17A) after the disengagement at Gogra in August 2021.
- **Infrastructure Development:** In the disputed border regions, both China and India have been bolstering their infrastructure. India sent out an additional 12,000 personnel to help build infrastructure along the Sino-Indian border. In these disputed areas, China has also massively improved its infrastructure.



Which other areas are under dispute since the Indo-China war?

- Located in the **Western Sector of the Sino-Indian border** is the region known as **Aksai Chin**. Although India claims it as a part of the Ladakh Union region, it is now controlled by China. The **battle over Aksai Chin** has its **roots in the competing territorial claims of China and India**, which are influenced by historical and geopolitical causes.
- Arunachal Pradesh is a state in northeastern India that borders Tibet, China. **South Tibet is how China refers to the entire region**, which it **claims as its own**. The ongoing border conflict between the two nations in the **Eastern Sector** is directly tied to the Arunachal Pradesh dispute.
- There have been territorial disputes involving the area of Arunachal Pradesh along the **Sino-Indian border's Eastern Sector**. The **McMahon Line**, a border demarcation suggested by the British in the **Simla Accord of 1914**, is the main point of controversy. The McMahon Line is rejected by China, which asserts that it was signed without their consent and under coercion.
- There are smaller, **more localised border conflicts** and incursions in places like the **Depsang Plains in Ladakh** and the **Doklam Plateau**, which is **close to the trijunction between India, China, and Bhutan**. There have occasionally been standoffs and tensions between the two nations in certain places.

What are the recent events happening at the border?

1. Infrastructure Development in Eastern Ladakh:

1. India is constructing a black-topped road on the north bank of the Pangong Tso, with a completion date of 2025, as part of the development of the infrastructure in eastern Ladakh.
2. Reaching Finger 4 on the Indian side is the main goal of the road's construction.
3. Infrastructure development, particularly the construction of modern landing fields and transportation networks, is given considerable priority.
4. Additionally, progress is being made on a different route through the Saser La than the Darbuk-Skyok-Daulat Beg Oldie road.

2. Chinese Infrastructure Development:

1. China is working quickly to connect the north and south banks of the Pangong Tso River with a bridge.
2. The auxiliary bridge is already finished.
3. On the north bank, there has been extensive construction activity, including road connectivity to Shandong village.
4. At Yuli, a 22-kilometre tunnel connecting the crucial G-216 highway in Tibet to the G-0177 motorway is being built.
5. East of the Khurnak Fort is a Chinese air defence installation.

3. Budgetary Allocation and the Border Roads Organisation (BRO):

1. In recent years, the budgetary allocation for the BRO has significantly increased.
2. The BRO's capital budget for 2023–2024 was 5,000 crore, a 43% increase from the previous year.
3. The India-China Border Roads (ICBR) project has received more money.
4. Over 1,400 km of key roads are intended to be built as part of the ICBR plan along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
5. The eastern segment of the BRO's important infrastructure projects, which will improve all-weather communication along the LAC, is almost finished.

What do we know about Pangong Tso Lake?

- Pangong Tso, sometimes referred to as **Pangong Lake**, is located at a high altitude in the **western region of Tibet in China** and the **eastern region of Ladakh in India**.
- **Elevation:** The lake is one of the highest altitude lakes in the world at a height of 4,225 metres (13,862 ft) above sea level.
- **Size:** Pangong Tso is one of the largest lakes in this region, measuring over 134 kilometres (83 miles) in length. It has a footprint that is about 700 square kilometres large.
- **Sublakes:** Five sub-lakes make up Pangong Tso: Pangong Tso, Tso Nyak, Rum Tso (twin lakes), and Nyak Tso. Each of these sub-lakes has distinctive qualities and features of its own.
- **International Boundaries:** About 50% of Pangong Tso is located in Tibet, China, while about 40% is in the Indian state of Ladakh. 10% of the lake is still up for debate, and it acts as a de facto border between the two nations.
- **Geography:** Geographically speaking, the Indus River basin and the landlocked basin of Pangong Tso are divided by a small, raised ridge. The Indus River basin and the lake, however, are thought to have been connected in prehistoric times.
- **Cultural Significance:** A distinctive fusion of Tibetan and Indian traditions can be seen in the area surrounding Pangong Tso. It is a place that offers culturally enriching opportunities for travellers to engage with local customs, cuisine, and festivals.
- **Tourism:** Pangong Tso has become a very well-liked tourist destination throughout time. Visitors come to the lake to take in its natural beauty, partake in outdoor pursuits like camping and photography, and soak up the peace and calmness of the isolated Himalayan region.

Genome-sequencing screening for babies

Context:

Recent developments have made genome sequencing more accessible, inexpensive, and available to more people. Additionally, it provides substantially higher coverage for genetic disease screenings. Importantly, this could aid medical professionals in making an accurate diagnosis quickly because sequencing is also a "single" test as opposed to the numerous procedures carried out as part of standard newborn screening.

Compared to standard genetic tests, which only provide a diagnosis in about 10% of cases, whole-genome sequencing could provide a much higher diagnosis rate of about 40%, with 26% of the diagnosed children benefiting from a more rapid diagnosis that lessens the severity of their illness and, as a result, lower treatment costs.

The sequences of 32 ill children and 127 seemingly healthy infants were examined in a recent study that was published in the American Journal of Human Genetics. It was discovered that a little more than 10% of newborns had an unforeseen risk of genetic disorders. Sequences identified the causes of disease in three of the babies after three to five years of follow-up; for the 14 other babies, a clearer understanding of the risk allowed for improved medical surveillance.

What is Genome Sequencing?

- A method called whole genome sequencing (WGS) is used to determine the entire DNA sequence of an organism's genome all at once.
- It entails sequencing every chromosome in an organism, including DNA from mitochondria and, in plants, DNA from chloroplasts.
- WGS has long been utilised as a research technique to examine disease causes, evolutionary biology, and genetic variation.
- However, WGS has also been used in clinical settings since 2014 to perhaps direct therapeutic approaches.
- In personalised medicine, whole genome sequencing data can help tailor medicines based on a patient's genetic profile.
- By examining a person's full genome, scientists and medical professionals can discover genetic variants connected to disease risk and treatment response.
- WGS can help predict a person's likelihood of acquiring a particular disease and help focus prevention efforts.
- Compared to DNA profiling, which merely assesses the chance that genetic material originated from a particular person or group, whole genome sequencing is more thorough.
- DNA profiling doesn't reveal any new details about ancestry, origin, or illness susceptibility.

What is the importance of early screening and its relation to newborn babies?

- **Importance:** Early diagnosis of genetic illnesses in infants is important because it enables the use of effective treatments and has the potential to save lives or prevent impairments. Newborn screening programmes work to give this early diagnosis.
- **Limitations of traditional newborn screening:** Traditional newborn screening programmes are subject to several limitations, including a small selection of genetic testing that could leave out some disorders. Whole-genome sequencing provides a more thorough method of genetic disease screening.
- **Sequencing Healthy Babies:** Sequencing babies as part of standard medical treatment might also be advantageous because it can reveal previously unknown concerns for genetic diseases. This makes it possible to better monitor medical conditions and intervene as necessary. Additionally, it helps pinpoint relatives who are vulnerable and might gain from genetic testing.

What are the boons and bans of genome sequencing?

- **Ethical considerations:** Newborn whole-genome sequencing presents ethical issues, such as handling and sharing accidental discoveries. It's important to address concerns about fair access to technology, psychological effects, and privacy.
- **Possibility and accountability:** By enabling early detection of genetic abnormalities, individualised treatment, and a healthier future, rapid whole-genome sequencing has the potential to revolutionise healthcare. However, it's crucial to carefully weigh the advantages and potential drawbacks.

Delhi To Host Test Run Of Hydrogen Fuel-Cell Buses

Context:

Buses fuelled by hydrogen will likely begin their initial test runs in Delhi before moving on to other states. According to S.S.V. Ramakumar, Director (R&D), Indian Oil, the buses, built under a joint venture comprising Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. and Tata Motors, would operate between Delhi and Faridabad as part of a scientific test experiment before moving on to select "iconic" routes.

What is Hydrogen Fuel Cell?

Clean Energy Conversion:

- Hydrogen fuel cells produce energy by an electrochemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen, doing away with the requirement for burning in the process. They consequently don't emit any carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, which are a factor in climate change.
- Since heat and water vapour are the only byproducts of the reaction, fuel cells are a clean and environmentally acceptable method of energy conversion.
- Fuel cells contribute to better air quality and a decrease in the negative environmental effects of human activity by preventing the release of pollutants and greenhouse gases.

E

Lithium Ion BATTERY vs Hydrogen FUEL CELL

Electric Vehicles

BEVs contain a large battery to store electricity.

Onboard charger
Converts AC electricity from power outlets into DC power.

Electric motor
Propels the car using energy from the battery.

Lithium-ion battery
Lithium ions create an electrical current by moving between the negative (anode) and positive (cathode) electrodes.

Cathode	Liquid Electrolyte	Anode
•	•	•
Charging: Lithium ions move from Anode to Cathode		
Discharging: Lithium ions move from Cathode to Anode		

The longest-range BEV is the 2022 Lucid Air Dream Edition, which has an EPA rating of 505 miles.

The longest-range FCEV is the 2022 Toyota Mirai XLE, which has an EPA rating of 402 miles.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

FCEVs use a hydrogen fuel cell to create electricity. This requires a tank to store hydrogen gas.

Fuel tank
Hydrogen gas is stored in a high-pressure tank. Liquid hydrogen can't be used because it requires cryogenic temperatures.

Exhaust
The only waste product of an FCEV is water.

Battery
Stores energy from regenerative braking.

Electric motor
Propels the car using energy produced by the fuel cell stack.

Fuel cell stack
The fuel cell combines hydrogen and oxygen to generate electricity.

Hydrogen gas (H₂) intake

Oxygen (O₂) intake

Anode | **Catalyst** | **Electrolyte** | **Cathode**

H₂ passes through the catalyst and splits into protons (H⁺) and electrons (e⁻)

Protons (H⁺) pass through the electrolyte

Chemical reaction creates water (H₂O)

Water emitted through exhaust

Electrons can't pass through the electrolyte, so they take an external path. This creates an electrical current which powers the car.

ELEMENTS

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High Energy Conversion Efficiency:

- Compared to conventional combustion-based technologies, fuel cells have the potential to attain higher energy conversion efficiencies.
- Depending on the kind and design of the fuel cell, internal combustion engines normally function at an efficiency of around 25–30%, whereas fuel cells can achieve efficiencies of up to 60–80%.
- More electrical power is available per unit of fuel used thanks to this improved efficiency, leading to greater energy savings and less resource use.

Versatile Uses:

- Fuel cells are used in a variety of industries, including transportation, stationary power generation, and portable electronics.
- Fuel cells can power electric vehicles (cars, buses, and trains) in transportation and provide advantages over battery-powered vehicles, including greater driving ranges and quicker refuelling periods.
- Fuel cells are a dependable and low-emission kind of power generation that may be used in stationary applications to power and heat homes, buildings, and even entire power grids.
- Electronic equipment can use portable fuel cells as backup power sources to provide longer usage times without the use of conventional batteries.

Quieter and Vibration-Free Operation:

- Fuel cells operate more quietly and with fewer vibrations than combustion-based technologies because they have fewer moving parts.
- Due to this property, fuel cells are suited for applications requiring low noise levels, such as quiet indoor settings, residential locations, or even peaceful outdoor settings.

Scalability and Flexibility:

- Fuel cells are flexible and scalable, and they may be modified to satisfy a variety of power needs.
- To produce power at various scales, from small electronic devices to large-scale power plants or grid-level applications, they can be utilised individually or combined into bigger systems.
- Fuel cell systems are suited for a variety of energy needs thanks to their scalability and adaptability, which also makes it easier for them to be integrated into existing infrastructure.

What goals can India achieve through the implementation of this fuel source?

- **Self-sufficiency and affordable clean energy:** The Prime Minister's Hydrogen Vision seeks to guarantee India's independence in terms of clean energy prices. India may lessen its reliance on imported fossil fuels and lessen the impact of changing fuel prices by encouraging the use of green hydrogen, which can be produced from renewable sources.
- **Goals for combating climate change:** Green hydrogen is a great source of clean energy that makes it possible to completely decarbonize industries with high emissions that are hard to reduce. For instance, the usage of buses powered by diesel in large commercial transportation increases CO₂ emissions dramatically. India may significantly lower its carbon footprint and move closer to its climate change objectives by switching to fuel-cell vehicles that operate on green hydrogen.
- **Emissions reduction from heavy commercial vehicles:** About 12–14% of India's CO₂ and particle emissions come from diesel-powered heavy commercial vehicles, including buses. These emissions are dispersed and challenging to contain. India can effectively minimise greenhouse gas emissions from this industry by substituting green hydrogen-powered fuel cell vehicles for diesel-powered ones.

- **Lower operating costs:** Compared to diesel-fueled vehicles, fuel cell vehicles driven by renewable hydrogen have lower operating costs. When expressed in rupees per kilometre, this cost advantage might be profitable for operators of commercial transportation. It encourages the use of fuel-cell cars and makes the switch to clean energy sources easier.
- **Transition from net importer to net exporter:** India can make the switch from being a net importer of fossil fuels to a net exporter of clean hydrogen energy by adopting green hydrogen technologies. India can manufacture green hydrogen domestically and export it to other nations thanks to the availability of plentiful renewable resources, diversifying its energy mix and creating job possibilities.
- **Global leadership in the hydrogen industry:** India has the potential to become a leader in the hydrogen industry thanks to the adoption of green hydrogen and the development of a strong hydrogen ecosystem. India can export green hydrogen to other nations in addition to meeting its energy demands by becoming a significant producer of green hydrogen. India may also use its knowledge and talents to export green hydrogen-related machinery and technology, strengthening its position as a global leader in this developing industry.

Deliberations on the increasing rate of permanent intake through the Agnipath scheme

Context:

There are discussions currently underway about expanding the intake size per batch from approximately 46,000 and the recruitment to permanent cadre from 25% to 50% once the first batch of Agniveers join the units and deploy on the ground.

What is Agniveer Scheme?

- The Government of India authorised the Agnipath Scheme, also called the Agneepath Scheme, on June 14, 2022. It is **a tour of duty-style programme.**
- **The plan is to fill the three armed services—Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force—**with non-commissioned officers.
- Under this plan, recruits will be hired for a set tenure of four years and will be referred to as Agniveers.
- The plan is intended to get around elements of the conventional system that were previously available, including extended tenures, pensions, and other perks.
- The Agnipath Scheme's launch has drawn criticism for the lack of public discussion and engagement before it was put into place.

What are the features of this scheme?

- It is an **all-Indian recruitment process.** That implies that anyone in India may apply for this position.
- **It has a four-year contract.**
- opportunity to enlist as an agniveer in the military.
- **substantial Seva Nidhi package** and attractive monthly compensation.
- **100% of applicants will be accepted for ongoing enrolment.**
- enrollment strategy based on the Agneepath plan.

- After four years, **25% of Agniveers were chosen based on central, rigorous, transparent criteria based on married organisational requirements.**
- The first year of this programme would include a **package of 4.76 lacks for the youth.** The annual salary would rise to **6.9 lakhs** in the fourth year of service.
- The youth would receive a service fund worth **Rs. 11.7 lakhs** after completing their **4-year term of service.**



Agnipath Scheme
Terms of service

- Agniveers will be enrolled for a duration of 4 years including training period
- Agniveers will meet the medical eligibility conditions as applicable to respective categories/trades
- Agniveers will be given option to opt for enrollment into the Regular Cadre
- Upto 25% Agniveers from each batch will be enrolled in the Regular Cadre of the Armed Forces

What are the Disadvantages of this scheme?

- **Employment Duration:** The scheme provides employment opportunities for four years only.
- **Permanent Positions:** Only 25% of the candidates will be offered permanent positions after the training period. The remaining 75% will not be retained and will have to leave their jobs.
- **No Pension:** Candidates appointed under the Agneepath Scheme will not be eligible for a pension. This means that they will not receive a pension after retirement or upon leaving the job.
- **Lump Sum Amount:** Selected candidates will receive a lump sum amount of 11 lakh rupees after four years from the government's Seva Nidhi Scheme. However, it's important to note that some portions of this amount will be deducted from the recruit's salary every month during the four-year service period.
- **Non-Commissioned Ranks:** The scheme is specifically for non-commissioned ranks such as Sepoy, Naik, and Lance Naik. Candidates will be recruited into these positions and will serve in these roles during the four years.
- **Age Requirement:** The recruitment is limited to candidates between the ages of 17.5 and 23. Only individuals falling within this age range will be considered for employment under the Agneepath Scheme.
- **Job Security:** There is no job security provided beyond the four-year service period. After completing the four years of employment, the candidates will once again become unemployed.
- **Lack of Additional Benefits:** The scheme does not provide any extra or basic benefits typically associated with other government jobs. Candidates will not receive benefits such as healthcare, housing, or other perks that are usually provided in regular government employment.

Why is it recently in the news?

- Discussions are currently being held about raising the intake size per batch from around 46,000 soldiers and the recruiting rate for the permanent cadre from 25% to 50%. But no choice has yet been made about these suggested improvements.
- **1.75 lakhs (175,000) recruits can be accepted altogether under the Agnipath scheme up till 2026. Agniveers will have the option to join the regular cadre after serving their four-year tenure. A different recruitment procedure will be used to choose up to 25% of the Agniveers.**
- The armed forces are expected to have a substantial number of openings in the upcoming years as a result of the **restricted recruitment of 1.75 lakhs and the two years without any new hires.**
- The question of whether to **set standards for trainees** who depart during their training is another matter up for discussion. There **aren't any current requirements or limitations for trainees who decide to leave in the middle**, and many **trainees have done so in search of better prospects.**
- The Agnipath plan seeks to bring the military's average age down to **26 from 32.** With this change, the age distribution of the Indian armed forces will be consistent with that of the world's largest armies.

In conclusion, the lack of recruiting during the **COVID-19 epidemic** and the **frequent retirement of soldiers** have left the **Indian armed services short on personnel.** The government launched the **Agnipath plan**, which **seeks to enlist soldiers for four years**, in response to this shortage.

It is projected that there will be a **sizable number of openings** in the armed services in the upcoming years **due to limited recruitment and personnel retirement.** The Government hopes that **Agnipath will lower the average age of the armed forces** so that it is equivalent to other major armies throughout the world.

LVM-3: the other ISRO rocket

Context

ISRO will launch its Chandrayaan 3 mission on July 14 onboard an LVM-3.

What are Launch vehicles?

Launch vehicles are vehicles used to send payloads into space from the Earth's surface, such as satellites, scientific instruments, and spacecraft. To escape Earth's gravity and enter the desired orbit or trajectory, they generate the necessary thrust and velocity.

What are the different Launch vehicles used by ISRO?

PSLV

- **Introduction of Liquid Stages:** The use of liquid stages has improved the performance and mission flexibility of **PSLV**, the first launch vehicle in India to be fitted with liquid stages.
- A **workhorse that is Reliable and Versatile:** PSLV has proven to be a dependable and versatile workhorse for India's space missions from its first successful launch in October 1994.
- **Satellite Launches:** PSLV has been used to launch multiple Indian and foreign customer satellites, demonstrating its dependability and credibility.

- **Chandrayaan-1 and the Mars Orbiter Spacecraft:** In 2008 and 2013, respectively, the PSLV successfully launched two major spacecraft. These missions showed off PSLV's planetary and lunar exploration skills.
- **Feathers in the hat of PSLV:** The successful launches of the spacecraft Chandrayaan-1 and Mars Orbiter added to the PSLV's accomplishments and showcased its prowess in space exploration.
- **Multi-Payload Capability:** The PSLV's payload fairing is fitted with multi-payload adaptors, making it possible to launch several payloads into orbit at once.
- **Mission Flexibility:** The PSLV is capable of completing difficult missions, such as multi-orbit and multi-satellite launches, demonstrating its mission flexibility.

GSLV

- **Purpose:** To deploy communication satellites into geostationary transfer orbit (GTO), the GSLV Mk II is an Indian launch vehicle created by ISRO.
- **Cryogenic Third Stage:** The GSLV Mk II uses a cryogenic third stage to launch the satellite into geosynchronous orbit (GTO). An indigenous cryogenic stage was later designed and built into the vehicle after initially using cryogenic stages supplied by the Russian company Glavkosmos (GK).
- **Cryogenic Stage Developed Domestically:** Beginning with the GSLV D5 mission in January 2014, ISRO started using its cryogenic stage developed domestically for the GSLV Mk II. As a result of this accomplishment, India's space programme passed a crucial turning point because it became independent in the field of cryogenic technology.

Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle-Mark III

Payload:
Geostational
Communication
Satellite-19

Cryogenic upper stage
28 tonnes of
cryogenic propellants

Strap-on boosters

Core liquid boosters

Designed to carry 4 tonnes
of satellites
Height: 43.3 m
Diameter: 4 m
Total lift-off mass: 640 tonnes



Evolution of Indian launchers

	Satellite Launch Vehicle (SLV)-3	Augmented SLV	Polar SLV	GSLV-Mk II	GSLV-Mk III
First flight:	July 1980	Mar 1987	Sept 1993	Apr 2001	Jun 5 2017

Source: ISRO

© AFP

- **Operational Fourth Generation Vehicle:** The GSLV Mk II is categorised as a fourth-generation launch vehicle that is operational. It is an example of how India's launch vehicle technology has developed over time, including upgrades and domestic components.

- **Successes Consecutive:** Since January 2014, the GSLV Mk II has successfully launched six rockets in a row, setting a remarkable record. This dependable performance has shown the vehicle's dependability and maturity.
- **Deployment of Communication Satellites:** The GSLV Mk II is essential to India's space programme since it makes it possible to deploy communication satellites into GTO. These satellites provide connectivity to the internet, television, and a variety of telecommunications services.
- **Like the PSLV, the GSLV has multiple configurations.** The most powerful configuration is called LVM-3 (Launch Vehicle Mark 3), which can lift to 10 tonnes to low-earth orbit.

What do we know about Launch Vehicle Mark 3 that is going to be used in the recent launch?

- **LVM-3:** This configuration of the GSLV, which has three stages, is the most potent.
 - **A. First stage:** Two S200 boosters are fastened to the sides of the rocket body to make up the first stage. These boosters burn solid fuels called hydroxyl-terminated polybutadiene.
 - **B. Second Stage:** It is propelled by **two liquid-fueled Vikas engines**. Unsymmetrical dimethylhydrazine or nitrogen tetroxide are the two liquid fuel alternatives.
 - **C. Uppermost Stage:** A cryogenic engine powers the LVM-3's uppermost stage. It burns liquefied oxygen in conjunction with liquefied hydrogen as fuel.
- **Cryogenic Engine:** The **LVM-3's highest stage** is powered by a **cryogenic engine** that **burns liquid oxygen** and **hydrogen**. Due to its high specific impulse, **hydrogen** is an **effective rocket fuel**. But it must be liquefied and kept at extremely low temperatures, necessitating unique pumping and delivery systems.

India approves plan to buy 26 Rafale-M jets

Context

On Thursday, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), presided over by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, gave its approval for the purchase of three additional Scorpene-class diesel-electric submarines from France as well as 26 Rafale-M fighters, which will be operated off aircraft carriers.

What is Defence Acquisition Council and who are its members?

- A significant organization in India's defence establishment is the Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC). It is in charge of making choices about purchases and procurement for the defence industry and is made up of numerous senior individuals. The parts and duties of it are described as follows:
 - (a) **Grant 'in principle approval for capital purchases under the Long Term Perspective Plan (LTPP)**, which spans 15 years at the start of a Five Year Plan period. The "Make" projects in the Perspective Plan that have lengthy gestation periods are identified by this approval.
 - (b) **'In principle' acknowledge the necessity of each capital acquisition project for inclusion in the upcoming Five Year Plan**, at least nine months


before the start of the plan's first year. To do this, projects must be classified as "Buy" (outright purchase), "Buy and Make" (buy followed by licensed manufacture or indigenous development), or "Make" (independent production and R&D).

(c) **Based on input from the Defense Procurement Board**, track the advancement of significant projects.


IAF receives Rafale boost

India has received its first batch of five Rafale jets

The jets — 3 single-seat & 2 twin-seat — will be stationed at Ambala airbase







Rafale is a twin-engine multi-role combat aircraft



DEVELOPED BY FRENCH AIRCRAFT MANUFACTURER DASSAULT

Specifications

 Top speed: 2,223km/h	 Max weight: 24,500kg	 Range: 3,700km
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Load-carrying capacity: **9,500kg**

CAPABLE OF

- Ground support
- Aerial reconnaissance
- In-depth strikes
- Interception
- Nuclear deterrence

How does their DAC works?

- The Defence Procurement Board, Defence Production Board, and Defence R&D Board carry out the decisions made by the DAC when it convenes.
- The first step in the process of "acceptance of necessity" by the concerned administrative wing in the Ministry of Defence, in cooperation with Defence (Finance), is the approval in principle from the DAC.
- Based on the DAC's discussions, the Raksha Mantri makes the ultimate choices, which, if necessary, may also be forwarded to the Finance Minister or Cabinet Committee on Security for consideration.

Who are the members of the DAC?

- **Chairman:** Raksha Mantri (RM) - The Minister of Defense, who chairs the council.
- **Members:**
 - Raksha Rajya Mantris (RRMs) - Deputy Ministers of Defense.
 - Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) - The principal military advisor to the government (when appointed).
 - Chief of Army Staff (COAS) - Head of the Indian Army.
 - Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) - Head of the Indian Navy.
 - Chief of Air Staff (CAS) - Head of the Indian Air Force.
 - Defence Secretary - The highest-ranking civilian bureaucrat in the Ministry of Defence.
 - Secretary, Department of Defence Production and Supplies - Responsible for defence production.
 - Secretary, Defence Research and Development - Responsible for defence research and development.
 - Secretary, Defence Finance - Responsible for defence finances.
 - Vice Chief of Defence Staff (when appointed) / Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CISC) - The second-highest-ranking military officer and head of the Integrated Defence Staff.
 - Special Secretary (Acquisition) - Responsible for defence acquisitions.
 - Member Secretary: Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Planning and Perspective, Financial and Capital Acquisition) - Responsible for coordinating and facilitating the council's functions.

What is the latest addition to the Armed Forces through DAC?

- **Rafale-M fighter purchase:**
 - The **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** has given its **approval for the Indian Navy to purchase 26 Rafale-M jets.**
 - The approval covers all auxiliary gear, weaponry, training aids, spare parts, documentation, and logistical support.
 - An Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with the French government serves as the foundation for the procurement.
 - With the French government, the purchase price and other parameters will be negotiated while taking into account the comparative procurement costs of similar aircraft by other nations.
 - The deal will also call for the integration of machinery created in India and the creation of a hub for system maintenance, repair, and operation.
 - There will be four twin-seat trainers and 22 single-seat jets in the Rafale-M fighter fleet.
 - The Rafale-M planes will fill the gap until an indigenous deck-based fighter is developed, which may not be long enough for the Indian Navy's current MiG-29Ks.
- **Scorpene-class submarine acquisition:**
 - The purchase of three further Scorpene-class submarines for the Indian Navy has also been approved by the DAC.
 - Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders will build the submarines as part of the Buy (Indian) category.
 - The Indian Navy will be more operationally ready because of these submarines' stronger indigenous content, which will also generate domestic jobs.
 - Six Scorpene-class submarines are currently being constructed as part of Project-75 and a technology transfer deal with Naval Group.
 - The \$3.75 billion transaction that started the project was inked in 2005, and it is now almost finished.

How is Rafale going to give an edge to the Indian Navy and why did we choose them?

Advanced Weapons Package:

- **Beyond Visual Range (BVR):** Advanced Weapons Package Advanced BVR air-to-air missiles on the Rafale enable it to engage adversarial aircraft at a range of more than 100 kilometers. Compared to missiles of American origin, these have a greater range and performance.
- **Air-To-Ground Scalp Missiles:** SCALP missiles, which are long-range precision ground attack missiles, are carried by the Rafale aircraft. They are able to locate and strike targets even far within enemy territory.
- **Long-Range Precision Ground Attack Missiles:** The Rafale is equipped with long-range precision ground attack missiles that can precisely target distinct targets and allow for pinpoint attacks on adversary locations.

Stealth and Tracking:

- **Reduced Radar Cross-Section:** The Rafale employs stealth elements, such as its form and materials, to lower its radar cross-section. Stealth and Tracking: Reduced Radar Cross-Section. This increases its survival by lowering the chance of adversary radar detection.
- **Advanced Avionics:** The Rafale's electronic warfare and advanced avionics equipment enable the aircraft to identify and engage hostile targets while reducing its own visibility to hostile radar systems. This enables it to tracklessly attack enemy jets at a great distance.

Targeting systems and helmet-mounted sights:

- **Helmet-Mounted Display:** The Rafale has a technology that lets pilots project important data onto their visors through a helmet. As a result, they have better situational awareness and can engage targets more quickly.
- **Advanced targeting systems are installed** in the aircraft and function in tandem with the helmet-mounted display. These systems enhance the efficiency of weapon deployment by allowing pilots to track and engage targets fast and precisely.
- **Quick Deployment:** Operations at High Altitude: Even in cold start circumstances, the Rafale is capable of taking off from high altitude air bases like Leh. This increases its operating flexibility and enables speedy deployment as well as operation from difficult terrain and inclement weather.

Russia 'exits' UN-brokered deal

Context:

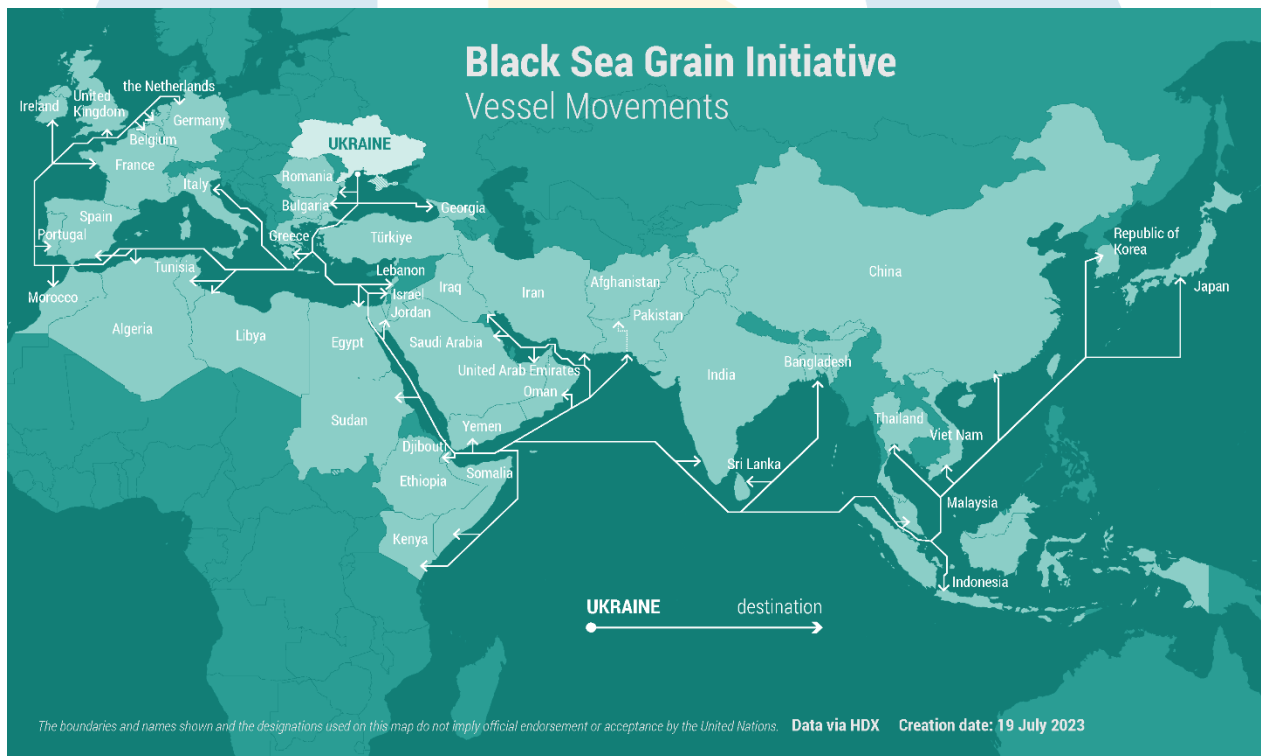
Hours after drones destroyed Russia's sole bridge linking its continental portion to the Crimean peninsula, the Kremlin announced on Monday that it was ending a significant arrangement permitting grain exports from Ukraine. Moscow has long grumbled about the implementation of the deal, which was intended to allay concerns about food shortages in vulnerable nations, and claimed that the deadly Kerch bridge attack had nothing to do with its withdrawal.

What is the Black Sea Grain Initiative?

- **Context:** The program was launched during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Due to the invasion, grain supplies by sea from Ukraine, a significant Black Sea exporter, and Russia's grain exports were both briefly halted. With claims that Russia

was turning food supplies into weapons, this led to an increase in food prices worldwide and the prospect of starvation in low-income nations.

- **Conversations and Consensus:** The United Nations (UN) and Turkey, which controls the Black Sea's marine channels, had discussions on the topic in April 2022. The resulting agreement, which had a 120-day duration, was signed on July 22, 2022, in Istanbul. To ease the food crisis, the agreement set forth rules for securely exporting grain from particular ports.
- **Coordination and Inspection Center:** The UN is acting as the secretariat for a joint coordination and inspection centre that was formed in Turkey. This centre was essential in guaranteeing the secure transfer of food and grain while upholding the specified protocols and requirements.
- **Extension of the pact:** The pact, which was initially slated to expire on November 19, 2022, ran into difficulties when Russia briefly halted its participation as a result of a drone attack on Russian military ships in the Black Sea. However, after attempts at conciliation, Russia eventually returned. A 120-day extension of the agreement was announced by the UN and Ukraine on November 17, 2022.
- **successful Shipments:** By mid-July 2023, more than 1,000 trips had left Ukrainian ports successfully, transporting approximately 33 million tonnes of grain and other food products to 45 nations. The interruption in grain exports led to a global food crisis, which was greatly helped by these supplies.



What is the Background behind this deal?

- A projected 47 million people globally were expected to be severely undernourished in 2022 as a result of rising food prices. The consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 were among the causes of this.
- The war had the greatest impact on developing and emerging nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These nations were particularly dependent on imported grain and gasoline, which left them vulnerable to the rise in food prices.
- According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Ukraine is one of the top exporters of grains, sending over 45 million tonnes of grain to the world market each year.

- 20 million tonnes of grain were delayed at Odesa, a port city in Ukraine, as a result of the conflict. Wheat, corn, and sunflower oil exports—which were predominantly transported through Ukraine's Black Sea ports—were impacted by this disruption.
- While some ports were under Russian control, others had damaged infrastructure, and some were closed by mines. These conditions made it much more difficult for Ukrainian agricultural products to be exported.
- Due to the size of the operation and the potential for leaving the ports open to attack, the Ukrainian government was initially hesitant to demine the sea area nearby the ports.
- There were rumours that the European Union was debating a proposal for the establishment of a subsidiary by the Russian Agricultural Bank in July 2023. To ease the bank's sanctions, this action intended to re-connect the bank to the global financial network, including SWIFT.
- To **protect the Black Sea grain agreement, sanctions against the Russian Agricultural Bank were loosened.** By preserving this agreement, the EU sought to promote Ukraine's agricultural sector and secure continuing access to international food markets. This agreement allowed Ukraine to export its food products to those markets.

Which is the sea route through which this trade was going on?

- In the **northwest of Turkey**, there are two **significant rivers known as the Turkish Straits.**
- They are made up of the **Dardanelles and the Bosphorus**, which link the **Black Sea to the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.**
- The **Sea of Marmara's opposite ends** are where the straits are located.
- They are regarded as a component of Turkey's exclusive economic zone at sea and are governed by the internal waters regime.
- Geographically, the straits separate European Turkey from Asian Turkey and act as a border between the two continents.
- Due to its **strategic significance in trade, politics, and warfare**, the **Turkish Straits** have had a tremendous impact on European and global history.
- The **Montreux Convention**, which has been in force since 1936, provides guidelines for the management and regulation of the straits.

What are the recent developments that led to Russia's decision in withdrawing from the deal?

- **Drones Attack Kerch Bridge:**
 - The only bridge connecting Russia to the Crimean peninsula, the Kerch Bridge, was attacked by drones.
 - Both the bridge and the attack's fatalities were damaged.
 - Russian authorities said that the strike was carried out by the Ukrainian Navy and the SBU security service.
 - When Russian forces are resupplying their frontlines in southern Ukraine, the Kerch Bridge is a vital supply route.
- **Russia's Exit from Ukraine's Grain Export Deal:**
 - The Kremlin declared that Russia was leaving Ukraine's grain export deal.
 - Russia's displeasure with the pact's execution was cited as the reason for the decision.
 - The drone attack on the Kerch Bridge was not a direct cause of the **withdrawal.**
- **Russian Reactions and Actions:**
 - Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, ordered that the bridge be repaired and restored.

- Putin promised to respond to the drone strike with retaliation.
- He labelled the assault a terrorist attack and stressed the importance of stepping up security.
- **Impact on the Grain Agreement:**
 - **Over 32 million tonnes of Ukrainian grain were exported last year according to the Black Sea Grain Initiative.**
 - No new ships have been authorized since June 27, according to the Joint Coordination Centre, which is in charge of the deal.
 - Not all parties concerned had agreed to the applications for participation in the agreement.
 - With Putin announcing Russia's intention to cancel the agreement because of what was viewed as neglect of Russian interests, the pact's survival was already in doubt.

The link between endometriosis and an infectious bacterium

Context:

Fusobacterium has been linked to endometriosis, according to a study, which could lead to the creation of non-invasive testing and the use of antibiotics to lessen the condition's severity. One in ten women globally is currently affected with endometriosis.

What is endometriosis?

- Endometriosis is a condition where tissue that resembles the uterine lining grows outside of the uterus. It can make getting pregnant more difficult and result in severe pelvic pain.
- Endometriosis can develop during a person's first period and persist beyond menopause.
- Tissue resembling the uterine lining grows outside the uterus as a result of endometriosis. This causes swelling and the formation of scar tissue in the pelvic area and (occasionally) other parts of the body.
- Endometriosis has no recognized cause. Endometriosis cannot be prevented in any known way. There is no cure, although medications or, in certain situations, surgery can be used to address the symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

- Intense pelvic discomfort is a common side effect of endometriosis, particularly during menstruation. Some people experience pain while having sex or going to the bathroom. Getting pregnant might be challenging for some people.
- Endometriosis can occur in adults who exhibit no symptoms. Pelvic pain, which is frequent in people who do, is one of the symptoms.

What causes Endometriosis?

Regardless of ethnicity or social standing, endometriosis is a complex disease that affects many women all over the world from the start of their first period (menarche) until

menopause. Its development is assumed to be influenced by a wide range of circumstances. Endometriosis is now understood to develop as a result of

- When menstrual blood with endometrial cells exits the body through the cervix and vagina during periods, it can return through the fallopian tubes and into the pelvic cavity. This is known as retrograde menstruation. Endometrial-like cells may be deposited outside the uterus as a result of retrograde menstruation, where they might develop and implant.
- Cells undergo cellular metaplasia when they transform into a different form. Outside of the uterus, cells transform into endometrial-like cells and begin to proliferate.
- The disease may start in stem cells and then spread throughout the body through the blood and lymphatic system.

What kind of Impact does it cause?

Endometriosis has substantial social, economic, and public health effects. Due to extreme pain, exhaustion, melancholy, anxiety, and infertility, it might lower the quality of life. Endometriosis patients can feel excruciating pain that makes it impossible for them to attend a job or school. The sexual health of those who have endometriosis and their partners may be impacted by painful sex since it may cause interruption or avoidance of sexual activity. By promoting their human right to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, quality of life, and general well-being, addressing endometriosis will empower those who are impacted by it.

What are the ways to Prevent this disease?

There is currently no known technique to stop endometriosis. Increased knowledge, followed by early diagnosis and treatment, may slow or stop the disease's natural development and lessen the severity of its symptoms over the long run, including perhaps lowering the chance of central nervous system pain sensitivity. Right now, there is no treatment.

Turbulence hits UDAN scheme, 50% of routes grounded

Context

Construction of "74 airports in seven years" as opposed to the same number built in the seven decades after Independence is the government's major claim to achievement in the aviation industry since 2014. Only 11 of these airports, however, have been completely new construction, and 15 airports have been abandoned during this time due to the failure of nearly half the lines introduced under the regional connectivity plan (RCS).

What is the UDAN scheme?

To improve regional aviation connectivity in India, the Ministry of Civil Aviation launched the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS). The program is sometimes referred to as "UDAN" (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik), which means "Let the Common Citizen of the Country Fly." Making air travel affordable and readily available for those who reside in India's rural and remote regions is RCS/UDAN's main goal. The Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS)/UDAN's main characteristics are:

- **Aim:** The program's goals include fostering regional economic growth, promoting travel, and enhancing general connectivity to the nation's rural and underserved regions.
- **Subsidized Airfares:** As part of the program, certain airlines are permitted to fly between underserved or unserved airports. Viability Gap Funding is a type of financial assistance given to these airlines to reduce the cost of air travel for people living in these areas.
- **Priority Routes:** The emphasis is on routes that link smaller cities, villages, and rural areas, which are frequently underserved by air travel.
- **Reviving Abandoned Airports:** As part of the plan to improve connectivity, unserved or neglected airports will also be reopened.
- **Helicopters and Fixed-Wing Aircraft:** The program involves both helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft operations to meet various regional connectivity needs.
- **Participating Airlines:** To expand their operations to underserved regions, regional carriers and currently operating scheduled airlines are both urged to take part in the RCS/UDAN initiative.
- **Route Bidding Procedure:** Based on the viability gap money that airlines are looking for from the government, airlines are chosen through a competitive bidding procedure. The airline that offers a route with the lowest viability gap finance required wins the route.
- **Operational and Financial Flexibility:** The program offers some operational flexibility by allowing airlines to run three to seven flights per week on each route, with a minimum.



What is the current status of UDAN?

- **Airport Development:**
 - In the seven years since 2014, according to the government, 74 airports have been constructed.
 - Only 11 of these airports were completely new construction; the remainder were historic airstrips that were renovated as part of the RCS program.
 - The emphasis was on repurposing underutilized airports and enhancing air connection for smaller cities.
- **Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) or Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) Scheme:**
 - To increase air connectivity for Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and to subsidize flights on certain routes, the RCS was introduced in 2017.
 - Under this system, airlines bid for routes, and successful airlines receive incentives and viability gap support (subsidy).
 - Airlines are required to sell 50% of their tickets at a fixed fee (2,500 per hour of flight) in exchange for a subsidy, which is equal to 50% of the seating capacity of their aircraft.

What are the criticisms and challenges faced by the scheme?

- 225 of the 479 routes that were introduced under the RCS have stopped operating.
- Of these, 128 routes closed before the required three-year timeframe was reached under the plan.
- Airlines discovered that 70 of these 128 routes were not commercially viable even with the subsidies, resulting in their discontinuation.
- Due to airline operators' non-compliance, airlines' route surrenders, or airline businesses' closures, an additional 58 routes were cancelled.
- The RCS program has had varying degrees of success, with certain routes experiencing issues with commercial viability.
- Only 58 out of 155 routes have continued to operate without government subsidies after the initial three years of support.
- The subsidy is paid for by the airlines operating on non-RCS routes through an RCS tax of 15,000 per departure, which they then charge the passengers on non-RCS flights.
- **Waterdrome closures:**
 - Between the Statue of Unity in Kevadia, Gujarat, and Gandhinagar, the state's capital, two wardrobes were constructed.
 - However, they had to shut down quickly after their October 2020 start since SpiceJet stopped operating as a result of "changes in technical requirements."

What is the way forward from this situation?

- **Route Planning and Viability Assessment:** Before beginning the launch of new routes under the RCS, do extensive study and viability studies. Examine the routes' demand, potential passenger flow, and economic viability to make sure they have a higher chance of being financially successful.
- **Incentives:** Encourage airlines operating on RCS routes to continue operations even after the initial three-year support period by providing further incentives and support. This may take the form of tax breaks, lower operational costs, or cost-related subsidies.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Airport development and management can be done in conjunction with private businesses through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Airport development and operation can benefit from the experience, capital, and efficiency that private firms frequently contribute.

- **Participation of Airlines:** Promote increased airline participation in the RCS program by offering all airlines appealing benefits and a level playing field for competitiveness. Higher levels of competition may result in better services and more sustainable routes.
- **Marketing and Awareness:** Promote air travel and the availability of new routes to potential passengers in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities through marketing and public awareness campaigns. Spread the word about the advantages of flying and work to alter people's perceptions of its affordability and convenience.

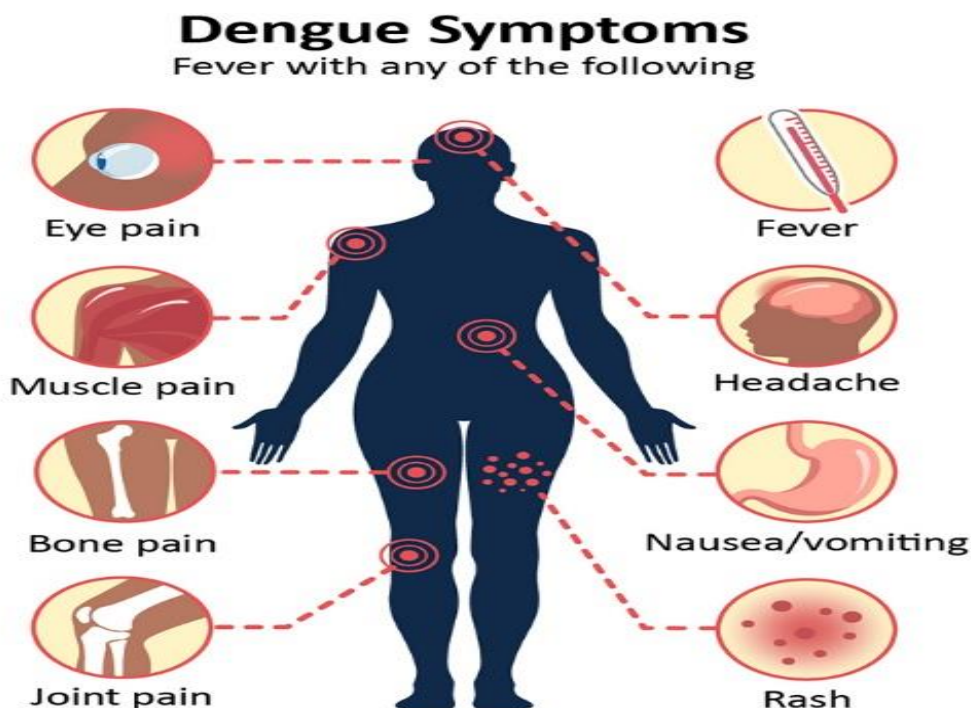
The threat of dengue fever escalates globally

Context

The worrisome recent increase in dengue incidence around the world, notably in new places, presents serious public health issues. The WHO predicts that this year may see a record number of cases as a result of climate change favouring disease-carrying mosquitoes.

What is dengue?

Dengue fever is a viral disease that is mostly spread through mosquitoes, especially *Aedes Aegypti* species. It is a serious issue for public health in many tropical and subtropical parts of the world. DEN-1, DEN-2, DEN-3, and DEN-4 are the four different serotypes of the dengue virus, which is a member of the Flaviviridae family.



How is it getting transmitted?

Dengue is spread to people via the bites of infected female mosquitoes, most frequently *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. When these mosquitoes feed on the blood of a person who has

the dengue virus, they become infected. The mosquito can then spread the illness to everyone it bites after becoming infected.

What are the symptoms of Dengue?

Mild to severe dengue fever symptoms often show up 4 to 10 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Typical signs include:

- extreme fever
- terrible headache
- back of the eyes hurt
- Muscle and joint pain
- nausea and diarrhoea
- Skin rash that might itch
- mild bleeding, such as bleeding from the gums or nose

How can we prevent dengue?

Dengue does not have a specific therapy, so prevention is essential. Prevention strategies for dengue include:

- Eliminate stagnant water from buckets, tires, and flower pots to reduce mosquito breeding places. Mosquitoes can lay their eggs in these areas.
- Apply insect repellent with DEET, picaridin, or other appropriate ingredients to exposed skin and clothing to prevent mosquito bites.
- Wearing protective clothing will help you avoid mosquito bites, especially at dawn and dusk when mosquito activity is at its highest.
- Use mosquito netting while sleeping, and keep screens on your doors and windows to keep mosquitoes out of your living spaces.
- Community initiatives: Public health measures, such as community awareness campaigns and mosquito control programs, can help lower the mosquito population and the risk of dengue transmission.
- Takeda's Dengue Vaccine: Takeda recently unveiled the first dengue vaccine, which has been authorized in various nations. While it has a limited ability to prevent serious illness, there is still room for development in the areas of infection prevention, uniform protection against all serotypes, and long-lasting immunity.

How is India getting affected by Dengue?

- **High Burden:** The number of dengue cases in India has been among the highest in the world. Numerous states and towns report thousands of incidents each year.
- **Endemic Areas:** Dengue is common in both urban and rural parts of India, where it is endemic. States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi, and West Bengal that have dense populations and tropical climates are more likely to experience dengue outbreaks.
- **Seasonal Pattern:** Because of the accumulation of standing water during the monsoon season, the incidence of dengue tends to grow during and after such times. In most of India, the monsoon season normally lasts from June through September.
- To reduce mosquito breeding places, mosquito control strategies like fogging, larvicide administration, and source reduction are used in India to combat dengue. To spread awareness of preventive measures, health officials also prioritize early detection, case management, and public education.

How is Dengue Affecting Globally?

- **Alarming Global Increase:** The recent global increase in dengue incidence is concerning, affecting millions of individuals each year all over the world. The WHO

predicts that there could be a record number of cases as a result of global warming, which benefits mosquitoes that spread disease.

- **Outbreaks in America:** America has had large dengue epidemics since the beginning of 2023, with more than two million cases being documented as of July. The countries with the largest number of cases this year are Bolivia, Brazil, and Peru.
- **Southern Cone Most affected:** The bulk of dengue cases in the Americas have been documented in the Southern Cone, which includes Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay. All four DENV serotypes are said to be co-circulating in a number of the region's countries, which presents difficulties for public health agencies.
- **The Changing Climate in Europe:** The changing climate in Europe has resulted in more frequent heat waves, flooding, and long, hot summers, which have favoured dengue-carrying mosquito species. The region is experiencing a rise in DENV infections, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).
- **Outbreaks in the Middle East:** Dengue outbreaks have been reported in the Middle East, with the Qena governorate of Egypt reporting one and Sudan reporting its first dengue case ever in February. Due to poor climatic conditions, the disease is not regarded as endemic in the Middle East.

Mapping India's chip design ecosystem

Context

According to media sources, the Indian government is debating a proposal to choose an ownership share in domestic chip design firms as part of the second phase of the design-linked incentive (DLI) scheme for the semiconductor industry.

What are the current industry dynamics for Semiconductor chips?

- **Capital Intensity:** The semiconductor industry as a whole demands a sizable capital investment for both manufacturing and design. Costly expenses are involved in setting up fabrication facilities, expanding manufacturing capacity, and carrying out research.
- **Long Gestation Period:** Because chip design and fabrication units require lengthy gestation periods before the first product is released to the market, returns on investment do not occur immediately.
- **Complexity of Chip Design:** Chip design costs more to develop than standard software. Research and development are becoming more difficult as chipsets get smaller and functional requirements alter.
- **interruptions in the supply chain:** The semiconductor business is susceptible to interruptions in the supply chain, which might erode investor confidence.

What are the advantages of introducing industry in India?

- **Skilled Talent Pool:** Indian semiconductor design engineers account for 20% of the global workforce, making them a highly skilled resource pool.
- **IP Ownership:** India has a sizable talent pool, but it only holds a small percentage of the intellectual property (IP) of chip designs.

- **DLI Initiative:** The Design-Linked Incentive (DLI) program, which was launched in December 2021, intends to help local semiconductor companies and indigenize technologies.
- **Growing businesses:** Over 30 semiconductor design businesses have been founded in India as a result of the DLI program and the larger SemiconIndia future design initiative.



What are the challenges that the industry can face?

- **Inefficiency of Government Venture Capital:** Investing in chip design businesses as a venture capital firm could be useless and inefficient. Due to increased valuations and access to a worldwide ecosystem of clients and investors, companies might favour foreign acquisitions.
- **Lack of Venture Capitalists:** Indian semiconductor businesses' ability to expand is hampered by the lack of venture capitalists in the country's private sector.
- **Limited income of Design Companies:** In comparison to the industry's potential, the total yearly income of domestic semiconductor design companies is pitiful. Investors and venture capitalists are put off by lengthy gestation periods.
- **Global Competition:** The semiconductor industry is fiercely competitive on a global scale, and India is up against stiff opposition in its efforts to become a centre for the production of semiconductors and chips.

What is the government's role as Regulatory authority in Semiconductor Chip Industry?

- **Support for Regulations:** The government's equity involvement may offer regulatory assistance to chip design firms, supporting a stable environment for their expansion.
- **Aligning Interests:** The government guarantees that design firms' interests are aligned with the success of projects by holding an equity investment, resulting in shared risk and benefit.
- **Preventing Foreign Ownership:** Equity injection can stop enterprises from selling a majority stake to larger international players, retaining the business and its advantages in India.

- Small and medium-sized businesses in the area would benefit from an equity infusion since it would allow them to take part in the semiconductor ecosystem.

In conclusion, it is critical for creating a robust and competitive ecosystem for the Indian government to concentrate on assisting the indigenous semiconductor industry, particularly chip design. Even if there are difficulties, the government's equity interest proposal aims to resolve some of these problems and encourage the expansion of homegrown chip design firms, making India a global hub for the semiconductor and chip manufacturing industry.





GEOGRAPHY

Urban Flooding: A Growing Menace Amid Changing Climate Patterns

Context:

The recent devastating floods in North India have drawn attention to the interconnected issues of climate change, urbanization, and infrastructural challenges plaguing India's major cities. As the monsoon season continues, hill States like Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi face the risk of landslips, landslides, and severe threats to life and property. Surprisingly, even Delhi, a city not typically associated with heavy rains, has experienced inundation, shedding light on the looming disaster potential.

Relevance:

GS - 1 (Important Geophysical Phenomena)

GS - 3 (Disaster Management) (Environmental Pollution & Degradation)

Prelims:

Floods, Monsoon, Western Disturbance, El Nino-Southern Oscillation Indian Ocean Dipole , Climate Change National Disaster Management Plan, National Disaster Management Authority

Mains Questions:

- Discuss the factors contributing to the recent floods in North India and their implications for urban development. (150 words)
- Suggest a joint strategy that States can evolve to combat the increasing risks of floods and protect their populations and infrastructures. (150 words)

Dimensions of the article:

- Emergence of Disaster Hotspots
- Deconstructing Delhi's Deluge
- Blame the River, but Beware of Infrastructural Indifference
- Anticipating the Future: Climate Trends and Urban Expansion

Emergence of Disaster Hotspots

- The recent spate of floods across North India has thrown the spotlight on the intricate relationship between **climate change, rapid urbanization, and the critical gaps in infrastructure planning.**
- With the monsoon in full swing, the hilly regions bear the brunt of torrential rains, resulting in landslips, landslides, and heightened risks to both lives and properties.
- Tragically, the regions of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi have experienced record rainfall, causing confirmed fatalities exceeding 60 and counting. However, it is the unexpected inundation of Delhi, a metropolis not commonly associated with floods, that demands immediate national attention to the impending disasters that lie ahead.

Deconstructing Delhi's Deluge

- Delhi, the bustling National Capital Territory, finds itself submerged in the terminology of the India Meteorological Department, which labels its recent rainfall as "excess" and "large excess" for five out of eight days from July 3-10.
- On a single day, July 9, the city recorded a staggering 221.4 mm of rain, surpassing the average July rainfall of 209.7 mm. While this substantial rainfall undoubtedly contributed to the flooding, it is noteworthy that precipitation has considerably dwindled in the past few days.
- Despite the reduction in rainfall intensity, significant portions of the city, encompassing prominent landmarks like the Red Fort and the Supreme Court, remain submerged.



Blame the River, but Beware of Infrastructural Indifference

- Delhi's officials swiftly pointed fingers at the flooding Yamuna, blaming the overflow from upstream States, particularly at Yamuna-nagar in Haryana.
- The ineffective regulation and redirection of the river's flow by Delhi's barrages added to the woes. However, this simplistic attribution fails to acknowledge the city's own infrastructural shortcomings, which over the years have failed to curb construction on the Yamuna's floodplains, neglected the timely desilting of drains before monsoons, and carelessly embraced the rampant concretization of urban landscapes.
- Moreover, upstream riverbed mining in Haryana contributes to massive silt deposits that obstruct the river's natural course. Playing the blame game and attributing the calamity solely to "record rains" is not only unproductive but also evades the pressing realities.

Anticipating the Future: Climate Trends and Urban Expansion

- With warming trends in the Arctic and the Arabian Sea, the likelihood of more extreme rain spells has surged.
- The implications of urban flooding are not unique to Delhi; cities like Bengaluru, Chennai, and Mumbai grapple with the issue more frequently.
- Delhi, with its ever-expanding population and infrastructural demands, can no longer claim immunity to such catastrophes.
- The urgency to act in concert is evident, much like the collaborative approach taken to tackle air pollution, recognizing its interdependence on the efforts of all cities.

Way Forward:



Unifying States for Flood Preparedness

- To fortify against the escalating risk of floods, States must transcend their differences and forge a collective strategy. **A joint management approach, akin to the one adopted to combat air pollution, becomes imperative to mitigate the multifaceted threats that flooding poses.** Collaborative

initiatives should encompass comprehensive urban planning, water resource management, disaster preparedness, and infrastructural improvements.

Climate-Resilient Urban Planning

- States must prioritize resilient urban planning to steer clear of disasters like the recent floods. Regulating construction on floodplains, preserving natural drainage systems, and investing in green infrastructure will prove indispensable. Additionally, measures to enhance the adaptive capacity of cities against extreme weather events should be central to the strategy.

Inter-State Water Management

- Effective water management across States, particularly concerning rivers like the Yamuna, demands harmonized efforts. From upstream riverbed mining to downstream barrage operation, States must work together to ensure the natural flow of water is maintained without causing undue harm to downstream regions.

Investing in Disaster Preparedness

- Preparedness for future floods necessitates investments in early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, and disaster response mechanisms. Governments should collaborate on the research and implementation of cutting-edge technologies to anticipate and mitigate flooding risks effectively.

Public Participation and Awareness

- Engaging citizens in the flood resilience agenda is critical. Raising awareness about responsible urban practices, water conservation, and disaster preparedness will foster community participation and ownership in flood management.

Conclusion:

The recent floods have sounded an alarm that must not go unheeded. As climate change intensifies, the specter of urban floods looms large over India's cities. Delhi's recent deluge serves as a reminder that no city can claim immunity from the forces of nature. To fortify against such cataclysms, States must abandon the parochial mindset and embark on a collaborative journey. Together, they can engineer a resilient strategy that intertwines the principles of environmental stewardship, sustainable development, and public welfare. The unity in purpose will safeguard cities and their inhabitants from the wrath of floods and nurture a brighter and more resilient urban future.

Battling the GM Mustard Dilemma

Context:

The Supreme Court of India is currently witnessing an ardent battle between environmentalists and Delhi University over the cultivation of genetically modified (GM) herbicide-tolerant (HT) mustard. This contentious issue has far-reaching implications for Indian farmers and consumers, as GM crops differ significantly from conventional varieties and hybrids.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government Policies and Intervention) GS-03 (Biotechnology)

Prelims:

- GM crops
- Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)

Mains Questions

- What are the key factors that differentiate genetically modified (GM) crops from conventional varieties, and how do these differences impact Indian agriculture? (150 words)
- Evaluate the regulatory weaknesses highlighted by the Committees and discuss the potential consequences of releasing herbicide-tolerant (HT) crops like GM mustard without adequate precautions. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- GM Crops
- GM Crops in India - A Controversial Debate
- A Need for Transparent and Robust Regulation

GM Crops:

- **Definition of GMOs:** Genetically modified crops (GM crops) are agricultural plants whose DNA has been altered using genetic engineering techniques, enabling the incorporation of genes from various living organisms to express desired traits.
- **GM crops in India:** India has approved only one GM crop for commercial cultivation, which is Bt cotton. This variety was approved in 2002 after being illegally cultivated by many growers in the early 2000s, and it currently accounts for 95% of the cotton-growing area in the country.
- **Other GM crops in India:** BT Brinjal, GM-Mustard, and Protato (protein-rich potato).
- **Potential of GM crops:** GM technology allows for the introduction of desired traits from any living organism, be it plants or animals, offering possibilities for enhancing agricultural productivity. However, concerns surrounding safety, regulation, and public acceptance continue to influence the pace of GM crop approvals in India.

GM Crops in India - A Controversial Debate

- Over the past two decades, India has been a battleground of opinions regarding GM crops. Environmentalists, scientists, politicians, farmers, and consumers have all raised valid questions concerning the safety, efficacy, and necessity of genetically modified food.
- The advent of Bt cotton, the first and only GM crop approved in the country, has been met with mixed results. While some farmers have experienced short-term benefits, it has come at a steep cost in terms of cultivation expenses and risks.
- Simultaneously, seed companies have profited significantly from the sale of expensive GM seeds.
- To address the intensifying debate, two Standing Committees of Parliament meticulously examined the subject of GM crops and food. Additionally, the Supreme Court appointed a Technical Expert Committee (TEC) in response to public interest litigations.
- These two committees, working over a five-year interval, highlighted notable weaknesses in the regulatory framework and strongly advocated for caution before the release of GM food.
- The Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, and Forests particularly pointed to GM mustard, urging the government to conduct a thorough and transparent assessment of its long-term biosafety, environmental risks, and socio-economic impacts.
- Five out of the six TEC members also criticized the safety assessment of GM crops, deeming HT crops like GM mustard unsuitable for the Indian context and foreseeing adverse consequences on the environment, rural livelihoods, and sustainable agriculture.



A Need for Transparent and Robust Regulation

- The convergence of viewpoints among prominent scientists and elected representatives is a compelling case against hasty approval of any HT crop. This convergence effectively refutes the notion that critics of GM crops are anti-development.

- Consequently, the government must approach the issue of HT crops, particularly GM mustard, with transparency and robustness, emphasizing the importance of precaution.
- However, the government's current approach raises serious concerns. Despite provisions of the Right to Information Act and a declaration by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee, the government has not made the full biosafety dossier of GM mustard public.
- Moreover, the government seems dismissive of agricultural scientists' criticisms, which highlight that non-GM mustard hybrids already available offer superior yields compared to GM mustard.

Conclusion:

- The disregard with which the government is pressing forward, ignoring science-based concerns and opposition, is disconcerting. Attempting to sidestep the growing evidence of long-term ecological and health risks of HT crops, the government argues that GM mustard should not be considered HT since its primary objective is to improve yields. However, the scientific community unequivocally classifies GM mustard as an HT crop, making the government's argument misleading at best. Such actions not only mock facts and logic but also undermine the constitutional principles of safeguarding public health, protecting the environment, and preserving agricultural livelihoods.
- The decision on GM mustard's fate before the Supreme Court holds tremendous significance, as it could set a precedent for the potential release of other HT crops in the future. The future of farming, India's rich food culture, and agricultural heritage hang in the balance. Therefore, it is imperative for the Supreme Court to thoroughly consider the consequences and uphold the principles of sustainable agriculture and responsible technological advancement, keeping the best interests of Indian farmers and consumers at heart.

Human error' led to Balasore train tragedy

Context :

The report to the Railway Minister and Railway Board states that the triple-train crash on June 2 was caused by errors in the signalling circuit modification performed at the Bahanaga Bazaar station, which led to the erroneous signal being given to the Coromandel Express.

What is the background of the tragic incident?

- **Details of the Accident:** Two express trains and a goods train were involved in the accident, which happened in the Balasore district of Odisha. The Yashwantpur-Howrah Express's two carriages derailed close to the Bahanaga train station, colliding with the Coromandel Express as it approached. As a result, roughly 17 coaches derailed, some of which collided with a freight train's waggons.
- **Casualties:** Over 350 people were hurt in the collision, and at least 70 passengers were thought dead. As victims were being pulled out from under the derailed carriages, it was anticipated that the death toll would grow.
- **Earlier Mishap:** This mishap was rated as one of the worst in recent memory. It is mentioned that the Coromandel Express also experienced an accident in 2013,

which occurred in the Jajpur district, around 50 kilometres from the current disaster scene.

- **Government Response:** The Odisha government deployed multiple teams, including senior Secretaries and a Minister, to manage the situation. Doctors from neighbouring districts and premier medical colleges were mobilized to provide medical assistance to the injured.
- **Assistance and Reactions:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed grief over the accident. The Railways Minister announced compensation for the deceased and injured. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin dispatched a team to aid Tamils affected by the accident and promised necessary assistance.
- **Coordination:** To coordinate with railway officials and the Odisha government in providing rescue and relief to the affected passengers, the West Bengal government dispatched a delegation consisting of a Minister and an MP.

What were the findings of investigations of the tragic incident?

- **Train collision in Balasore:** On June 2, a train crashed in Balasore, tragically killing 291 people and injuring over 900 others.
- **Duty of the S&T Department:** The railway system's Signal and Telecommunication (S&T) division was held primarily accountable for the collision.
- **Human Error:** The accident was deemed to be the result of "human error" and mistakes made by the S&T division.
- **Alteration of the signalling circuit Failures:** The signalling-circuit modification work that was done at the north signal goomty of the Bahanaga Bazaar station in the past had lapses that led to the crash. The goomty is a cabin that houses railroad machinery.
- **Execution Errors:** The crash was also brought on by errors in the signalling work that was being done to replace an electric lifting barrier at the level crossing gate 94.
- **Maintainance timings:** Repairs were completed on time, with a reconnection memo being provided at 4.50 p.m. on the day of the accident after a disconnection notice for repairs was issued at around 4.20 p.m. But even after reconnecting, S&T personnel continued to work on the signal circuit.
- **Wrong Signalling and Collision:** Train 12841 (Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express) received a green signal for a run-through movement on the UP postal line due to the errors, which led to a collision. The train, however, travelled on the UP loop line since the crossover 17 A/B was set to the loop line. As a result, Train 12864 Yeshwantpur-Howrah Express was rear-ended by a goods train, which caused it to crash and derailed.
- **Submission of a report:** A.M. Chowdhary, the South Eastern Circle Commissioner of Railway Safety, investigated the incident and delivered a 40-page report to the Railway Board, the Director-General of Safety, and the office of Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

How to prevent further tragedies from happening?

- **Past Incident and Recommendations:** The study referred to a comparable incident that occurred in May 2022 at the Bankranayabaz railway station, underlining the fact that corrective actions taken in the wake of that occurrence would have prevented the Balasore catastrophe.
- **Commissoner's Recommendations:** The Commissioner made several recommendations, including updating wiring diagrams for completion signalling and other documents, adhering to best practices for signalling-modification work, performing functional tests before alterations, using approved circuit diagrams during

modifications, deploying a separate team for testing modified circuits, and issuing competency certificates for signalling modification work.

- **Regular Inspections & Maintenance:** Ensure that the infrastructure, including the trains, tracks, signals, and other components, is regularly inspected and well-maintained. This includes looking for any mechanical issues, worn-out components, or other dangers.
- **Advanced signalling Systems:** Implement cutting-edge signalling technologies, such as automated train control (ATC) or positive train control (PTC) systems. These innovations can control speed, monitor train movement, and avoid collisions.
- **Training and Education:** Make sure operators and maintenance staff are well-versed with safety standards, emergency procedures, and best practices by offering comprehensive training programmes.
- **Regulations and Compliance for Safety:** Enforce stringent safety rules and make sure that all parties, such as train drivers, maintenance workers, and railway authorities, abide by them. Any safety hazards can be found and fixed with the help of routine audits and inspections.
- **Risk evaluation and mitigation:** To identify possible dangers and create mitigation methods, conduct detailed risk assessments. This entails researching variables like the weather, the state of the tracks, and train congestion.

Pakistan hopes India will adopt Indus Water Treaty

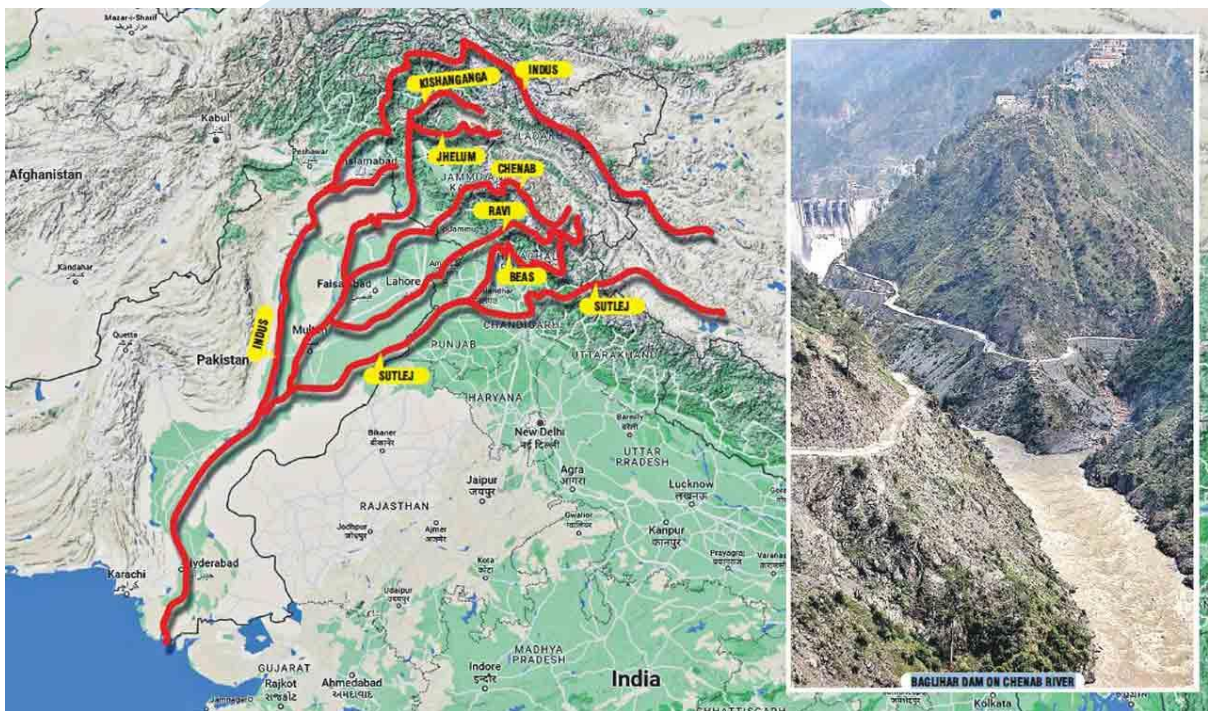
Context :

Pakistan expressed its hope that India would follow the Indus Waters Treaty in "good faith" after New Delhi declared on Thursday that it cannot be forced to take part in "illegal" proceedings at the Permanent Court of Arbitration regarding the Kishenganga and Ratle hydropower projects in Kashmir.

What is the Indus Water treaty discussed in this context?

- **Negotiation and signing:** The Indus Waters Treaty was negotiated between India and Pakistan with the World Bank acting as a mediator. Ayub Khan, the president of Pakistan, and Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister of India, signed it on September 19, 1960, in Karachi.
- **River Division:** Eastern rivers and western rivers are the two groups into which the treaty separates the rivers of the Indus basin. Beas, Ravi, and Sutlej are the three eastern rivers under Indian sovereignty; Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum are the three western rivers under Pakistani administration.
- **Water Allocation:** According to the agreement, Pakistan and India would share the waters of certain rivers. The three eastern rivers' waters can be used by India for storage, consumption, and irrigation without any restrictions. On the other hand, Pakistan enjoys unlimited access to the western rivers.
- **Non-Consumptive Uses:** India is permitted to use the waters of the western rivers for non-consumptive uses in addition to irrigation, including power generation, navigation, fish farming, and floating of property.
- **Water allocation Criteria:** To ensure fair sharing between the two countries, the treaty specifies precise criteria for the allocation of water throughout different seasons and conditions.

- **Treaty Principles:** The preamble to the treaty highlights India and Pakistan's goodwill, friendliness, and collaboration to make the most use of the Indus River system. It acknowledges each nation's rights and duties in regulating the seas.
- **Mechanism for Resolving Disputes:** The treaty creates a procedure for settling arguments and disagreements between India and Pakistan. It allows the World Bank to designate a Neutral Expert to resolve disagreements that cannot be settled via negotiation.
- **Water wars Prevention:** Despite their history of military battles, the treaty has been successful in preventing water issues between India and Pakistan. It has made it easier for the two nations to manage and share their water resources in harmony.
- **The World Bank's Role:** As the treaty's custodian and facilitator, the World Bank is extremely important. It aids in the settlement of disputes and keeps an eye on how the terms of the treaty are being carried out.



What is the reason behind the dispute in the case of Indus Water?

- The **Kishanganga and Ratle Hydroelectric Projects (HEPs)** were the subject of Pakistan's **initial request in 2015** for the appointment of a **Neutral Expert** to investigate those complaints.
- Pakistan abruptly **withdrew its request for a Neutral Expert in 2016** and suggested that a **Court of Arbitration** rule on its objections instead.
- Per the pertinent **dispute resolution clauses of the treaty**, Pakistan contacted the World Bank in August 2016 to **request the establishment of a Court of Arbitration**.
- In response, **India filed a different application requesting the appointment of a Neutral Expert rather than an arbitration court**.
- India claimed that Pakistan's bid for a court of arbitration was an infraction of the treaty's graded system for resolving disputes.
- The term "**graded mechanism**" refers to a method of resolving disputes where parties first attempt to address the matter through consultation, then submit it to a Neutral Expert, and then, if necessary, to an Arbitration Court.

- The **World Bank chose to take India's proposal** for a **Neutral Expert** into consideration rather than **responding to Pakistan's request for a Court of Arbitration**.
- An impartial technical expert is chosen to look into and offer opinions on certain technical issues of the dispute.
- While evaluating India's application, the World Bank put on hold the selection of a Neutral Expert and Chairman for the Court of Arbitration.
- But after a sizable delay, the **World Bank declared in March 2022** that it will restart the **selection of a Neutral Expert and a Chairman for the Court of Arbitration**.

What is the Court of Arbitration?

- **Established:** The Permanent Court of Arbitration was established in 1899 during the first Hague Peace Conference. Its goal was to establish a framework for the arbitration of international conflicts in a peaceful manner.
- **Location:** The Hague, Netherlands is home to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The Permanent Court of Arbitration's headquarters and other international law-related organisations are located at the Peace Palace, which was built between 1907 and 1913.
- **Nature of the Organization:** The Permanent Court of Arbitration is a non-United Nations intergovernmental organisation. It holds the status of a United Nations observer while not being an organisation of the organisation. It can now participate in UN operations because of its constructive connection.
- **Services for Conflict Resolution:** The Permanent Court of Arbitration serves as an arbitral tribunal and offers services for conflict resolution in connection with agreements made between nations. Member nations, international organisations, or private parties may be participants in these accords.
- **Legal Issues Covered:** A wide range of legal issues are addressed in the cases heard by the Permanent Court of Arbitration. These include disagreements over national and international trade as well as territorial and maritime issues, human rights, and sovereignty.
- **Membership:** The 1899 Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes and the 1907 Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes are two different multilateral accords that establish the Permanent Court of Arbitration. 122 nations are currently members of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.
- **Neutrality and Impartiality:** The Permanent Court of Arbitration makes sure that the arbitration process is unbiased and impartial. It offers a venue for parties to a dispute to present their claims and supporting documentation, and a panel of arbitrators is chosen to render a legally enforceable verdict.

Centre adding more services to Ayushman Bharat health centres

Context:

By the end of August, further services will be added to the current offerings, including screening, prevention, control, and management of non-communicable illnesses, treatment for common ophthalmology and ENT issues, senior and palliative health care services, and basic dental health care.

What are Ayushman Bharat Health Centers?

To move away from selective health care and towards a more complete spectrum of treatments covering preventative, promotive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative care for all ages, the Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) were introduced under the Ayushman Bharat Programme. These facilities were envisioned as the cornerstone of India's healthcare system in the National Health Policy of 2017.



What are the services provided under the Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)?

- **Care for Pregnancy and Childbirth:**
 1. Services for antenatal care that protect pregnant women's health.
 2. Support and assistance during labour to encourage safe deliveries.
 3. postnatal care to keep an eye on the mother's and the child's health.
- **Services for neonatal and infant health care:**
 1. Newborns and infants receive specialised treatment to ensure their wellbeing.
 2. services for immunising against diseases that can be prevented.

3. screening for developmental delays or health problems and early identification.
- **Childhood and Adolescent Health Care Services:**
 1. Comprehensive healthcare for children and adolescents is provided by childhood and adolescent health care services.
 2. monitoring of growth, vaccination, and dietary assistance.
 3. early intervention and childhood illness screening.
 - **Services for family planning and reproductive health:**
 1. counselling on contraception and family planning techniques.
 2. providing services and materials related to contraception.
 3. prevention and treatment of problems with reproductive health.
 - **Treatment of Contagious Diseases:**
 1. governmental health programmes
 2. implementation of national health initiatives for managing and controlling communicable illnesses.
 3. This includes initiatives to combat illnesses like leprosy and tuberculosis (TB).
 - **Management of common communicable diseases and general outpatient care:**
 1. Treatment for common communicable diseases such as respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, and skin infections.
 2. general outpatient treatment for minor disorders and acute, straightforward illnesses.
 - **Non-Communicable illnesses (NCDs) Screening, Prevention, Control, and Management:**
 1. Risk factor screening and early detection of NCDs such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular illnesses, etc.
 2. encouraging the adoption of preventative measures and lifestyle changes.
 3. offering management and treatment services for NCDs that have been identified.
 - **Basic Oral Health:**
 1. Basic dental care treatments are offered as part of basic oral health care.
 2. promotion and education of oral health.
 3. referrals for cutting-edge dental care as needed.
 - Common ophthalmic and ENT issues are treated with basic ENT (ear, nose, and throat) therapy.

What is the Ayushman Bharat programme mentioned here?

1. To realise the goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the Government of India's flagship programme, **Ayushman Bharat**, was introduced as advised by the **National Health Policy 2017**. This programme was created to fulfil the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and their core principle, "**leave no one behind.**"
2. **Ayushman Bharat represents** an effort to transition from a **sectoral and segmented approach** to the **delivery of health services** to a **comprehensive need-based strategy**. This programme intends to implement ground-breaking interventions to holistically address the healthcare system at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (encompassing prevention, promotion, and ambulatory care). The continuum of care approach used by **Ayushman Bharat consists of two interconnected parts:**
 1. **HWCs (Health and Wellness Centres)**

2. Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)

What were the changes that the government is intending to make on these HWCs?

- **Service Expansion:**
 - The **AB-HWCs** programme is currently experiencing its **largest service expansion**.
 - **Non-communicable disease screening, prevention, control, and management** are among the new services being provided.
 - **Emergency medical services, basic dental health care, aged and palliative care, common ophthalmology and ENT disorders, and screening** for and treatment of mental health conditions are also offered.
 - By the end of August, it is intended to have reached every centre.
- **Introduction of Health Officers:**
 - **Community health officers** are now **available in secondary centres** thanks to the **introduction of a new cadre of these professionals**.
 - These officers—a **total of 1.29 lakh**—will run the **public health department** and serve as clinicians.
 - They will be in charge of the **group of auxiliary nurse midwives, Anganwadi workers, and accredited social health activists**.
- **national quality assurance standards:**
 - The National Quality Assurance Standards assessment and certification are advocated for AB-HWCs.
 - By 2026, it is intended to have 50% of the centres certified.
- **Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC):**
 - The **program's goal** is to offer **comprehensive primary health care**, which includes services for **pregnant women and children, care for people** with non-communicable diseases, and free access to **basic medications and diagnostic tools**.
 - The intention is to increase the accessibility of these services and promote universal access to healthcare.
- **Cumulative Screenings:**
 - The **AB-HWCs initiative** has carried out a sizable number of **non-communicable illness screenings**.
 - The total number of **screenings is more than 122.02 crore**.
 - This includes **36.16 billion screenings for diabetes, 24.75 billion for oral cancer, 11.44 billion for breast cancer, and 7.83 billion for cervical cancer**.

These points emphasise the program's broad range of screenings and wellness activities, the addition of community health officers, the emphasis placed on quality assurance, and the development of services.

In Varanasi, turtles help clean the Ganga

Context :

Large-scale human efforts have been made since 2014 as part of the Namami Gange Programme to clean the Ganga and revitalise the almost 2,600 km river network. Turtles in particular have been playing a significant influence in this.

What is Namami Gange Programme ?

- **Partnership:** To carry out the Namami Gange Programme, which seeks to clean and revitalise the Ganga river network, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Ministry of Forest joined up with the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).
- **The Namami Gange Programme has two primary goals** that it wants to accomplish:
 - a. **Pollution reduction:** The program's main focus is on practical ways to lessen pollution in the Ganga River.
 - b. **Conservation and rejuvenation:** The Ganga River is intended to be preserved and revitalised to ensure its long-term survival.
- **Budget:** From 2023 to 2026, **the plan will cost Rs. 22,500 crore**. This significant sum of money is earmarked to assist the program's numerous initiatives and projects.
- **Community Engagement:** The programme aims to interact with a variety of stakeholders, **including researchers, tech firms, investors, and locals**. The plan seeks to **promote cooperation and cooperative efforts** for the **conservation of the Ganga River by involving these interest groups**.
- **Mascot:** The **Namami Gange Program's** mascot is the well-known comic book character **Chacha Chaudhary**, chosen by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)**. The goal of this **choice is to raise programming awareness and engagement among the general population**.
- **Clean Ganga Roadshow:** In **Glasgow, during COP26**, a **Clean Ganga roadshow** was launched. **Four chapters were established** as a result of the roadshow in **Scotland, Wales, the Midlands, and London**. These chapters act as hubs for bringing together various interest groups with the **Namami Gange Programme and fostering awareness and cooperation**.
- **Fish conservation:** At the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers near Prayagraj Sangam, more than **30,000 seeds of catla, rohu, and mrigal fishes were released to address the decline of large carps in the Ganga River**. This programme attempts to restore the fish population and protect the river's ecology.
- **Project Progress:** According to the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), 147 out of 341 projects (or 43% of them) have been finished. 61 out of 157 sewage projects (or 39%) have been finished, making up the majority of these finished projects. The efforts made to reduce pollution as a whole are aided by these accomplished projects.

What turtle-related activities are carried out as part of this scheme?

- **Turtle Breeding and Rehabilitation Centre:** As part of the Namami Gange Programme, a turtle breeding and rehabilitation centre has been running since 2017 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The facility is dedicated to raising turtles and releasing them into the Ganga River.
- **Turtle Species:** Around a dozen different kinds of turtles, both herbivorous and carnivorous, are raised at the facility. By helping to remove dead people and flowers that are dumped in the river, these turtles help to maintain the ecosystem.
- **Release of turtles:** Since 2017, more than 5,000 turtles have been released into the river, and another 1,000 turtles will be released this year. The turtle population and their contribution to the environment of the river are strengthened by this endeavour.
- **Turtle egg collection and hatching:** A crew from the Forest and Wildlife Department gathers turtle eggs along the Chambal region's coastline. The following 70 days are spent carefully monitoring these eggs. Only 30 eggs are placed in each wooden box, which is then filled with sand and water to speed up hatching.
- **Artificial Hatching:** The temperature in the room where the hatching process takes place is kept between 27 and 30 degrees Celsius. In the wooden boxes where the eggs are kept, the eggs are buried in sand, and the hatching occurs in June or July.

- **Nurturing Period:** The turtles are moved to an artificial pond after hatching, where they are cared for and watched over for two years. Before being released back into the river, this time allows the turtles to mature and expand.

What kind of changes were visible in the environment since the implementation of this programme?

- **Water Quality Improvement:** The Ganga River's turtle population has helped to improve the river's water quality. Turtles contribute by consuming meat and other materials dumped into rivers. As a result, there have been improvements in water quality indicators such as dissolved oxygen (DO), faecal coliform (FC), and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD).
- **Water Assessment:** Positive results have been obtained from water quality assessments performed at several points along the river. According to the pH values, the water is fit for bathing. Numerous areas have seen increased DO, BOD, and FC levels, which point to a beneficial effect on the river's environment.

What are the possible negative impacts of this scheme?

- **Overpopulation:** Releasing a lot of turtles can result in overpopulation, particularly if the ecosystem can't support so many people. As a result, there may be more competition for scarce resources like food and nesting areas, which could lower survival rates and negatively impact population health as a whole.
- **Disruption of native species:** The release of non-native turtles into an ecosystem has the potential to upset the balance of native species. Native turtle populations may collapse as a result of non-native turtles out-competing or preying on them. On the ecosystem as a whole, this may have cascade impacts that could limit biodiversity and cause ecological imbalance.
- **Degradation of the habitat:** Turtles have certain habitat needs, such as adequate nesting places and aquatic habitats. If too many turtles are released without regard for the ecosystem's carrying capacity, habitat destruction may result. Increased foraging may lead to overgrazing of aquatic vegetation, upsetting the ecosystem's balance, while excessive nesting may harm the environment's vegetation and affect the structure of the soil.

Import of urea may ease by 2025

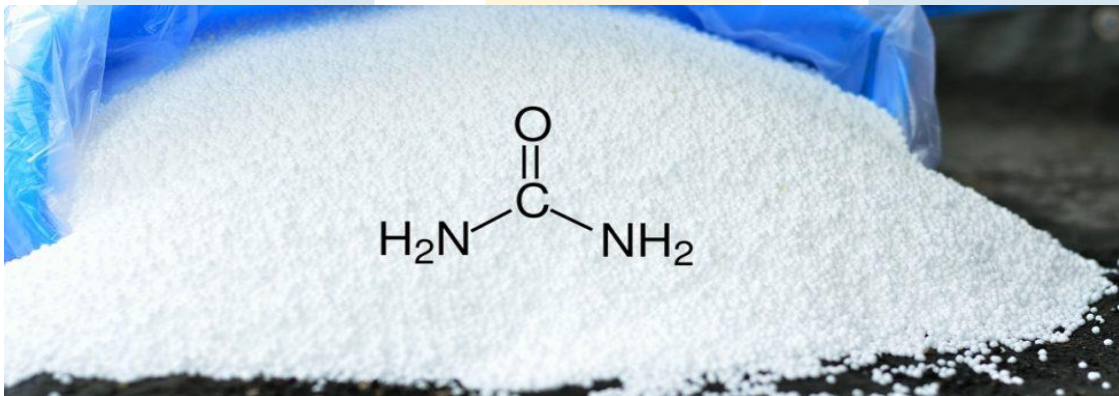
Context :

According to Manukh Mandaviya, the Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers, the country's fertiliser use has fallen out of balance, necessitating the introduction of a special package worth an estimated 3.7 lakh crore for farmers. He claimed in an interview with The Hindu that the country's current nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium ratio should have been 4:2:1. Instead, it is 8:3:1.

What is the reason behind reducing the imports of fertilizers?

- **Green Revolution:** By introducing high-yielding crop types, the Green Revolution in India sought to improve agricultural production and reduce food scarcity.
- **Nutrient Deficiencies:** Numerous Indian soils are deficient in nutrients, such as nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), which are crucial for plant growth.

- **NPK Fertilisers:** The Green Revolution encouraged the use of chemical fertilisers containing NPK, which gave crops an instantaneous and concentrated delivery of nutrients, to address nutrient deficits.
- **Increase in Crop Yields:** The use of NPK fertilisers increased crop yields significantly, especially for staples like wheat and rice.
- **Continued Use:** NPK fertilisers have remained common in Indian agriculture due to the success of the Green Revolution.
- **Soil Nutrient Replenishment:** NPK fertilisers are used by farmers to restore the soil's nutrients and guarantee the best possible crop growth and production.
- **Increased Agricultural Productivity:** A significant rise in agricultural productivity was caused by the widespread use of NPK fertilisers as well as other elements like enhanced irrigation and contemporary agricultural methods.
- **Soil degradation Concerns:** Concerns about soil degradation include nitrogen imbalances, decreased soil fertility, and elevated soil salinity as a result of the overuse of chemical fertilisers over time.
- **Water Pollution:** Runoff from fields where NPK fertilisers are used can contaminate water sources, causing water pollution and ecological harm.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** As people become more conscious of the damaging effects that excessive fertiliser use has on the environment, initiatives are being made to encourage sustainable agriculture methods that lessen dependency on NPK fertilisers.



What are the adverse effects of overusing fertilizers?

- **Soil Degradation:** Degradation of the soil can result from the overuse of NPK fertilisers and poor management techniques. **Continuous use of these fertilisers over time has the potential to degrade soil fertility, reduce organic matter content, and alter the physical structure of the soil.** As a result of this degradation, the soil may erode, beneficial soil organisms may disappear, and its ability to retain water may be reduced.
- **Nutrient Imbalance:** Unbalanced nutrient levels can be caused by an overreliance on NPK fertilisers. **Nitrogen (N) discharge and leaching from excessive nitrogen application can contaminate rivers and lakes. High soil phosphorus (P) concentrations can cause eutrophication, which damages aquatic habitats by causing oxygen deprivation and destructive algal blooms.**
- **Contamination of groundwater:** Excessive use of nitrogen-based fertilisers can cause **leaching, which can contaminate groundwater.** A concern about the quality of drinking water is posed by nitrate, a result of nitrogen fertilisers, which can travel through the soil profile and infiltrate groundwater sources. **Nitrate contamination in drinking water can be harmful to people's health, especially for young children and expectant mothers.**
- **Reduced biodiversity:** The use of **NPK fertilisers** without consideration can have a detrimental effect on biodiversity in agricultural environments. A **reduction in plant diversity results from excessive fertilisation, which favours the growth of some**

plant species at the expense of others. **Beneficial insects, pollinators, and other species that depend** on a variety of environments for food and shelter may be impacted as a result.

- **Implications for climate change:** Nitrous oxide (N₂O), a powerful greenhouse gas, is released during the **production, shipping, and use of NPK fertilisers**. The ozone layer's thinning and climate change can both be caused by **N₂O emissions from fertilisers**.
- **Economic hardship:** Because **NPK fertilisers** can be **expensive, relying too heavily on them can place a financial burden on farmers**, particularly small-scale farmers. Furthermore, continued fertiliser application without good soil management techniques might eventually **reduce crop output, necessitating even higher fertiliser inputs to sustain yields**.

What are the measures taken by the government to overcome this situation?

- **Soil Health Card Scheme:** Farmer-specific soil health cards are made available to farmers through the **Soil Health Card Scheme**, which was established. These cards include **advice on the right amount and kind of fertilisers to apply**, as well as details on the nutritional content of their soil. This **programme aims to encourage sensible and balanced fertiliser use by offering scientific recommendations**.
- **Rationalisation of Subsidies:** To deter **excessive use of fertiliser**, the government has been **striving to rationalise the subsidies**. While lowering or removing subsidies for urea, which is **frequently overused because of its cost**, efforts are **being made to tailor subsidies to small and marginal farmers**.
- **Neem Coating of Urea:** To control the use of urea, the government made **neem coating of urea mandatory in 2015**. Nitrogen is slowly released from urea coated with neem, which **lowers the amount needed and prevents its diversion for non-agricultural uses**. This action aids in cutting back on unnecessary urea use.
- **Integrated Nutrient Management:** The use of organic manures, biofertilizers, and other nutrient sources with chemical fertilisers is emphasised in **Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) practises**, which are promoted by the government. INM seeks to strengthen soil health, increase nutrient use effectiveness, and lessen reliance on artificial fertilisers.
- **Promotion of Organic agriculture:** Through several initiatives and programmes, the government supports organic agricultural methods. **Compost, vermicompost, and biofertilizers are a few examples of the natural inputs** used in organic farming that lessen the need for synthetic fertilisers. Organic farming is encouraged nationwide through programmes like the **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and the National Programme on Organic Production (NPOP)**.
- **Special agricultural package:** Due to the uneven use of fertilisers around the nation, a **package worth 3.7 lakh crore is being recommended to aid farmers in India**. There are connections between the health of the soil, people, animals, and the environment. Different facets of health and the environment may suffer as a result of the decline of soil health.
- The **government is taking its time transitioning to 100% natural farming**. As was the case in **Sri Lanka, a sudden switch to organic farming can have unforeseen repercussions**. The objective is to gradually promote organic and natural farming methods.
- By **2025, the government wants to replace its reliance on imported urea with nano urea and other substitutes**. Nano urea will still be used in conjunction with regular urea.

China event raises concern over India's only ape

Context:

At a recent international conference on gibbons held in China, the conservation status of India's sole ape raised questions.

What do we know about hoolock gibbon?

- There are two types of Hoolock Gibbon which are seen in parts of North Eastern India and Parts of China
- Eastern Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock leuconedys*):
- Eastern Hoolock Gibbons are mostly found in Myanmar and southwest Yunnan, China, east of the Chindwin River.
- The colour of the fur is mostly black.
- Genetic study shows a split from a Western Hoolock Gibbon common ancestor around 1.42 million years ago.
- distinct white eyebrows that are separated slightly more widely than those of a Western Hoolock gibbon.
- Western Hoolock Gibbon: *Hoolock hoolock*, also known as the Western Hoolock Gibbon, is mostly found in Myanmar west of the Chindwin River.
- Light brown or reddish brown is the colour of the fur.
- Genetic research suggests that the Eastern Hoolock Gibbon and humans diverged from one another roughly 1.42 million years ago.
- distinctive white eyebrows that are more closely spaced than those of an Eastern Hoolock gibbon.



What are the threats faced by the Hoolock gibbons (both species)?

- **Habitat encroachment:** Human activities including farming, building infrastructure, and towns that invade gibbon habitats.
- Fragmentation of the forest restricts the movement and availability of gibbons by dividing their **habitats into smaller, isolated sections**.
- Gibbons are hunted for their meat, which is used as **bushmeat**, and for their various body parts, **which are utilised in traditional medicine**.
- **Pet trade:** Gibbons are frequently taken in violation of the law and marketed as exotic pets.

What is the strength of these species and their conservative status?

- In the last few decades, there has been a sharp drop in the population of the Eastern Hoolock Gibbon.
- It was one of the top 25 most endangered primates in the world in 2009.
- The likelihood of the Western Hoolock Gibbon surviving is decreasing as a result of habitat loss.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List classifies it as Endangered.
- Both species are recognized in India under Schedule 1 of the Indian (Wildlife) Protection Act of 1972.
- The largest remaining population of Hoolock Gibbons is determined to be in Myanmar, according to a national Hoolock Gibbon status evaluation done in Myanmar between 2007 and 2011.
- Hunting and logging were shown to be two major threats to both species.
- The two main challenges to their survival were identified as habitat degradation and fragmentation.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Challenge of Resurrecting the WTO's Dispute Settlement System

Context:

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) deal at the Geneva ministerial conference, aimed to revive the WTO's dispute settlement system (DSS), also known as the organization's 'crown jewel,' by 2024.

Relevance:

GS-02, GS-03 (Bilateral Groupings and Agreements)

Prelims:

- WTO
- WTO's appellate body
- Anti-dumping duties

Mains Questions:

- What challenges does the WTO face in defining the role of the appellate body and addressing the issue of creating binding precedents? (150 words)

WTO's Appellate Body and Its Importance in Dispute Settlement

- The Appellate Body of the World Trade Organization (WTO) plays a crucial role in resolving trade-related disputes. **Established in 1995, this standing committee comprises seven members who handle appeals against judgments issued in such disputes.** With over 500 international disputes and more than 350 rulings since its inception, the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism is among the most active in the world.
- **The Functioning of the Appellate Body:**
 1. The Appellate Body serves as an avenue for countries involved in a dispute to seek a review of panel reports on points of law. It has the authority to uphold, modify, or reverse the legal findings made by the panels that initially examined the issue.
 2. Between 1995 and 2014, approximately 68% of the 201 panel reports adopted were appealed. Notably, countries on either side of the dispute have the right to file an appeal.
 3. Over the years, the Appellate Body has issued around 152 reports, contributing significantly to the resolution of international trade conflicts.
- **The Significance of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Procedure:**

The WTO's dispute settlement procedure plays a vital role in ensuring the smooth flow of international trade. **Once the reports of the Appellate Body are adopted by the WTO's disputes settlement body, they become final and binding on the parties involved.** This ensures that disputes are resolved in a fair and impartial manner, maintaining the integrity of the multilateral trading system.

Dimensions of the Article:

- The 'Precedent' Problem
- Balancing Consistency and Flexibility

- Comparative Precedent Practices
- De-judicialization of Trade Multilateralism
- Voting as a Solution

The 'Precedent' Problem:

- The United States criticizes the appellate body for what it perceives as judicial overreach and exceeding its institutional mandate.
- The U.S. argues that the appellate body's role must be precisely defined before its resurrection can take place.
- A major point of contention lies in the creation of binding precedents through the appellate body's decisions, which the U.S. views as contrary to the text of the WTO's dispute settlement understanding (DSU).

Balancing Consistency and Flexibility:

- While there is no rule of precedent in international law, the **appellate body plays a crucial role in ensuring consistency in the interpretation and application of WTO agreements.**
- The DSU emphasizes that the dispute settlement system provides security and predictability to the multilateral trading system.
- Striking a delicate balance, the appellate body encourages reliance on previous interpretations in cases with similar issues but allows departures from previous rulings and reasoning if "cogent reasons" exist. However, likening this system to common law precedent vastly exaggerates the case.

Comparative Precedent Practices:

- Contrary to the U.S.'s contentions, the appellate body is not the only international court that considers its previous decisions.
- Other international courts, such as the International Court of Justice and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, also rely on past decisions unless compelling reasons warrant deviation.
- Some propose adopting a statement clarifying that appellate body rulings do not create precedents, although the U.S. remains unsatisfied with this approach.

De-judicialization of Trade Multilateralism:

- The U.S. appears to be pursuing the de-judicialization of trade multilateralism as part of its broader strategy. In the neoliberal economic landscape that shaped the WTO's creation, the law served as the visible hand complementing the invisible hand of market competition.
- The WTO acted as the regulatory mechanism for global trade, legalizing and judicializing international relations. However, de-judicialization, as defined by Daniel Abebe and Tom Ginsburg, involves weakening international courts to regain decision-making power.
- Amid rising geopolitical challenges posed by China, the U.S. seeks greater control over its trade policies and a reduced role for the appellate body's judicial review.

Voting as a Solution:

- Negotiating with the U.S. to revive the appellate body seems futile. One potential alternative, suggested by Henry Gao, **is electing appellate body members through voting at the WTO's General Council meeting**. However, this approach risks antagonizing the U.S., and it remains uncertain whether countries are willing to embark on such a path.

Way Forward:

Resurrecting the WTO's dispute settlement system demands a careful re-evaluation of the appellate body's role and the issue of creating binding precedents. It also necessitates addressing the broader trend of de-judicialization in trade multilateralism. Constructive dialogue, innovative solutions, and a collective commitment to upholding the rule of law are crucial in navigating these challenges and preserving the integrity of the WTO.

Conclusion:

The future of the WTO's dispute settlement system hangs in the balance. The U.S.'s obstructionism, concerns over precedent, and the push for de-judicialization present significant hurdles. Efforts to resurrect the system must prioritize striking the right balance between consistency and flexibility, redefining the appellate body's mandate, and exploring potential solutions that ensure fair and effective dispute resolution. The international community must unite in safeguarding the multilateral trading system and upholding the principles of international law.

Enhancing Public Health Surveillance: Unleashing the Power of Wastewater

Context:

The integration of wastewater surveillance into existing public health surveillance mechanisms holds great potential for revolutionizing disease prevention and control efforts exploring the benefits, challenges, and opportunities associated with harnessing the power of wastewater analysis for enhancing India's epidemiological capabilities.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Environmental Pollution & Degradation)

Prelims:

- Waste Water Management
- SBM 2.0
- Open Defecation-Free (ODF) status
- AMRUT Mission
- Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974

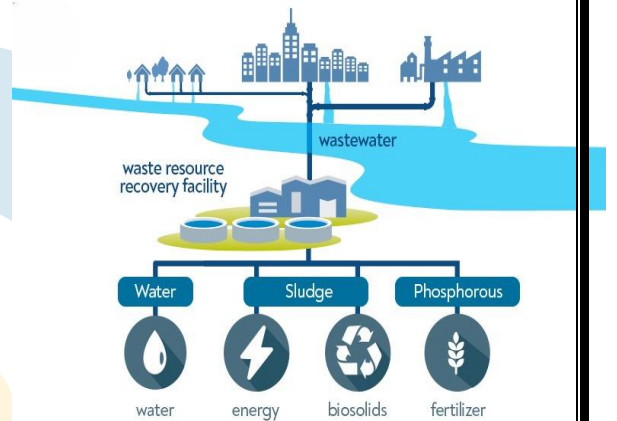
- The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- Central Pollution Control Board, Eutrophication, Bioremediation, Phytoremediation.

Mains Question:

- Discuss the potential of wastewater surveillance in bolstering public health efforts and the challenges and opportunities it presents for India's disease monitoring and response mechanisms. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Unveiling the Historical Relevance
- Resurrecting an Age-Old Strategy
- Unveiling the Benefits
- Charting the Path Forward
- The Power of Data Sharing
- Political Support and Funding



Unveiling the Historical Relevance:

- The extraordinary tale of **John Snow's investigative breakthrough during the devastating cholera outbreak of 1854** serves as a compelling reminder of the untapped potential that disease prevention and control hold.
- But what if Snow had access to today's tools? Could he have foreseen the imminent outbreak and sounded the alarm? Such questions evoke curiosity about the possibilities and advancements in disease surveillance and prevention that lie ahead.

Resurrecting an Age-Old Strategy:

- The recent publication in **The Lancet Global Health** resurrects the long-established concept of utilizing wastewater for public health surveillance.
- Originally conceived more than eight decades ago as a means to monitor the spread of poliovirus, this approach played a pivotal role in India's triumph over polio and has regained relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic as a tool for tracking the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

Unveiling the Benefits:

- The incorporation of wastewater surveillance into disease surveillance efforts offers numerous advantages in enhancing public health endeavours.
- This cost-effective approach eliminates the need for invasive individual samples, easing the burden on healthcare systems. Despite recent improvements, the existing surveillance system in India grapples with challenges such as uneven coverage and fragmented disease-specific efforts.
- By supplementing traditional data sources, wastewater surveillance can provide real-time insights into community-level disease patterns, often preceding clinical data.

Charting the Path Forward:

- To fully harness the potential of wastewater surveillance, it must be seamlessly integrated into existing surveillance mechanisms. Strengthening public health laboratory networks and incorporating wastewater sample testing into surveillance reporting can enable early disease detection, especially in areas with limited healthcare access and diagnostic capabilities.

- Furthermore, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, a groundbreaking initiative aiming to establish a comprehensive online platform for healthcare services, presents an ideal avenue for integrating wastewater surveillance.
- Real-time disease spread tracking and targeted public health responses can be facilitated through the harmonious fusion of these endeavours.

The Power of Data Sharing:

- The promise of wastewater surveillance hinges on the foundation of extensive data sharing. This necessitates fostering an environment of accessibility and cooperative strategies both domestically and internationally.
- By providing health departments at all levels of government access to wastewater surveillance data, India can amplify its disease monitoring and response capabilities.
- Moreover, sharing this data with global health agencies can foster collaborative efforts in disease tracking and mitigation, strengthening the global health infrastructure and enabling swift responses to public health threats.

Political Support and Funding:

- India's proactive stance on public health surveillance and resource mobilization serves as a promising foundation. As discussions emphasize the importance of innovation and implementation, the integration of wastewater surveillance aligns seamlessly with Niti Aayog's current vision.
- India's leadership role in international platforms like the G20 offers a remarkable opportunity to elevate the significance of innovative disease surveillance approaches, including wastewater sampling.
- By championing this agenda, India can garner international commitments, support, and position itself as a leader and coordinator in integrated public health surveillance. Through strategic collaborations and proactive leadership, India can pave the way for an alert, predictive, responsive, and robust model of disease surveillance.

Conclusion:

Embracing the power of wastewater analysis in public health surveillance holds immense potential for revolutionizing disease prevention and control efforts in India. By integrating wastewater surveillance into existing mechanisms, fostering data sharing, and securing political backing, India can position itself at the forefront of integrated public health surveillance. With a dedicated cadre of public health professionals and effective implementation strategies, India can unlock the vision of a proactive and responsive disease monitoring system, leading the charge in safeguarding public health.

Strengthening Bilateral Partnerships and Resolving the South China Sea Issue

Context:

The recent meeting between the Foreign Ministers of India and the Philippines at the fifth meeting of the Philippines-India Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Bilateral relations, Regional groupings)

Prelims:

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
- South China Sea
- Act East Policy
- BrahMos
- ASEAN, ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund, ASEAN-India Green Fund

Mains Questions:

- Assess the importance of dialogue and political frameworks in resolving the South China Sea issue, emphasizing the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the need for greater understanding among its member nations. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Strengthening Bilateral Partnership: A Pathway to a Promising Future
- Nautical Partnership: An Evolving Strength
- India's Shift in Stance: Upholding International Law and the 2016 Arbitral Award
- Arbitration Case: Unveiling the Verdict and Implications
- Dialogue and Political Frameworks: The Path to Peaceful Conflict Resolution



Strengthening Bilateral Partnership: A Pathway to a Promising Future

- The recent meeting between the Foreign Ministers of India and the Philippines at the fifth meeting of the Philippines-India Joint Commission on Bilateral Cooperation in New Delhi has paved the way for a strengthened bilateral partnership in the 21st century.
- The meeting, characterized by the shared interests and nearly 75 years of diplomatic history between the two maritime Asian republics, witnessed the External Affairs Minister of India, S. Jaishankar, and the Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Enrique Manalo, outlining a roadmap for enhanced cooperation between Manila and Delhi.

Nautical Partnership: An Evolving Strength

- The evolving strength of the nautical partnership between India and the Philippines is evident in various areas of cooperation and agreements.
- The decision to establish a resident defense attaché office in Manila signifies a deeper commitment to mutual defense and security. Additionally, the cooperation between the Coast Guards of the two countries has been boosted, facilitating joint efforts in safeguarding maritime interests.
- Manila's acquisition of naval assets under a concessional line of credit from Delhi further underscores the growing maritime collaboration.
- Moreover, the expansion of training and joint exercises on maritime security and disaster responses, coupled with the initiation of a maritime dialogue, cements the foundation of a robust partnership.

India's Shift in Stance: Upholding International Law and the 2016 Arbitral Award

- India's recent position on the South China Sea issue marks a departure from its earlier stance. While reiterating its consistent adherence to international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), India has now unequivocally called for respect towards the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea.
- This shift signifies India's candid recognition of the award's legitimacy and its commitment to upholding the rule of law.

Arbitration Case: Unveiling the Verdict and Implications

- The arbitration case between the Philippines and China, submitted to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), culminated in a significant verdict with far-reaching implications.
- Despite China's withdrawal from the arbitration proceedings, the PCA continued to adhere to UNCLOS guidelines and released the Award on July 12, 2016. The tribunal's unanimous decision favored the Philippines, rejecting China's historical rights claims and debunking the validity of the "nine-dash line."
- Moreover, the tribunal found China in violation of the Philippines' sovereign rights, particularly within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), through activities such as interfering with fishing and petroleum exploration, constructing artificial islands, and impeding the free movement of Philippine vessels.
- This landmark verdict serves as a reminder of the importance of upholding international law and respecting the rights of littoral states.

Dialogue and Political Frameworks: The Path to Peaceful Conflict Resolution

- Given the geopolitical, economic, and strategic significance of the South China Sea, it is imperative to find a political framework for resolving disputes in the region.
- The creation of such a framework, which can only be achieved through dialogue, becomes crucial. While the PCA's decision holds legal weight, the ground reality poses challenges to its implementation. Therefore, a peaceful conflict resolution that fully respects legal and diplomatic channels, in line with the ruling, is the preferred approach.
- Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should engage in "quiet diplomacy" to seek a political solution. The progress towards a legally binding "code of conduct" in the region rests primarily on ASEAN's shoulders.
- Strengthening understanding and unity among ASEAN member nations will enable them to effectively convey a crucial political message to China, emphasizing the importance of maintaining peace and upholding international law.

Way Forward:

- To ensure the stability and security of the South China Sea, it is imperative for nations, including India, to continue fostering robust bilateral partnerships and engaging in constructive dialogue.
- Upholding international law, respecting the 2016 Arbitral Award, and supporting ASEAN's efforts in building a political framework are essential steps toward peaceful conflict resolution.
- By prioritizing collaboration, understanding, and adherence to legal and diplomatic channels, nations can collectively work towards safeguarding the vital marine commons and preserving global trade and economic stability.

EU Parliament Resolution: A Misguided Diagnosis of the Manipur Issue

Context:

The recent EU Parliament resolution on the violence in Manipur has stirred controversy and prompted a heated debate on the international stage. India's dismissive response to the resolution, labeling it as an interference in internal affairs and reflecting a colonial mindset, raises important questions about the need for scrutiny and the impact of global interconnectedness.

Relevance:

GS-02, GS-03 (Poverty and Developmental Issues) (Issues Related to SCs & STs) (Minorities) (Government Policies & Interventions) (Pressure Groups) (North East Insurgency)

Prelims:

- Meitei Tribe, Kuki Tribe, Naga Tribe.
- 6th schedule, Inner Line Permit (ILP).
- Xaxa Committee

Mains:

- Analyze the Manipur issue and evaluate the implications of the recent EU Parliament resolution on the conflict. (150 words)

The European Union (EU)

- It is a cohesive economic and political block created particularly after the World War-2, consisting of 27 countries, with 19 of them using "euro" as their official currency, while 8 EU members have opted not to adopt the "euro".
- EU aims to act as a unified entity, promoting peace, shared values, and the well-being of all its citizens through **Internal Single Market system**.

- The objectives of the EU covers various aspects, including ensuring **freedom, security, and justice within its borders, fostering sustainable development** based on balanced economic growth, employment, social progress, and environmental protection, addressing social exclusion and discrimination, promoting scientific and technological advancements, and enhancing cohesion and solidarity among member countries.



- It also values and respects its diverse cultural and linguistic heritage by working hand in hand towards the establishment of an economic and monetary union with the euro as its currency.

Dimensions of the article:

- Understanding the Manipur Issue
- Erroneous Understanding: Religious Basis and Communal Divide
- Implications and Way Forward

Understanding the Manipur Issue:

- The violence that erupted in Manipur, resulting in numerous casualties and displacements, warrants international scrutiny and concern.
- The ongoing distrust and hostility between the **Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities** have created a fertile ground for external actors to examine the situation.
- Just as Indian politicians voice their concerns on various global issues, lawmakers in the EU Parliament have a legitimate right to question actions in Manipur.

Erroneous Understanding: Religious Basis and Communal Divide:

- The EU Parliament resolution mistakenly portrays the conflict in Manipur as having a religious basis, pitting Hindus against Christians. This interpretation is flawed and fails to capture the underlying dynamics of the situation.
- The vandalization of churches and temples during the conflagration between the Hindu-majority Meitei community and the Christian-dominated Kuki-Zo community has fueled this misguided perception. (However, the catalyst for the surge in violence was a contentious order issued by a single judge Bench in the Manipur High Court, erroneously including Meiteis in the list of Scheduled Tribes).
- It is essential to note that the Naga community, also predominantly Christian, expressed its grievances over this decision.
- Nevertheless, the ethnic violence primarily involves militants from the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities, aggravated by deep-seated socio-economic disparities between the "hill" and "valley" areas.
- Therefore, the religious discord highlighted in the EU resolution misrepresents the true nature of the conflict.

Implications and Way Forward:

- The misguided diagnosis of the Manipur issue in the EU Parliament resolution poses significant implications for the region.

- By emphasizing religious discord, new fault lines are likely to emerge, undermining the crucial reconciliation and accountability processes necessary for resolving the crisis.
- To break the persistent stalemate, it is imperative for the **stakeholders to focus on socio-economic disparities, bridge the gap between communities, and ensure that the government is perceived as impartial and committed to addressing ethnic grievances.**
- Moreover, civil society must play a pivotal role in fostering dialogue and understanding among the conflicting parties.
- International actors, including the EU Parliament, should reevaluate their stance and lend support to initiatives that promote inclusive peace-building efforts.

Conclusion:

The EU Parliament's resolution on the Manipur issue, although well-intentioned, suffers from a misdiagnosis of the conflict. By erroneously framing it as a religious discord, the resolution fails to capture the true complexities and dynamics at play. Instead, a more nuanced understanding is required, one that acknowledges the socio-economic disparities, ethnic polarization, and the need for comprehensive reconciliation efforts. Only through such an approach can lasting peace and stability be achieved in Manipur. The EU Parliament and other international stakeholders should reassess their position and actively support initiatives that address the root causes of the conflict, fostering an environment conducive to genuine healing and progress.

India's Virtual SCO Summit

Context:

The recent virtual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has raised questions about India's evolving approach and priorities within the organization.

Relevance:

GS-02- (Regional Groupings) (Important International Institutions)

Prelims:

- Shanghai Cooperation Organization
- UNSC.

Mains Questions:

1. Discuss the evolving dynamics of India-China relations within the SCO framework and the impact of China's actions on India's stance. (150 words)
2. Evaluate India's role in the Eurasian game and the measures it should undertake to maintain its influence in the region. (200 words)

Dimensions of the article:

- India's Shift in SCO Summit Format: Dilution of Objectives?
- Re-appraisal of Indian Interests: China's Actions as a Catalyst
- The Implications of Connectivity and the BRI

- Maintaining Ties with Eurasia: Beyond Buddhist Heritage
- Silence on Ukraine: Implications and Diplomatic Standpoints

India's Shift in SCO Summit Format: Dilution of Objectives?

- India's Foreign Secretary, Vinay Kwatra, defended the virtual nature of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, asserting that it did not imply a dilution of India's objectives.
- However, the absence of a clear explanation for the virtual format raises concerns about India's changing approaches and its diminishing commitment to the SCO.
- Holding the summit physically or in a hybrid manner would have added greater significance to India's involvement.



Re-appraisal of Indian Interests: China's Actions as a Catalyst

- China's actions towards India in 2020, coupled with the evolving international order, have compelled a re-appraisal of India's interests within the SCO.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's optimistic approach towards resolving contentious issues with Chinese President Xi Jinping during India's full membership in 2017 now appears less tenable.
- India's combative assertiveness on issues such as terrorism and connectivity reflects fundamental differences with China and Pakistan.
- This assertiveness also highlights India's isolation within the organization on connectivity matters.

The Implications of Connectivity and the BRI

- Connectivity is a core issue within the SCO, but India finds itself increasingly marginalized in this domain.

- Prime Minister Modi reiterated India's stance that connectivity projects should respect national sovereignty, explicitly targeting China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- However, other SCO members remain enthusiastic supporters of the BRI, posing a challenge for India.
- India must be cautious of China's efforts to integrate Eurasia, potentially shutting India out of the region with Pakistan's support.

Maintaining Ties with Eurasia: Beyond Buddhist Heritage

- While promoting Buddhist heritage is commendable, it may not be sufficient to sway SCO members towards India or prevent their deepening engagement with China. India should prioritize the development of connectivity through projects such as the Chabahar port in Iran, despite the challenges it presents.
- Establishing active air corridors with Central Asian Republics and adopting a pragmatic policy towards Afghanistan are also crucial for India to sustain its presence in the Eurasian game.

Silence on Ukraine: Implications and Diplomatic Standpoints

- The SCO Declaration remained conspicuously silent on the Ukraine war, with India, Pakistan, and China refraining from addressing the issue in their summit statements.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, mentioned Ukraine and criticized the West. Mr. Xi, a longstanding supporter of Mr. Putin during the conflict, did not express support for Russia in his summit statement. This silence raises questions about the cohesion and alignment of SCO member states on critical geopolitical matters.

Way Forward:

- Strengthening strategic engagement, especially in counterterrorism efforts, remains imperative.
- Additionally, India should focus on advancing connectivity initiatives while striking a delicate balance between opposing the BRI and engaging with Eurasian nations.
- Vigilance regarding China's regional integration efforts and maintaining diplomatic channels with key stakeholders will be crucial for India's future positioning.

Conclusion:

India's virtual SCO summit has sparked discussions about its evolving approaches and emerging challenges within the organization. China's actions, particularly in 2020, have prompted a re-evaluation of India's interests and priorities. The virtual format, though avoiding controversies, has underscored India's current standing in Eurasia and its western neighborhood. As India prepares for upcoming summits, such as BRICS and G-20, it must carefully navigate regional dynamics to safeguard its strategic objectives and secure a prominent role on the global diplomatic stage.

India-France Strategic Partnership

Context:

India and France, celebrating 25 years of their strategic partnership, recently witnessed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's significant visit to France. The meeting with French

President Emmanuel Macron resulted in several agreements and defense deals, marking the uniqueness of their multidimensional relationship.

Relevance:

GS Paper - 2 (Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

Prelims:

- Climate Change
- Paris Agreement
- International Solar Alliance (ISA)
- Indo-pacific region
- Free Trade Agreement

Mains Questions:

Analyse the uniqueness and multidimensionality of the India-France strategic partnership, particularly in light of the recent developments during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- "Horizon 2047"
- Indo-Pacific Cooperation: A Stepping Stone
- Defense Deals: Stepping Up Security
- Respect for Strategic Autonomy
- Diplomatic Balance: Navigating International Issues
- Beyond Traditional Alliances

"Horizon 2047"

- The highlight of the visit was the unveiling of "Horizon 2047," a strategic road map encompassing cooperation in defense, space, nuclear energy, climate change, green transitions, education, and people-to-people ties.
- This ambitious plan not only strengthens bilateral relations but also paves the way for mutual growth and development.

Indo-Pacific Cooperation: A Stepping Stone

- Recognizing the evolving geopolitical landscape, India and France released another road map detailing Indo-Pacific cooperation.
- The plan emphasizes military and naval exchanges, fostering regional stability and prosperity.
- Additionally, a trilateral development fund aims to assist countries in the region, promoting inclusivity and shared progress.

Defense Deals: Stepping Up Security

- Amid regional security challenges, both nations took decisive steps to enhance their military capabilities.
- The decision to procure **26 Rafale-M fighter jets** for the Indian Navy, alongside the acquisition of three more **Scorpene submarines**, showcases their commitment to maritime security.
- An agreement between Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Safran for helicopter engines further bolsters their defense partnership.



Respect for Strategic Autonomy

- A key pillar of India-France relations is the deep-rooted respect for each other's strategic autonomy.
- France's principled stand on non-interference in India's internal affairs and foreign policy choices reflects their commitment to a genuinely collaborative partnership.

Diplomatic Balance: Navigating International Issues

- Notably, France refrained from publicly criticizing India's stance on various issues, even during critical moments like India's nuclear tests.
- This diplomatic restraint underscores their balanced approach, allowing the partnership to thrive without external pressure.

Beyond Traditional Alliances

- Unlike many alliances that seek to draw each other into larger coalitions, India and France appreciate the strength of their bilateral relations.
- This characteristic sets them apart from other major global partnerships, highlighting their ability to chart an independent path towards common goals.

Way Forward:

The India-France strategic partnership has entered a new era with "Horizon 2047". As both nations start on a journey towards cooperation and growth, they must prioritize the following areas to unlock their full potential:

Leveraging Technology and Innovation

- Harnessing their expertise in defense, space, and nuclear energy, India and France should explore joint research and development projects to foster innovation and technological advancements.

Strengthening People-to-People Ties

- Cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and tourism initiatives can deepen the understanding between the two nations, fostering enduring friendships at the grassroots level.

Sustainable Development and Climate Change

- In tackling global challenges, India and France can combine their efforts to address climate change and pursue green transitions, setting an example for the international community.

Enhanced Indo-Pacific Engagement

- Both countries must actively engage with other nations in the Indo-Pacific region to promote a free, open, and inclusive order, contributing to regional stability and prosperity.

Conclusion:

The India-France strategic partnership stands as a masterpiece woven through decades of cooperation, mutual respect, and shared interests. As they celebrate 25 years of alliance, the significance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to France lies not only in the agreements and defence deals but in the underlying complexity and dynamism of their relationship.

India-France Relations: Navigating Complexity and Cooperation in a Changing World

Context:

The article discusses the diplomatic relations between India and France, focusing on the historical context and the underlying principles that have shaped their partnership.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Bilateral relations)

Mains Questions:

- Analyze the historical context of India-France relations and the impact of nuclear tests in Pokhran-II on the bilateral ties. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Historical Trajectory of India-France Relations:
- The Founding Principles of the India-France Engagement
- A Historical Example of Unwavering Ties
- France's Role in India's Nuclear Endeavors
- Mr. Modi's Visit to Paris: Upholding the Spirit of Engagement
- The Ukraine War: A Test of Non-Interference and Non-Alliances
- Strategic Partnerships and Geopolitical Alignment

The Historical Trajectory of India-France Relations:

- The year 1998 marked a critical turning point in India-France relations when India conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran-II, causing discomfort to the French government.
- Surprisingly, only a few months prior to this incident, French President Jacques Chirac had been the esteemed chief guest at India's Republic Day Parade, signifying the warmth of diplomatic relations.
- However, despite joining the P-5 countries in condemning the nuclear tests, France abstained from supporting the United States-led move to impose sanctions on India, preserving the Strategic Partnership Agreement intact.
- This intriguing dynamic highlighted the unique approach of India and France in handling their ties with a mixture of complexity and pragmatism.

The Founding Principles of the India-France Engagement:

- India and France have fostered a profound connection grounded in three fundamental pillars, serving as the bedrock of their relationship.
- Both nations hold steadfastly to the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, a reflection of their respect for sovereignty and autonomy.
- The shared belief in strategic autonomy, as emphasized by President Charles De Gaulle, underscores their commitment to charting independent paths on the global stage.
- Finally, adhering to the legacy of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India and France remain non-aligned, refraining from entangling themselves in each other's coalitions and alliances.

A Historical Example of Unwavering Ties:

- An exemplification of the unwavering ties between India and France was evident in French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac's visit to India in 1976.
- At that time, India was grappling with the ramifications of declaring an Emergency, garnering international criticism.
- However, Chirac chose to proceed with his visit, displaying the significance of fostering diplomatic relations irrespective of domestic circumstances. Furthermore, his acknowledgment of India's role in facilitating cooperation at the "Paris Conference on International Economic Cooperation" highlighted the importance of India's contributions on the global stage.

France's Role in India's Nuclear Endeavors:

- France's pivotal role in supporting India's nuclear ambitions can be traced back to 2006 when Chirac laid the groundwork for the civil nuclear deal. Subsequently, when India secured a waiver at the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008, it was France that inked the first civil nuclear deal with India.
- Jacques Chirac's memoirs provide a glimpse into his profound affinity for India, attributing the Strategic Partnership as a means to elevate India's global significance, given its history, democratic values, secularism, and cultural diversity.

Mr. Modi's Visit to Paris: Upholding the Spirit of Engagement:

- During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Paris, the enduring spirit of engagement between the two nations was evident. Despite the backdrop of violent protests in France and criticisms leveled against India by the European Parliament, the visit proceeded unhindered.
- This demonstrated a mature understanding of the complexities each nation faces, allowing them to sustain diplomatic ties while respecting their respective internal matters.

The Ukraine War: A Test of Non-Interference and Non-Alliances:

- The ongoing war in Ukraine posed a test for France's stance on non-interference and non-alliances. While co-authoring a UN Security Council resolution seeking humanitarian aid access in the conflict zone, France acknowledged India's strategic autonomy by not expressing disappointment when India abstained from voting on the resolution.
- President Emmanuel Macron's approach to the war, characterized by direct communication with Russian President Vladimir Putin, exemplified France's nuanced and multifaceted approach to global affairs.

Strategic Partnerships and Geopolitical Alignment:

- France's public disapproval of NATO-plus partnership plans resonated with India's rejection of the NATO template. This common stance prevented the inclusion of India in the project, signaling a divergence from the traditional Western alliances.
- The recently released India-France Roadmap on the Indo-Pacific further underscored the absence of efforts to draw each other into regional military coalitions. Moreover, the collaboration between the Indian Navy and France in joint patrols and potential future engagements in territories like Reunion, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and India's Andaman Islands exemplifies the collaborative and non-aligned spirit of the two nations.

Way Forward:

The India-France relationship holds immense potential for further growth and cooperation, driven by the principles of non-interference, strategic autonomy, and non-alignment. Both nations must continue fostering diplomatic dialogue and mutual understanding to address global challenges and work towards a more balanced world order.

Conclusion:

The India-France partnership stands as an exemplar of how nations can cultivate enduring ties while respecting each other's autonomy and non-interference. The historical context, strategic alignments, and shared values have contributed to the resilience of this relationship. As the world navigates through evolving geopolitical landscapes, the India-France partnership serves a

India-Sri Lanka Ties: Addressing the Tamil Question for a Complete Vision

Context:

India's ties with Sri Lanka, specifically focusing on their recent joint statement on economic cooperation titled "Promoting Connectivity, Catalyzing Prosperity: India-Sri Lanka Economic Partnership Vision." This joint statement was released after talks between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe in Delhi.

Relevance:

GS-02 (India and its Neighborhood) (Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

Prelims:

- India-Sri Lanka Relations
- Tamil National Alliance

- Sri Lankan Tamils
- Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987
- Buddhism
- Indian Ocean.

Mains Question:

- Examine the recent joint statement on economic cooperation between India and Sri Lanka, and critically analyze the implications of not addressing the Tamil question in their bilateral negotiations. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Forward-Looking Vision for India-Sri Lanka Relations
- The Missing Link: Unaddressed Commitments
- Tensions Over Unspoken Issues

The Forward-Looking Vision for India-Sri Lanka Relations

- In a bid to foster stronger economic ties, India and Sri Lanka recently unveiled a joint statement titled "**Promoting Connectivity, Catalysing Prosperity: India-Sri Lanka Economic Partnership Vision.**"
- The vision encompasses five key areas: maritime, air, energy, trade, and people-to-people initiatives.
- Aiming for enhanced connectivity, both nations plan to invest in maritime and air infrastructure, facilitating the development of ports, airports, and the resumption of ferry services. Flight networks will be expanded to foster better connectivity between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern Provinces.
- A significant stride towards energy cooperation includes the establishment of renewable energy wind and solar plants in Sri Lanka. Moreover, a memorandum of understanding was signed to operationalize UPI digital payments and designate the Indian Rupee as the currency for trade.
- Furthermore, both nations seek to bolster tourism, cultural and religious travel, and educational collaborations.



The Missing Link: Unaddressed Commitments

- Despite the comprehensive vision statement, a notable omission became evident: the failure to acknowledge previous commitments made by Sri Lanka regarding the 13A constitutional amendment.
- This amendment pertains to the devolution of powers to the North and Eastern provinces, crucial to addressing long-standing issues. Another unresolved matter pertains to the plight of Indian fishers who have faced arrests while fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Surprisingly, no mention of these critical issues was found in the documents released during President Wickremesinghe's visit to India. It was left to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to raise his voice in favor of devolution and Provincial Council elections during his speech, emphasizing the need for a dignified and respectful life for the Sri Lankan Tamil community.

Tensions Over Unspoken Issues

- Back in Colombo, the ruling SLPP, which supports President Wickremesinghe's government, asserted that they lack the "electoral mandate" to discuss these matters. This stance has historically been a source of tension between India and Sri Lanka.
- The joint statement and President Wickremesinghe's remarks in Delhi both sidestepped these crucial concerns, conveying a tacit message: India's historical concerns over the Tamil issue may no longer be welcomed in bilateral negotiations.
- Despite the deep familial bonds between India and Sri Lanka, historical issues have strained ties in the past, and any future vision that neglects an amicable resolution of these matters will remain incomplete.

Way Forward:

To ensure a comprehensive and harmonious vision for India-Sri Lanka relations, it is imperative that both nations openly address the Tamil question and fulfill prior commitments related to the 13A constitutional amendment. The conduct of Provincial Council elections should be prioritized to promote democratic governance and inclusivity. Recognizing the historical sensitivities, both sides must engage in sincere dialogue and foster a conducive environment for resolving outstanding issues.

Conclusion:

India and Sri Lanka's bilateral relations are anchored in a shared history and cultural ties. While the recent joint statement outlines a promising vision for economic cooperation, it falls short in acknowledging and addressing the Tamil question, which remains a significant aspect of their relationship. Ignoring these historical concerns risks perpetuating tensions and hindering progress. For a truly complete and forward-looking vision, both nations must prioritize the resolution of these issues, promoting mutual understanding, respect, and prosperity for all stakeholders involved. Only through genuine cooperation and collaboration can India and Sri Lanka embark on a path of strengthened bilateral ties and a prosperous future together.

ASEAN's Struggles and India's Role in the Indo-Pacific

Context:

Recently, the 56th Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) of ASEAN was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, scrutinizing the impact of critical geopolitical factors on the region. The article also delves into ASEAN's vision for unity, and the significance of India's role in the Indo-Pacific equation.

Relevance:

GS-02 (India's foreign policy, International relations)

Prelims:

- ASEAN
- Member countries

Mains Question:

- Discuss the challenges faced by the ASEAN in navigating the complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. Analyze the impact of geopolitical tensions, the role of major players, and the significance of India's engagement in the region. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- ASEAN's Brave Attempts Amid Transformative Changes
- Maintaining Unity Amidst Global Turmoil
- ASEAN's Dilemma in the South China Sea
- Geopolitical Crossfire in the Indo-Pacific
- ASEAN's Attempt at Mitigating Tensions
- ASEAN's Struggle with Unity on Myanmar

ASEAN's Brave Attempts Amid Transformative Changes

- The 56th Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) of ASEAN, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in mid-July 2023, served as a barometer to gauge the ever-evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, the heart of Southeast Asia.
- Within this complex web of strategic contestation, ASEAN's institutional architecture has emerged as an inclusive platform, drawing nations from far and wide, along with major players such as the United States, China, India, Japan, and Russia.
- The joint communiqué of the FMM revealed ASEAN's vision, aiming for a political community promoting regional peace, a well-integrated economic community, and a socio-cultural community focused on sustainable development.



Maintaining Unity Amidst Global Turmoil

- Addressing fellow Foreign Ministers, the Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi, emphasized two critical factors essential for ASEAN's success: adhering to the ASEAN Charter to maintain credibility and staying in the driver's seat while navigating the ever-changing regional dynamics.
- However, achieving these noble goals has become increasingly difficult as internal differences on issues like Myanmar continue to surface. Furthermore, the strained relationship between the United States and China poses a serious challenge to ASEAN's desire to lead the region and shape its agenda.

ASEAN's Dilemma in the South China Sea

- China's deep-rooted political and economic ties with several ASEAN states, particularly Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, have turned them into virtual dependencies. Although the Philippines has displayed assertiveness in the South China Sea dispute, the central players - Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand - favor a cooperative approach with Beijing.
- Consequently, no strong voice is raised against China's delaying tactics in negotiating an enforceable code of conduct for the South China Sea, revealing a perplexing case of diplomatic doublespeak.

Geopolitical Crossfire in the Indo-Pacific

- As the United States and China engage in an acrimonious debate, ASEAN finds itself in the crossfire of geopolitical tensions. While China blames the US for the strained relations, citing its refusal to accept China's 'peaceful rise,' the US no longer ignores China's aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.
- The **NATO's Vilnius summit communiqué** clearly expressed concerns over China's ambitions and coercive policies, challenging the interests, security, and values of the democratic nations.

ASEAN's Attempt at Mitigating Tensions

- To cope with intensifying geopolitical tensions, ASEAN looks towards the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a potential solution.
- Focused on **maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and economic collaboration**, the AOIP seems promising.
- However, its practical implementation remains a cause for concern, casting shadows on ASEAN's ability to effectively address regional challenges.

ASEAN's Struggle with Unity on Myanmar

- While ASEAN reiterates its centrality, internal disagreements over the sensitive Myanmar situation undermine its credibility. This issue has led to the exclusion of Myanmar from all political-level discussions within ASEAN.
- Thailand's independent dialogue with the military government, defying ASEAN's official policy, has further revealed the group's internal divisions.
- The routine reaffirmation of the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) forged in April 2021 fails to conceal this disunity, leaving ASEAN's centrality vulnerable and weakened.

Way Forward:

As geopolitical complexities loom large in the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN must take proactive steps to maintain its relevance and credibility. Emphasizing unity and collective action is imperative in addressing regional challenges effectively. Engaging major players, including India, in fostering cooperation on issues like cyber, financial, and maritime security, can contribute significantly to mitigating tensions in the region.

India's Role in the Changing Landscape of Global Cooperation

Context:

India played a pivotal role as the host of the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that witnessed significant achievements, exemplified by the signing of the New Delhi Declaration and statements on countering radicalization and digital transformation cooperation.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (Regional Groupings) (Important International Institutions)

Prelims:

Members of SCO, RATS, UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Dimensions of the Article:

- A Changing World
- The Spirit of the SCO
- Enhancing Solidarity and Mutual Trust
- Embracing Win-Win Cooperation
- The Need for Multilateralism
- China's Commitment

A Changing World:

- The world is currently experiencing unprecedented changes, with geopolitical tensions, economic slowdown, energy crises, food shortages, and the urgent need to address climate change.
- In the face of these challenges, collaboration among nations becomes imperative. The key risks to global peace and development are power politics, economic coercion, technology decoupling, and ideological contest.
- It is crucial for the international community to collectively address these questions: unity or division, peace or conflict, cooperation or confrontation.

The Spirit of the SCO:

- Over the years, the SCO has embraced the vision of becoming a community with a shared future for humanity. Member-states have shown unwavering support for each other's core interests, fostering collaboration between their national development strategies and regional initiatives.
- The spirit of amicable neighbourliness and friendship has been the driving force behind partnerships built on dialogue and cooperation, rather than confrontation and alliance. As a guardian and contributor to regional peace, stability, and prosperity, the SCO's achievements reflect the aspirations of all nations for peace, development, and mutually beneficial cooperation. Its leading role paves the way for strengthened unity, increased cooperation, and effective risk management in the new era.

Enhancing Solidarity and Mutual Trust:

- The SCO member-states must stand together to ensure common security. As external elements attempt to orchestrate a new Cold War and bloc confrontation in the region, utmost vigilance and firm rejection are essential.
- Strengthening security cooperation, cracking down on terrorism, separatism, extremism, and transnational crimes, as well as fostering collaboration in digital, biological, and outer space security, are paramount. Political settlements must also be pursued for resolving international and regional hot-spot issues.

Embracing Win-Win Cooperation:

- Protectionism, unilateral sanctions, and decoupling efforts adversely impact global well-being. To combat these challenges, the SCO must foster greater collaboration in trade, investment, technology, climate actions, infrastructure, and people-to-people engagement.
- Collective efforts to scale up local currency settlement between member-states, promote sovereign digital currency cooperation, and establish an SCO development bank are necessary for high-quality and resilient economic growth in the region.

The Need for Multilateralism:

- The SCO should engage with observer states, dialogue partners, and other regional and international organizations, such as the United Nations, to uphold the UN-

centered international system and the rule of law. Together, these efforts can promote global peace, drive inclusive development, and safeguard the international order.

China's Commitment:

- China remains steadfast in its commitment to working with partners, including India and South Africa, to enact the Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative.
- Through these actions, China seeks to contribute to world peace, security, and prosperity. Respect for each country's independent path to development and social system, as well as adherence to the UN Charter's principles and purpose, are vital for comprehensive and sustainable security.
- Dialogue and diplomacy must be embraced as the primary means to resolve international disputes, addressing challenges in both conventional and non-conventional domains.

Way Forward:

- In forging a united, equal, balanced, and inclusive global development partnership, humanity's shared values of peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom should guide the way.
- A resolute stance against hegemony, unilateralism, a Cold War mentality, and bloc confrontation is essential. Illegal unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction measures must be unequivocally rejected.
- India, China, South Africa, and other SCO member-states must lead by example in safeguarding the development rights and legitimate interests of the developing world.

Conclusion:

The 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization marked a significant milestone in the cooperative efforts of member-states. India's hosting of the summit facilitated crucial achievements that emphasized the importance of unity, cooperation, and shared prosperity. As the world grapples with various challenges, the SCO's role in promoting multilateralism, solidarity, and win-win cooperation becomes ever more indispensable. By upholding these values and principles, the SCO can play a vital role in shaping a more stable, prosperous, and equitable global order.

Elusive Consensus: A Closer Look at India-China Relations

Context:

The recent high-level engagement between India and China, featuring National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese diplomat Wang Yi, has once again highlighted the profound divergence in their perspectives on the state of bilateral relations.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Bilateral Relations)

Prelims:

- Line of Actual Control (LAC)

Mains Questions:

- Examine the government's approach to handling relations with China and the border situation. How has opacity and defensiveness impacted public understanding of India's broader approach to China? Discuss the contradictions in trade and investment policies toward China. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Contrasting Perspectives: India-China Dialogue
- The Imperative for Informed Public Discourse
- The Border Situation: Demchok and Depsang

Contrasting Perspectives: India-China Dialogue



- The recent meeting between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Johannesburg unveiled starkly different viewpoints on the state of India-China relations.

- While Mr. Doval expressed India's concerns about the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the erosion of the basis of ties, China focused on a broader picture and called for a return to a track of healthy

and stable development.

- Additionally, China revealed the existence of a purported "Bali consensus," a noteworthy development not previously disclosed by either side.
- This disparity in narratives underscores the need for the government to adopt a more transparent approach to communication regarding the relationship with China.

The Imperative for Informed Public Discourse

- Opacity and defensiveness have become the hallmarks of the Indian government's response to queries concerning the border situation and its overall approach to China.
- Since the tensions that emerged in April 2020, the lack of clear and candid information has hindered public understanding of the intricacies surrounding India-China relations. A significant example of the contradictory nature of policies can be observed in the case of trade and investment.
- On one hand, trade with China reached record levels, fueled by imports of Chinese machinery, while on the other hand, the government imposed bans on over 200 Chinese apps, including TikTok. This dichotomy raises questions about the coherence of India's stance towards its neighbor.

The Border Situation: Demchok and Depsang

- Despite 18 rounds of talks, the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains enigmatic, with little clarity on the ongoing issues in Demchok and Depsang – the last two friction points.
- Though buffer zones have been established in five other areas, the terms and conditions of these arrangements and the subsequent withdrawals by both countries remain shrouded in secrecy.
- Such ambiguity and lack of comprehensive information leave the public grappling for insights into the actions taken by both nations to stabilize relations and ensure peace along the border.

Way Forward:

- In dealing with India's largest neighbour, secrecy and ambiguity are no longer tenable strategies. As India seeks to establish a lasting and stable relationship with China, the government must prioritize transparent communication with the public.
- Informed citizens can play an active role in understanding the complexities and challenges in this crucial bilateral relationship. A clear and open dialogue can help bridge the gap between official statements and public perception, fostering a more robust national discourse on India's approach to China and its vision for the future.

Conclusion:

The divergence in perspectives presented by India and China during their recent high-level engagement highlights the urgent need for a more transparent approach to communication. Opacity and defensiveness in the government's responses to questions about the border situation and broader China policies have contributed to a lack of clarity and understanding among the public. With India-China relations holding significant importance, fostering an informed public discourse is imperative. By embracing transparency and shedding light on complex issues like the LAC situation and trade policies, the government can pave the way for a more enlightened understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the bilateral relationship. Only through such open dialogue can India and China achieve an elusive consensus that fosters lasting peace and stability in the region.

Connecting India to Southeast Asia

Context:

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari states that the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is around 70% complete. To improve commerce, economic, health, education, and tourist linkages between the three nations, India, Thailand, and Myanmar are building a 1,400 km-long roadway that connects the country with Southeast Asia by land.

What is the Look East Policy of India?

- **Evolution From Look East Policy:** The Act East policy is the evolution of India's Look East policy, which was started in 1991 and has since been discontinued. It

stands for development and a more practical strategy to strengthen India's interaction with Southeast Asian countries.

- **Strategic and economic ties:** The Act East policy seeks to forge strong ties with Southeast Asian nations on both a strategic and economic level. It acknowledges the region's economic potential and geopolitical importance and works to improve collaboration in several areas, including trade, investment, infrastructure, and connectivity.
- **Focus on projects and results:** In contrast to the Look East policy, the Act East policy places more of a focus on tangible projects and activities that are outcome-based. Through cooperative projects and mutually beneficial results, it aspires to go beyond empty rhetoric and forge real partnerships with Southeast Asian countries.
- **commerce and connectivity:** The Act East programme aims to increase commerce and connectivity between India and Southeast Asian nations. To enable the flow of goods, services, and people, it places a strong emphasis on the development of physical infrastructure, including roads, ports, and air links. By lowering obstacles and encouraging economic integration, it also seeks to improve commercial relations. The 1,360 km (850 mi) long India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMT Highway), which is being built as part of India's Look East strategy, will connect Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar.
- **Regional Power and Counterweight to China:** India is to be positioned as a regional force and a counterweight to China's expanding influence in Southeast Asia through the Act East policy. India wants to raise its profile and have more influence in regional issues, hence it is attempting to do so by fortifying its connections with Southeast Asian countries.
- **Engagement with ASEAN:** India's relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are given particular attention by the Act East policy. Through greater political, economic, and cultural collaboration, it aims to expand India's participation with ASEAN. In 1996, India joined ASEAN as a full dialogue partner, and since then, it has built several institutional frameworks for cooperation.

What is the need for India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway?

- A project under India's Look East strategy, the IMT Trilateral Highway aims to link Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar. It is a 1,360-kilometre (850 mi) long highway that is presently being built.
- **Increasing trade and business between India, ASEAN nations, and Southeast Asia as a whole is the IMT Trilateral Highway's main goal.**
- By creating a land connection between India and Thailand, the highway is anticipated to **improve economic integration in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area and lower transportation costs.**
- To create the **East-West Economic Corridor**, India has suggested extending the IMT Trilateral Highway to **Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.**
- As a result of the connection offered by the **IMT Trilateral Highway and the East-West Economic Corridor**, **India and ASEAN nations will be able to cooperate more and trade more.**
- To further improve trade and transport infrastructure, the IMT Trilateral Highway will **connect with river ports being built at Kalay (Kalaymyo) and Monywa along the Chindwin River.**



What is ASEAN-India Free Trade Area and how is this highway going to benefit AIFTA?

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s ten member states and the Republic of India have signed the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA), which is a regional free trade agreement. On October 8, 2003, in Bali, Indonesia, the inaugural framework agreement was signed. On August 13, 2009, the final agreement was signed following multiple rounds of discussions.

- By promoting increased communication and trade between the participating nations, the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is a crucial infrastructure project** that is expected to **contribute to the growth of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)**.
- **Enhanced Connectivity:** By reducing transportation costs and times for commodities exchanged between India, Myanmar, and Thailand, the highway will considerably boost connectivity between these nations. It will encourage simpler trade integration inside the AIFTA region by promoting smoother mobility of commodities, services, and people.
- **Trade Expansion:** The Trilateral Highway's enhanced connectivity and transportation effectiveness are anticipated to increase bilateral and multilateral trade between India, Myanmar, and Thailand. The highway will create new market opportunities, enabling companies to investigate and increase trade in several industries, including manufacturing, services, and agriculture.
- **Development of Border Areas:** Border regions' socioeconomic growth will be facilitated by the Trilateral Highway, which will pass through several isolated and impoverished border regions. The increased connection and infrastructure will draw investments and encourage inclusive growth, which will lower poverty and raise living standards in the surrounding areas.

China Protests Dalai Lama Meeting U.S. Officials

Context

The meeting between the Dalai Lama and representatives of the "Central Tibetan Administration" (CTA) and visiting American official Uzra Zeya was denounced as an attempt to "interfere" in China's "internal affairs" by China on Monday. The Dalai Lama, who arrived in Delhi on Saturday, stated that Tibetans did not seek "independence" and that he was open to negotiations with the Chinese government, which he claimed had sent feelers to him before they met with Ms Zeya.

Background of the events :

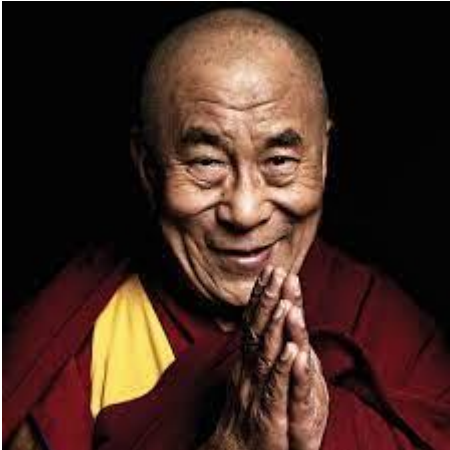
- **Seventeen-Point Agreement :**
 - The **Seventeen Point Agreement** was signed by officials of the **Tibetan Government and the People's Republic of China** in **1951** on behalf of the **14th Dalai Lama**.
 - The agreement recognised China's control over Tibet while providing Tibet with some autonomy in **exchange for the protection of Tibetan culture and religious freedom**.
- **Rejection of the Agreement:**
 - The Dalai Lama later declared that **he had signed the Seventeen Point Agreement under duress** and without the **backing of the Tibetan people**.
 - The relationship between the **Tibetan Government and the Chinese authorities** was strained by the **Dalai Lama's rejection of the accord**.
- **worldwide Recognition Efforts:**
 - To assert **Tibet's independence** or **win substantial autonomy**, the Tibetan government worked to gain worldwide support for its cause.
 - However, the **majority of countries** now **recognise Tibet as a part of China**, making these efforts mostly ineffective.
- **Modernization and Military Conflict:**
 - To **bolster its position**, the **Tibetan Government** began **modernization initiatives, including the modernization of its military**.
 - When Chinese forces pushed into Tibet in October 1950, a **military confrontation** erupted in the **western Kham region's Chamdo region**.
 - The **Tibetan army was defeated in the battle**, and **Chinese forces took control of the area**.
- **Peaceful Liberation vs Chinese Invasion :**
 - The **Chinese government** referred to their efforts in Tibet as the "**Peaceful Liberation of Tibet**," highlighting the **historical ties between Tibet and China** and presenting their **actions as a method of reintegrating Tibet into China**.
 - The **Central Tibetan Administration** and the **Tibetan diaspora**, on the other hand, frequently refer to the incidents as the "**Chinese invasion of Tibet**," considering **China's activities to constitute an occupation and a suppression of Tibetan freedom**.
- **Tibetan Rebellion and Exile:**
 - In 1959, **Tibetans** protested the **deterioration of their cultural and religious liberties** by **launching a broad rebellion** against **Chinese control in Tibet**.
 - Military repression was used as a response by the Chinese government.
 - The **Tibetan Government-in-Exile** was founded in **Dharamshala after the Dalai Lama and many other Tibetans fled into exile in India**.

- The **Chinese authorities disbanded the Tibetan authorities after the uprising and made measures that had a profound effect on Tibetan social structures and culture.**

Who is Dalai Lama and Why did he go into exile?

- **Identity and Recognizability:**

- The **14th Dalai Lama's spiritual name is Jetsun Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso**, and his birth name is **Lhamo Thondup**.
- He is regarded as a living Bodhisattva and is thought to be **Avalokitevara (Chenrezig in Tibetan) in a new body.**
 - He practises **Tibetan Buddhism** and is a member of the **Gelug school**, which is the newest school.
 - In 1937, it was determined that the **Dalai Lama was the tulku (reincarnate) of the 13th Dalai Lama**, and in 1939, he was publicly recognised as the 14th Dalai Lama.



- **Early Life and Enthronement :**

- His early years were spent in a **farming family in Taktser (Hongya Village), in the Amdo region of Tibet (now in the province of Qinghai, China).**
- His appointment as the **Dalai Lama did not follow the customary Golden Urn selection procedure.**
- He was a little boy when his enthronement ritual took place in Lhasa on February 22, 1940.

- **Chinese Occupation and Temporal (Political) Duties:**

- In 1950, at the age of 15, the **Dalai Lama took full temporal responsibility** after the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet.
- The Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo territories were under the control of the **Tibetan administration, also known as the Ganden Phodrang.**
- However, the **Dalai Lama** escaped to India and created the **Tibetan government in exile as a result of the 1959 uprising in Tibet against Chinese control.**

- **Exile and Exile Government:**

- The **Dalai Lama founded the autonomous Tibetan government** in exile in Mussoorie after arriving in India in 1959. Later, it was moved to Dharamshala, where he now lives.
- In 2011, he **stepped down from his position as the political leader and assisted with the establishment of the Central Tibetan Administration, a democratic administration.**

- **Teachings and Advocacy:**

- The **Dalai Lama has championed the Middle Way Approach**, which aims for a **peaceful conclusion with China**, and has argued for the **well-being of Tibetans.**
- He instructs **Tibetan Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism all over the world**, drawing sizable crowds. His **initiations and Kalachakra teachings are important occasions.**
- The **Dalai Lama** participates in numerous conferences and gatherings where he speaks on a variety of subjects, including **religion and science, environmental concerns, economics, women's rights, nonviolence, interfaith dialogue, physics, astronomy, and more.**

- **Awards and Recognitions:**

- In 1989, the **Dalai Lama** received the **Nobel Peace Prize** for his **nonviolent campaign to liberate Tibet from Chinese tyranny.**
- He was awarded the **US Congressional Gold Medal in 2006** for his services to **human rights, nonviolence, and world peace.**

- He has been named by Time magazine as one of **Mahatma Gandhi's "Children of Gandhi" and as Gandhi's spiritual heir to nonviolence.**

Why were Dalai Lama and CTA in the news recently?

- The **spiritual head of Tibet, the Dalai Lama**, met with **Uzra Zeya**, a representative of the **United States**, in **New Delhi, India**. **Zeya** is the U.S. Special Coordinator for **Tibetan Issues and the Under Secretary** of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.
- China vigorously objected to this gathering because it saw it as meddling in its internal affairs. Tibet is regarded as a domestic matter of China, and no outside forces are permitted to interfere
- China opposes all interactions between what it refers to as **"Tibetan independence" groups and representatives of other nations**. The **Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)**, which is situated in **Dharamshala**, has been branded by China as a **"separatist political group" that is not recognised by any other nation**.
- China has previously objected to American engagement in issues relating to Tibet. Before his trip to Dharamshala in May 2022 and the creation of the position of U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues by the Biden administration in 2021, Uzra Zeya received complaints from China.
- The spokesperson for the Chinese embassy urged the US to uphold its promise to recognise Tibet as a part of China, to refrain from interfering in China's internal affairs under the guise of Tibet-related issues, and to refrain from supporting what China views as the "anti-China separatist activities" of the Dalai Lama's group.
- The Dalai Lama said that Tibet is a part of China before departing Dharamshala, despite protestations from China. He also disclosed that he had been approached for talks by the Chinese government both formally and informally.

The Solomon Islands And China Sign Various Deals

Context

- The leaders of China and the Solomon Islands pledged to deepen their ties, which have caused anxiety in Australia and the United States over Beijing's influence in the South Pacific.
- Premier Li Qiang and Prime Minister Xi Jinping of China met with Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. The contracts were signed under the supervision of Mr Li and Mr Sogavare and dealt with technological, economic, and police cooperation.

Solomon Islands

- **Geography:** Geographically speaking, Melanesia, a component of Oceania, is where the Solomon Islands are situated. More than 900 tiny islands make up its six larger islands. About 28,400 square kilometres (11,000 square miles) of land make up the entire nation. The largest island, Guadalcanal, is where Honiara, the capital, is located.
- **Population:** About 700,000 people are living in the Solomon Islands. Indigenous Solomon Islanders, descended from the Lapita people and other waves of migration, make up the majority of the population.
- **Early Settlement:** The Lapita people were one of the first indigenous groups to live on the islands, which have been inhabited since at least 30,000 to 28,800 BCE. The

contemporary indigenous population of the Solomon Islands was created via the mingling of these early settlers.

- **European exploration:** Lvaro de Mendaa, a Spanish sailor, made the first European voyage to the Solomon Islands in 1568. Although Mendaa did not give the islands a name, it is thought that individuals who heard of his expedition afterwards referred to them as "the Solomons."
- **Change of Name and Independence:** In 1975, the British administration's official name was changed from "British Solomon Islands Protectorate" to "The Solomon Islands." In 1976, self-government was attained, and complete independence followed in 1978. Charles III became the King of the Solomon Islands and was represented by a governor-general when the nation transitioned to a constitutional monarchy.



What is the relation between Solomon and China?

- **History:**
 1. The **Solomon Islands and the Republic of China (Taiwan) had diplomatic ties from 1983 until 2019.**
 2. 2019 saw the decision by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare to sever ties with Taiwan and open diplomatic channels with the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- **Lease of Tulagi:**
 1. A **lease for the entire island of Tulagi** was signed between a **Chinese state-owned corporation, China Sam Enterprise Group, and the Tulagi province government in September 2019.**
 2. The Solomon Islands attorney general eventually annulled the deal because of legal problems and a lack of key information.
- **Security Pact:**
 1. **China and the Solomon Islands inked a drafting security pact in March 2022, allowing the Solomon Islands to ask China for assistance in upholding social order and safeguarding people's lives and property.**
 2. The agreement also discusses **utilising the Chinese military to safeguard Chinese workers and important projects** in the Solomon Islands, as well as allowing Chinese ships to dock and restock supplies there.

- **Wang Yi's visit:**
 1. In May 2022, as part of a trip to the **Pacific to sign security and trade** agreements with a number of minor Pacific nations, China's foreign minister **Wang Yi paid a visit to the Solomon Islands.**
 2. The trip was **regarded as a crucial turning point in China's relations** with the Solomon Islands.
- **Deal with Huawei:**
 1. The Solomon Islands agreed to **accept a \$66 million loan from China** in August 2022 in exchange for Huawei building 161 mobile phone towers there.
 2. The **Tina Hydro Project loan** and this one collectively contributed greatly to the Solomon Islands' growing national debt.
 3. Matthew Wale, the head of the opposition, expressed reservations about the loans, particularly the timetable for repayment and Huawei's right to a cut of profits.
- **Additional Activity:**
 1. **The Solomon Islands turned away a British Royal Navy ship and a U.S. Coast Guard ship** in August 2022, claiming a **ban on foreign military ships while they were under evaluation.**
 2. **Concerns were expressed regarding the Solomon Islands'** alleged rift with the West in favour of **tighter connections with China as a result of this decision.**

How is this relationship going to affect India and its allies?

- **India:** China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific area has India concerned, especially in nations like the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and the Solomon Islands right now. India's interests in the area may face a strategic threat from China if it gains a stronghold in the Solomon Islands. It might have an impact on India's efforts to balance out China's influence and maritime security.
- **Like India, Australia** is worried about China's growing influence in the Pacific. One of the nations in Australia's sphere of influence is the Solomon Islands, therefore any considerable Chinese involvement in the area might be considered as a danger to Australia's economic and security interests. It might exacerbate existing tensions between China and Australia and intensify the current geopolitical rivalry. It could lead to increased tensions between China and Australia and further fuel the ongoing geopolitical competition between the two nations.
- **United States:** The Pacific area has emerged as a crucial theatre of conflict in the United States' larger geopolitical confrontation with China. Chinese influence in the Solomon Islands may have an impact on U.S. interests in the Pacific and pose a threat to its regional sway. In order to balance out China's increasing influence in the region, it might lead the United States to deepen its relationships with nations like Australia and India.

What are the possible ways to Counter these obstacles?

- **Groupings:** In the current situation, QUADS are more crucial than ever before. The member nations' cooperation can aid in addressing China's strategy of establishing bases in island groups. Malabar exercises are beneficial for honing the militaries of the participating nations.
- **Strengthen Regional Cooperation:** In order to strengthen regional collaboration with nations in the Indo-Pacific region, India, Australia, and the United States can collaborate. This may entail expanding development assistance, strengthening economic connections, and fostering cooperative security programmes. It is possible to balance China's influence by enhancing ties with nations like the Solomon Islands

through diplomatic contacts, trade agreements, and infrastructure development initiatives.

- **Infrastructure Development:** It's critical to address the Indo-Pacific region's infrastructure shortage. India, Australia, and the United States may work together to support environmentally sound, transparent, and financially viable infrastructure development projects that meet local requirements. They may counter China's Belt and Road Initiative and lessen reliance on Chinese investments by offering viable alternatives.

The geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific area may be impacted by China's relationship with the Solomon Islands overall. As they try to safeguard their interests and influence in the region, major nations like India, Australia, and the United States can become more competitive and shrewd in their geopolitical manoeuvring.

India To Push G-20 To Raise MNC Tax Share

Context:

The 2021 agreement, which updates long-standing regulations on how governments tax multinational corporations, was scheduled to take effect in more than 140 nations starting in 2019. The current regulations are often regarded as being obsolete because tech titans like Apple and Amazon may record profits in low-tax nations. Large international corporations would be subject to a minimum 15% tax as well as an additional 25% tax on "excess profits" as determined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

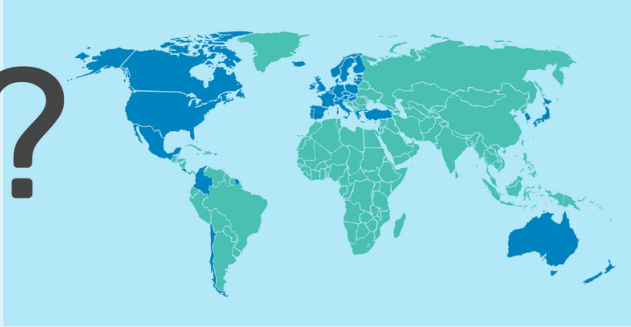

What is Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?

- **Membership:** 38 countries make up the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's membership, the majority of which are industrialized and high-income economies. These nations account for a considerable amount of the world's population and GDP. Western European countries made up the majority of the membership at first, but later non-European nations like the United States and Canada were added.
- **Objectives:** OECD's core objectives are to advance global trade and economic development. It acts as a forum for member nations to discuss common problems, create effective strategies, and coordinate national and international policies.
- **Influence and Platform:** The OECD has a considerable impact on economics and public policy. It gives member nations a forum for exchanging policy experiences, looking for answers to shared difficulties, and working together on numerous projects about social issues, economic development, and trade.
- **Headquarters:** The Château de la Muette in Paris, France, is where the OECD is based. This acts as the organization's main hub for operations and activities.
- **Funding:** The OECD is supported by contributions from its member nations. Each member makes a different amount of contributions to the organization's budget, which is subsequently used to fund its projects, studies, publications, and activities.
- **statistics and Publications on the Economy:** The OECD is well known for its vast library of publications and statistics on the economy. It disseminates studies, statistics, and analysis on a variety of subjects, offering insightful assessments of national economies and suggestions for policy.

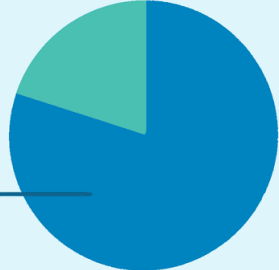
- **United Nations Observer:** The OECD has the title of "Official Observer" at the United Nations. This expands the organization's worldwide influence and reach by enabling it to actively engage in pertinent UN deliberations and projects.

What Is the OECD?

(Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)

- It is an association of 38 nations in Europe, the Americas, and the Pacific
- It helps member countries formulate economic and social policies
- Members and key partners represent 80% of world trade
- It aids developing countries outside membership and promotes reform



the balance

What are the Objectives of OCED?

- **OCED Transfer Pricing Guidelines:** The OECD offers guidelines for multinational companies and tax authorities to use when determining the pricing of inter-company transactions. These rules aid in ensuring that revenues are distributed fairly across the nations where multinational businesses do business.
- **Model Tax Convention:** The OECD makes available a model tax convention that serves as a guide for nations dividing up taxing authority. It is founded on the idea that the multinational corporation's home country has the primary authority to tax its revenues.
- **Pillar 1:** The first pillar of this OECD plan is to distribute multinational revenues to nations following their commercial activity, including online sales in places where they have no physical presence. The goal is to solve the issues brought on by digitization and ensure that multinational firms are taxed fairly.
- **Pillar 2:** The worldwide minimum corporate tax is a crucial part of this concept. A minimum tax rate of 15% was set by 130 countries' finance ministers to stop multinational businesses from moving their profits to low-tax areas. The multinational's headquarters would be responsible for paying the difference if a nation taxes it at a lower rate.

What is Global Corporate Minimum Tax and how does it work?

- **Levelling the Playing Field:** A worldwide corporate minimum tax would create a uniform standard for business taxation across all jurisdictions, levelling the playing field. This would stop a "race to the bottom" in which nations compete by lowering their tax rates to entice business. Setting a minimum rate would give all nations a

comparable place to start when taxing corporate profits, which would make it less appealing for MNCs to participate in profit shifting.

- **discouraging tax havens:** Tax havens are renowned for delivering extremely low or zero-tax regimes in some nations or territories. MNCs may use these jurisdictions as a means of moving earnings to artificially lower their tax obligations. Because profits made in tax havens would still be subject to a minimum level of taxation, a global minimum tax would deter such behaviour. This would make it less appealing for businesses to use profit shifting exclusively to lower their tax liabilities.
- **Promoting Fairness:** A worldwide corporate minimum tax ensures that MNCs pay a minimum amount of tax, regardless of where they operate, to promote justice in taxation. It aims to stop instances in which businesses make substantial profits in high-tax countries but transfer them to low-tax jurisdictions, leading to an imbalance between economic activity and tax obligations.
- **Revenue generation:** For nations that currently undergo profit shifting, enacting a global corporate minimum tax may result in higher tax receipts. The funding of public services, infrastructure improvement, and other social programs might be done with the additional revenue.

How does it work?

- **Purpose:** The global corporate minimum tax's goal is to ensure that multinational corporations (MNEs) pay a minimum amount of tax, regardless of where they conduct business. It is a component of the OECD's larger BEPS programme, which aims to address MNEs' use of tax avoidance techniques.
- **Country-by-Country Basis:** One strategy under consideration is to allocate and attribute profits on a country-by-country basis. MNEs would have to decide how much of their income to allocate to particular countries based on things like sales, staff, and assets. To prevent profit shifting to low-tax countries, this strategy aims to match profits with economic activity in each nation.
- **Include Particular Income or Activities:** Including particular types of income or activities in the tax base is another strategy. Income from intangible assets like intellectual property and profits from online business operations may fall under this category. The aim is to prevent excessive profit shifting and to ensure that various income streams are taxed fairly.
- **Negotiations and OCed Framework:** The OECD is in charge of spearheading the efforts to create a framework for the global corporate minimum tax. Negotiations. To establish an agreement on the definition of the tax base and associated regulations, consultations are required among its member nations. To guarantee a fair and efficient minimum tax regime globally, it is important to develop a consistent and standardized strategy.

What is India intending to do with this new Tax regime?

- India is urging its G-20 partners to support its proposal to raise the share of taxes paid by multinational companies to the countries where they earn "excess profits."
- The proposal aims to address the outdated international tax rules that allow digital giants like **Apple or Amazon to book profits in low-tax countries, leading to concerns about tax avoidance.**
- More than **140 countries reached a deal in 2021** to overhaul these tax rules, with implementation planned to begin next year. The deal includes a minimum 15% tax on large global firms and an **additional 25% tax on "excess profits" defined by the OECD.**
- However, there are issues with the multilateral agreement that forms the basis of a sizable portion of the tax reform proposal. The accord is viewed with scepticism by several nations, which might jeopardize the overall reform initiative.

- India is pushing for a marked rise in the taxes that multinational corporations pay in the nations where they do business. India specifically requests that a higher share of the **25% fee on excess earnings** go to the nations where these businesses operate.
- India wants to secure a fair distribution of tax revenues and allay worries about multinational firms lowering their tax commitments by lobbying for a bigger percentage of taxing rights on surplus profits.
- **Global corporations with yearly revenues over \$22 billion** are deemed to be producing excess profits under the agreement if their **profits grow at a rate of more than 10% annually**. The participating nations are **supposed to split the 25% fee on these excess profits**.
- India wants to **secure a fair distribution of tax revenues** and allay worries about **multinational firms lowering their tax commitments by lobbying for a bigger percentage of taxing rights on surplus profits**.
- The outcome of the G-20 meeting's discussions and negotiations will decide the degree of support for India's plan and its possible impact on the global corporation tax reform as a whole.

TNA categorically rejects Ranil's offer of devolution

Context

Ranil Wickremesinghe's pledge to execute the 13th Amendment without granting police powers was "categorically rejected" on Tuesday by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), who referred to it as "another hollow promise".

What is the background behind the 13th Amendment?

- **Indio-Srilanka Accord:** Rajiv Gandhi, the prime minister of India, and J.R. Jayewardene, the president of Sri Lanka, signed an agreement known as the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on July 29, 1987. By addressing the grievances of the Tamil minority, the pact sought to end the ethnic war in Sri Lanka.
- **Devolution of Powers:** The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord's 13th Amendment was a key component. It suggested transferring authority from the federal government to provincial councils, giving the provinces some degree of regional autonomy and self-governance.
- **Creation of Provincial Councils:** the formation of provincial councils in Sri Lanka as a result of the change. These councils were to be elected by the residents of each province as representative entities, and they were to have authority over certain issues in their particular territories.
- **Official Languages:** The Thirteenth Amendment designated Tamil and Sinhala as Sri Lanka's official languages, reflecting the nation's multiethnic and multilingual makeup.
- **Link Language:** English was listed as a third language in the amendment along with Sinhala and Tamil, referred to as the "link language." This meant that the central government and various linguistic communities would communicate using English as a common language.
- **Adoption of the Amendment:** On November 14, 1987, the 13th Amendment to Sri Lanka's 1978 Constitution was adopted by the country's parliament, effectively inserting its contents into the framework of the nation.

- **Aims of the amendment:** The Thirteenth Amendment's main goals were to resolve the problems of the Tamil minority, advance regional autonomy, and encourage harmony and cooperation among various ethnic groups.
- **Implementation challenges:** Despite the amendment's approval, it proved difficult to properly put its provisions into practice. Delegating authority over land, police, and finances to the provinces was a major concern because these sectors were essential for efficient local governance.
- **Acceptance by All:** The Sri Lankan government stressed the importance of the devolution framework being accepted by all regions of the nation. Given Sri Lanka's complex ethnic, cultural, and political landscape, this was taken into account.

What is the current situation in Sri Lanka relating to the implementation of the 13th Amendment?

- Although the 13th Amendment has been in effect for more than 30 years, successive Sri Lankan administrations have never completely implemented it.
- President Ranil Wickremesinghe offered to put the 13th Amendment into effect but without giving the provinces police authority.
- The 13th Amendment's main goal was to provide provincial councils more authority at the local level by transferring some federal government authority to them. The goal of this decentralization was to give the provinces more autonomy to decide on specific issues.



Why was the response by TNA ?

- Major political group representing Sri Lanka's Tamil community, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), has categorically opposed President Wickremesinghe's proposal.
- According to TNA spokesperson M.A. Sumanthiran, if the government is unwilling to implement the 13th Amendment, which is now part of the Constitution, it

demonstrates a lack of political will for true power devolution beyond this amendment.

- The TNA considers the President's plan for growth and power devolution—which excludes police powers—to be yet another empty pledge.

What is the significance of the 13th Amendment?

- **Devolution of Power:** In Sri Lanka, the idea of devolution of power was first introduced by the 13th Amendment. It established provincial councils and outlined the process through which the federal government would delegate some authority to these local organizations. The goal of this devolution was to decentralize government and give provinces more authority to decide on issues that directly impact their regions.
- **Ethnic conflict:** Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has historically been resolved through politics, particularly between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations. To find a political resolution to the ethnic issue, the 13th Amendment was included in the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987. It attempted to meet the demands of the Tamil minority for more self-governance by establishing regional autonomy.
- **Provincial Councils:** The amendment allowed Sri Lanka to establish provincial councils. These councils have the power to decide on particular matters including local development, agriculture, health, and education within their respective provinces. Between the federal government and local governments, they act as a middle level of government.
- **Minority Rights:** By giving minorities a measure of political representation and self-governance, the 13th Amendment aims to preserve the rights of minority communities, especially the Tamils. It aimed to resolve the Tamil community's longstanding issues of political exclusion and unfair treatment.
- **International implications:** The **Indo-Sri Lanka Accord**, which featured India's intervention to arbitrate the conflict, was the cause of the 13th Amendment. Its implementation was essential for upholding India's strategic objectives in the area and promoting healthy ties between the two close neighbours.

What are the challenges faced in implementing?

- **Opposition:** Nationalist movements have historically fought any perceived diminution of the authority and sovereignty of the central government in Sri Lanka. These organizations contend that giving more authority to the provinces could encourage secession or jeopardize the nation's unity and territorial integrity.
- **Security concerns:** National security worries have been one of the biggest obstacles to fully executing the 13th Amendment. Giving the provinces police authority is particularly difficult because it raises concerns about how local authorities can utilize this authority in ways that could endanger law and order or national security.
- **Lack of Political Consensus:** It has proven challenging to reach a political agreement on the 13th Amendment's implementation. Devolution of power is a topic on which many political parties and ethnic groups disagree, which frequently results in disputes and delays in the process.
- **Financial Restrictions:** Establishing and maintaining efficient provincial councils demands significant money when responsibilities are devolved to the provinces. Financial limitations frequently prevent these councils from operating effectively and restrict their ability to fulfil their prescribed duties.

India gains seven points to 80 on the passport index

Context

India moved up seven spots in the Henley Passport Index in 2023, moving from 87th to 80th place, while the number of nations that provide Indian passport holders visa-free travel remains the same.

What is Henley Passport Index and How are the ranks calculated?

- **The Henley Passport Index:** The Henley Passport Index is a global index that assesses passports' strength and influence based on the number of foreign countries to which its owners have visa-free access.
- **199 Different Passports:** The index contrasts 199 various passports from international jurisdictions. The visa specifications for each passport's bearer when going internationally are taken into consideration.
- **227 Travel Destinations:** The analysis considers 227 distinct travel locations around the world. These places to go include nations and territories where passport holders might want to go on vacation, on business, or for other reasons.
- **Scoring System:** The index employs a scoring algorithm to determine which passports have the necessary visas. The ratings are binary; a 1 is given if no visa is required or if visa-free access is made possible via a visitor's permission, a visa on arrival, or an electronic travel authorization (ETA). If a visa is necessary, including situations where an e-Visa is required before departure, several 0 are provided.
- **Access without a visa (Value = 1):** Passport holders who can enter a nation without needing a visa are given a score of 1 for that nation. This includes scenarios in which a passport bearer can enter a nation for a set amount of time without a visa or acquire one on arrival.
- **Visa on Arrival (Value = 1):** If a passport holder can get a visa when travelling to a particular country, that nation receives a score of 1. Visa on arrival refers to the ability of visitors to obtain visas at the port of entry after arriving in the nation.
- **Visitor's Permit or ETA (Value = 1):** A passport holder gets a score of 1 for a country if they can get an electronic travel authorization (ETA) or visitor's permit before going there. These authorizations, sometimes known as electronic travel authorizations, or ETAs, enable their holders to visit the destination for a brief period without getting a conventional visa.
- **Visa-Required (Value = 0):** If a passport bearer must first obtain a visa or an electronic visa (e-Visa) before travelling to a particular country, that country receives a score of 0. This includes situations where visitors are required to submit a visa application in advance through an embassy or consulate.
- **Total Score:** The number of countries for which no visa is necessary is added up to determine each passport's overall score (value = 1). The passport is more powerful the higher the score, as it allows the possessor access to more places without the need for visa-related formalities.
- **Assessing Passport Power:** The Henley Passport Index is a useful tool for evaluating the relative strength and freedom of various passports in terms of international travel. It gives people and governments information about passport privileges and global travel.

What was India's Rank?

- India improved in the 2023 edition of the index, moving up seven positions to the **80th position from the 87th position the year before.**

- The number of nations granting Indian passport holders visa-free entry has remained constant, notwithstanding the better position.
- India was ranked **76th on the index in 2014**, and 52 countries don't require visas for holders of Indian passports to enter. India's score on the index, however, has fluctuated over time.

What are other country's Rankings?

- After dominating the Henley Passport Index for five years, Japan has slipped to third place in 2023.
- The strongest passport in the world is Singapore, which has taken the top spot on the 2023 Henley Passport Index. Out of a total of 227 travel destinations, 192 can be visited without a visa by the inhabitants of Singapore.
- Germany, Italy, and Spain are in second position on the index.
- Along with nations like Austria, Finland, France, Luxembourg, South Korea, and Sweden, Japan is tied for third place.
- The United Kingdom has improved its standing on the index by moving up two spots to take up the fourth spot.

The Henley Passport Index offers useful insights on international travel and visa regulations, assisting people in understanding the degree of freedom of movement enjoyed by inhabitants of other nations. It also emphasizes how the dynamics of visa-free travel have changed over time for different nations.

G-20: 39 MNCs come together for a circular economy coalition

Context

As stated by Union Minister Bhupender Yadav at the Resource Efficiency Circular Economy Industry Coalition (RECEIC) launch on the sidelines of the fourth G-20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG) and Environment and Climate Ministers' meeting in Chennai on Thursday, adopting a circular economy model enables the transition from the linear "take-make-waste" paradigm and embrace a more sustainable and regenerative approach.

What is Circular Economy Model?

- **Model of Production and Consumption:** The circular economy is a resource-efficient economic model that attempts to cut waste and use limited resources to a minimum. It emphasizes eliminating waste and pollution through design, extending the useful life of products and materials, and renewing natural systems.
- **Key Ideas:** The circular economy is based on ideas like lending, sharing, reusing, mending, renovating, and recycling. These methods encourage a production and consumption strategy that is more environmentally responsible and sustainable.
- **Extending Product Lifecycles:** The circular economy aims to increase the lifespan of items through a variety of strategies, as opposed to adhering to the conventional linear model (take-make-consume-throw-away). Products can be kept functional and in use for longer periods by repairing and refurbishing them.
- **Recycling and Reuse:** The circular economy places a strong emphasis on recycling and reusing items' materials to make new ones once they have served their purpose. This lessens the need to mine new raw materials, conserves resources, and has little negative impact on the environment.

- **Reduced Waste:** The circular economy tries to reduce waste generation, particularly the amount of garbage that ends up in landfills or incinerators, by focusing on prolonging product lifecycles and encouraging recycling and reuse.
- **Combating Planned Obsolescence:** Planned obsolescence is the practice of purposely designing things with a short lifespan so that buyers will replace them frequently. The circular economy discourages this approach since it is inimical to the objectives of increasing product lifespans and lowering waste.
- **Importance of Sustainable Design:** The circular economy depends heavily on sustainable design, which is important. Durable, repairable, and simple to deconstruct for recycling are all features that are built into products. The use of products for as long as possible is ensured by this design strategy.

What is Resource Efficiency Circular Economy Industry Coalition (RECEIC)?

- 39 multinational businesses (MNCs) from various industries, including steel, FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods), and electronics have established the RECEIC coalition.
- The coalition is dedicated to implementing the circular economy and resource efficiency concepts to address environmental issues brought on by various waste kinds, such as plastics, microplastics, e-waste, and chemical waste.
- International Cooperation: In Chennai, on the eve of the Environment and Climate Ministers' conference and the fourth meeting of the G-20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG), RECEIC was officially launched. In an example of international cooperation for sustainability, ministers from seven nations, including Mauritius, Denmark, Italy, Canada, the UAE, France, and the European Union, were present.
- Government's Function: The government will serve as a supportive member of the coalition, which will be led by business. With this strategy, the private sector adopts sustainable practices voluntarily, while the government merely supports and facilitates these efforts through regulatory and legislative frameworks.

How is this grouping going to help is reducing waste management in India?

- Plastic Waste in India: India faces significant challenges regarding plastic waste. In 2021-22, approximately 41 lakh tonnes of plastic waste were generated in the country. To address this issue, the government introduced Extended Producers' Responsibility (EPR) guidelines through the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2022.
- Extended Producers' Responsibility (EPR): EPR guidelines hold producers, importers, and brand owners accountable for the post-consumer stage of their products, including their end-of-life waste. This incentivizes them to manage and recycle their products responsibly and reduce their environmental impact.
- EPR Certificates: Plastic waste processors produced 2.6 million tonnes of EPR certifications in accordance with the EPR recommendations. The commitment made by manufacturers and brand owners to recycle their plastic trash is shown in these certificates.
- Purchase of EPR Certificates: To fulfil their 2022–23 commitments, producers, importers, and brand owners (PIBOs) purchased approximately 1.51 million tonnes of these EPR certificates. This displays their dedication to carrying out their obligations under the EPR regulations.
- G-20 ECSWG: The G-20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG) has been actively promoting international cooperation to achieve a sustainable future and engaging in talks on environmental challenges.
- Future Sustainability: Discussions at conferences like the ECSWG and initiatives like RECEIC are essential in accelerating the transition of the world to a more sustainable and circular economy. These initiatives help to lessen environmental impact, save

resources, and create a more resilient and sustainable world for the future by bringing together governments, industry, and stakeholders.

Overall, establishing a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future will require taking important initiatives, such as those demonstrated at the G-20 ECSWG and the willingness of multinational firms to implement circular economy principles through RECEIC.

Stapled visas for Arunachal athletes unacceptable: India

Context

After Beijing declined to grant standard visas to three Wushu players, India on Thursday raised a strong complaint and threatened to respond appropriately, calling China's decision to reinstate the practice of "stapled visas" for Indian athletes from Arunachal Pradesh "unacceptable."

What are Stapled Visas:

- A government may issue a type of visa known as a stapled visa to indicate a particular status or a difference of opinion regarding the territory the visa applicant is from. In this instance, China grants stapled visas to residents of some Indian states, particularly Arunachal Pradesh and earlier Jammu and Kashmir (including Ladakh), which it regards as disputed areas.
- **Historical Context:** Since China began providing stapled visas to inhabitants of specific Indian regions in 2011–2013, the issue of stapled visas has been a source of friction between India and China. This practice had previously strained relations between India and China, and its resurgence today raises doubts about their future course.



Where was the stapled visa issued recently?

- **Indian Wushu Players Refused Regular Visas:** In the most recent episode, China refused to grant three Indian Wushu players from Arunachal Pradesh regular visas. Instead, they received stapled visas, demonstrating China's claim that Arunachal Pradesh is a disputed area and not a part of India.
- **India's Strong Protest:** India strongly protested the granting of stapled visas to its athletes in response to China's behaviour. The Indian government sees this action as intolerable and a violation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

How is it going to impact the bilateral relations between India and China?

- **Impact on Bilateral Relations:** The Chinese granting of stapled visas to Indian nationals has frequently caused a rift between the two nations. The most recent incident puts more strain on ties between China and India and raises questions about China's position on the disputed areas.
- **Meeting in secret between Modi and Xi:** It was disclosed that in November 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met in Bali. However, the Indian government had not previously made public the specifics of their negotiations.
- **Resolving Bilateral Issues:** The Indian Ministry of External Affairs emphasized that settling disputes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is essential to resolving India's bilateral disagreements with China. In the disputed areas, the LAC serves as India and China's de facto border. It is believed that strengthening bilateral relations depends on bringing calm and harmony back to these regions.

What is the way forward in this tense situation?

- **Diplomatic Engagement:** To resolve the matter, India and China should hold fruitful negotiations. The two nations can begin a high-level dialogue to address issues, clarify stances, and come up with solutions that are agreeable to both parties.
- **bidirectional mechanisms:** To resolve border-related issues and avoid misconceptions, use already-existing bilateral institutions like the India-China Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on Border Affairs (WMCC). These procedures can be used to settle conflicts and keep lines of communication open.
- **Confidence-Building Measures:** To ease tensions and foster trust between the two nations, confidence-building measures should be put into place in the disputed border regions. Joint military drills, cultural exchanges, and interpersonal contacts are a few examples of such actions.
- **Respect for Territorial Integrity:** China should desist from utilizing "stapled visas" as a way to contest India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh to respect India's territorial integrity. Further problems can be avoided by open communication between the parties regarding their respective perspectives.



ECONOMY

A Paradigm Shift: Unravelling the Improving Landscape of Non-Performing Assets in Indian Banks

Context:

Indian banks have witnessed a remarkable decline in NPAs, reaching their lowest levels since 2015.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Growth and Development) (Indian Economy)

Prelims:

- Non-Performing assets
- Restructure Advance
- Stressed assets
- Fugitive offender

Mains Questions:

- Examine the reasons behind the decline in non-performing assets (NPAs) in Indian banks. How has the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and the shift towards personal loans influenced this downward trajectory? (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The NPA Crisis Unveiled
- Factors Catalysing the Decline
- Unveiling the Pandemic Paradox
- The Resilient Rebound
- A Profits Renaissance
- Write-Offs and Worries
- Personal Loans' Paradigm

The NPA Crisis Unveiled:

- The Indian banking sector witnessed a bleak scenario just four years ago, with its NPA ratio ranking amongst the worst among emerging economies.
- NPAs, referring to loans that borrowers are unable to repay, plagued the sector. The **NPA ratio stood at a staggering 9.2% in the second quarter of 2019**, signaling the gravity of the situation.
- The true extent of bad loans remained concealed until the Reserve Bank of India conducted an extensive Asset Quality Review in 2016, shedding light on the severity of the NPA crisis.

Factors Catalysing the Decline:

- Between 2016 and 2019, the NPA ratio remained stubbornly high. However, subsequent years witnessed a decline, even amidst the challenging backdrop of the pandemic.
- Several factors have played a pivotal role in this positive shift.



a) The implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code facilitated the recovery of distressed loans, injecting vitality into the banking system.

b) Banks altered their lending strategies by reducing exposure to industries and bolstering their focus on personal loans. This strategic pivot sought to minimize risks associated with volatile industries while capitalizing on the potential of individual borrowers.

Unveiling the Pandemic Paradox:

- The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a fresh set of uncertainties. Questions arose regarding the fate of loan accounts under moratoriums and the impact on NPAs. Moreover, the rapid shift towards personal loans created apprehension.
- *Would borrowers who secured personal loans face difficulties in loan repayment, given the economic strain on industries that employed them was the only question.*
- However, contrary to expectations, the reduction in NPAs during FY20 can largely be attributed to the **deliberate write-offs by banks**.
- By writing off NPAs, banks maintain the health of their balance sheets but simultaneously curtail their available capital for fresh lending.

The Resilient Rebound:

- The recent financial stability report released by the Reserve Bank of India provides insights into the current state of NPAs.
- Chart 1 depicts the declining trajectory of gross NPAs (GNPAs) and net NPAs, reaching 3.9% and 1% respectively by March 2023, the lowest levels witnessed since 2015. This remarkable progress underscores the resilience of Indian banks in managing their NPAs.

A Profits Renaissance:

- Chart 2 highlights a marked improvement in the profitability of the banking sector. Return on Assets (RoA), a key performance metric, soared to 1.1% in 2023, a significant recovery from the negative 0.2% recorded in 2018.
- This resurgence has propelled the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) to a record peak of 17.1% in 2023. The surge in CRAR, which assesses a bank's exposure to riskier loans, reinforces the sector's overall financial well-being.

Write-Offs and Worries:

- Chart 3 reveals the downward trend in the ratio of write-offs to GNPAs, reflecting prudent risk management by banks in recent years. However, the ratio witnessed a surge in 2022-23, primarily driven by substantial write-offs by private sector banks.
- The dependence on write-offs as a key mechanism for NPA reduction raises concerns and necessitates a comprehensive review of the underlying causes.

Personal Loans' Paradigm:

- Chart 4 delves into the GNPA ratio of personal loans across various categories such as housing, credit cards, vehicle loans, and education loans.
- Encouragingly, the ratio has declined consistently across all these segments, showcasing the effectiveness of the shift towards personal loans as a strategy to mitigate NPAs.

Chart 1

The chart 1 shows that GNPA and Net NPAs continued to decline and in March 2023, reached 3.9% and 1%, respectively, the lowest levels since 2015

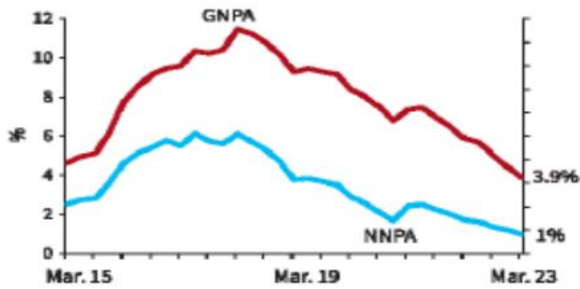


Chart 2

The chart shows the Return on Assets (RoA) and the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR). RoA is calculated by dividing the net income of a bank by its total assets

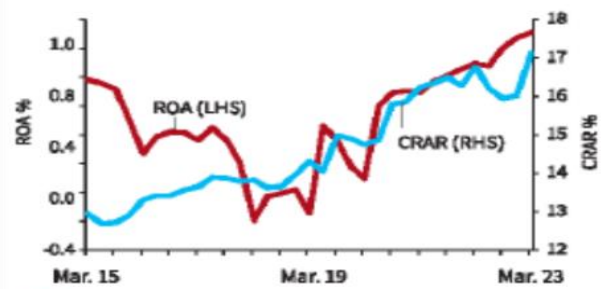


Chart 3

The chart illustrates the ratio of write-offs to GNPA, which had been on a consistent downward trend during 2020-21 and 2021-22, only to rise in 2022-23

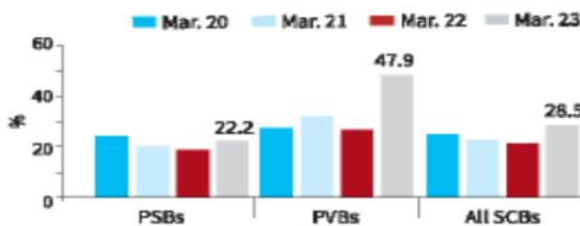
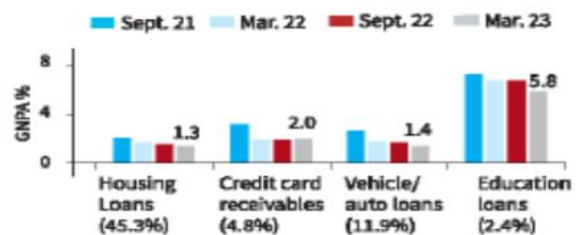


Chart 4

The chart shows the GNPA ratio of personal loans by category. The figures in brackets indicate the share of each segment in the total outstanding personal loans



Way Forward:

- As the Indian banking sector embarks on this positive trajectory, certain areas warrant careful attention. The over-reliance on write-offs necessitates a proactive approach towards addressing the root causes of NPAs.
- Diversifying lending portfolios while ensuring prudential risk management should remain at the forefront of banks' strategies.
- Strengthening the implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and fostering transparency in loan classification and reporting will be crucial in maintaining the progress achieved.

Conclusion:

The Indian banking sector's battle against NPAs has witnessed a remarkable turnaround, with NPAs reaching their lowest levels since 2015. Through the combined efforts of regulatory reforms, strategic shifts in lending, and improving asset quality, Indian banks have successfully navigated the challenges posed by the NPA crisis. However, the sustainability of this progress hinges on the sector's ability to address concerns surrounding write-offs and maintain a robust risk management framework. As the sector forges ahead, the resilience and adaptability demonstrated thus far augur well for its future, offering a glimmer of hope in a transformed landscape.

The 50th GST Council Meet: Unravelling Challenges and Charting the Path Ahead

Context:

The recently concluded 50th GST Council meet has shed light on several unresolved issues that had been lingering for a considerable period. The meeting covered crucial aspects, including the establishment of Appellate Tribunals and tax regulations for the flourishing online gaming industry. While progress has been made, effective execution remains paramount to ensure the desired outcomes.

Relevance:

GS-02, GS-03 (Government Policies and intervention) (Constitutional Bodies) (GST)

Prelims:

- GST council
- One nation One tax

Mains Question:

- Critically analyze the outcomes of the 50th GST Council meet in terms of its impact on the taxation framework, regulatory mechanisms, and the online gaming industry. Discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with the decisions made, and suggest measures to further streamline the GST regime.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Resolution of Long-Pending Issues
- Tax Treatment of Online Gaming Industry
- Streamlining Tax Rates and Exemptions
- Implications and the Need for Further Reforms

Resolution of Long-Pending Issues:

- The clearance of appointment norms for tribunal members, paving the way for the operationalization of tribunals within the next four to six months.
- To ensure accessibility, tribunal benches will be established gradually, beginning with State capitals and cities housing High Court benches.
- This development is expected to expedite the resolution of mounting GST litigations, reducing the burden on the judicial system.

Tax Treatment of Online Gaming Industry:

- The Council's decision to finalize a 28% GST levy on the face value of all bets placed in online games, casinos, or horse-racing has raised concerns within the gaming industry.
- Many e-gaming players perceive this decision as a severe setback, posing a threat to the industry's growth and the livelihoods it supports.



- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman acknowledged the economic significance of the casino-driven tourism revenue in Goa and Sikkim. However, the Council also deliberated on the ethical implications of providing preferential tax treatment to non-essential services.
- Given the ongoing policy formulation by the Electronics and IT Ministry on online gaming, this decision may necessitate further review and refinement to strike an appropriate balance.

Streamlining Tax Rates and Exemptions:

- The Council has taken commendable steps towards streamlining tax rates and clarifying exemptions. It has **reduced or clarified rates for various items, including food and beverages in cinema halls, unfried and uncooked snack pellets, fish soluble paste, and imitation zari yarn, which will now attract a lower 5% GST.**
- These amendments rectify past inconsistencies and provide greater clarity in the tax payment process.
- Prioritizing exemptions for drugs imported for cancer and rare diseases and imposing higher tax levies on sport utility vehicles could have been envisioned earlier.
- It is also crucial to discourage the use of larger personal vehicles, especially in a country grappling with severe traffic congestion.

Implications and the Need for Further Reforms:

- The impact of these decisions on individual sectors will depend on the fine print of the revised regulations. However, it is concerning that the Council has shifted its focus away from the promised overhaul of GST rates.
- The absence of a successor to lead the ministerial group on rate restructuring raises questions about the continuity of this critical initiative. As the nation enters an upcoming poll season, it is imperative for the Council to maintain its commitment to comprehensive rate reforms while addressing sector-specific concerns.

Way Forward:

- **Engage Stakeholders:** The Council should proactively engage with industry experts, economists, and representatives from affected sectors to solicit feedback, identify challenges, and explore collaborative solutions.
- **Continual Review:** Regular review of the decisions and their impact on various sectors is essential to assess their efficacy and make timely adjustments, if necessary.
- **Strengthening Appellate Tribunals:** The expedited establishment of tribunals should be accompanied by ensuring adequate infrastructure, skilled personnel, and an efficient dispute resolution mechanism to address the mounting GST litigations.
- **Policy Refinement for Online Gaming:** Given the evolving nature of the online gaming industry, a comprehensive policy framework should be formulated in

collaboration with industry stakeholders, considering the economic significance, job creation potential, and ethical considerations.

Conclusion:

The 50th GST Council meet has provided much-needed clarity on long-standing issues while introducing new challenges. Effective execution of the decisions, along with continuous review and refinement, will be instrumental in realizing the desired outcomes. Striking a balance between regulatory imperatives, economic growth, and ethical considerations remains a critical task. As the GST regime progresses, sustained efforts should be made to streamline rates, promote ease of doing business, and foster a robust and inclusive taxation framework that serves the interests of all stakeholders.

Industrial Concentration in India: Unravelling the Perils and Crafting a Path to Inclusive

Context:

Indian big business seems to be thriving, with prominent groups like Adani and Reliance Industries making significant strides. However, Small- and medium-scale firms, along with informal enterprises, are struggling to recover from the COVID-19 impact.

Relevance:

GS- 2 - (Government Policies and Intervention) (transparency and accountability)
GS-3- Industries

Prelims:

Crony Capitalism, Parliamentary Committee, Chief Justice of India (CJI), Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Mains Questions:

Analyze the dangers associated with rapid industrial concentration and its implications for India's economic landscape. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Perils of Rapid Industrial Concentration
- Challenges to Democracy and State Capture
- Market Functioning and Concentration
- The State's Role in Promoting Big Business
- State Support for Domestic Business and Global Expansion

The Perils of Rapid Industrial Concentration:

- Market power stemming from industrial concentration poses serious threats to a country's economic and social fabric. By suppressing competition, dominant businesses can artificially inflate profits and manipulate costs and prices.
- As a consequence, income and asset inequality soar, leaving a significant portion of the population disadvantaged.
- The resulting wealth disparity can hinder the growth and stability of the economy, leading to a less inclusive and equitable society.

Challenges to Democracy and State Capture:

- The accumulation of excessive economic power can go beyond shaping market dynamics and extend to influencing political processes. When corporate interests overpower democratic institutions, a phenomenon known as state capture emerges.
- This dilutes the role of civil society in countering such influence, limiting their ability to safeguard the interests of the public. State capture can lead to policies favoring the privileged few, perpetuating the concentration of wealth and entrenching socio-economic disparities.

Market Functioning and Concentration

- The rapid growth of concentration is not solely a result of market competition but rather a consequence of market functioning. In economies with significant asset and income inequality, the functioning of markets favors those who are already wealthy. This inherently leads to the centralization of economic power in the hands of a select few.
- Consequently, addressing the malicious outcomes of market functioning necessitates both market regulation and measures to curb the growth of dominant businesses and conglomerates.

The State's Role in Promoting Big Business:

- While civil society can advocate for action against growing concentration, the ultimate responsibility lies with the state to implement such policies. However, the state's alignment with private capital, particularly big business, has intensified over time.
- The rise of neoliberal ideologies has driven the belief that the state's role is to facilitate unrestricted growth of private capital. Paradoxically, this has resulted in increased concentration rather than fostering healthy competition.

State Support for Domestic Business and Global Expansion:

- State policy has been influenced by the notion that domestic big businesses must be supported to compete against global giants and expand internationally. This has led to protectionist measures and significant subsidies to favored business groups.
- While liberalization opened Indian markets to global competition, state intervention has simultaneously protected certain business interests, leading to distorted outcomes and hampered competition.

Way Forward:

To steer India towards a more equitable and inclusive economic landscape, a multi-faceted approach is essential:

1. Strengthening Market Regulations: Robust regulatory mechanisms must be implemented to curb monopolistic practices and ensure a level playing field for businesses of all sizes.

2. Promoting Inclusive Growth: Nurturing an environment that supports small- and medium-scale enterprises and informal businesses can foster inclusive economic growth, bridging the gap between haves and have-nots.

3. Enhancing Civic Engagement: Encouraging active participation of civil society in policy formulation and public discourse will act as a bulwark against undue corporate influence on democratic institutions.

4. Transparency and Accountability: Enhancing transparency in political funding and accountability in policy-making will restore faith in democratic processes and diminish the influence of money in politics.

5. Diversifying Economic Opportunities: Exploring and supporting diverse sectors and industries will lead to a more resilient and balanced economy, mitigating the reliance on a few dominant players.

Conclusion:

The path of unchecked industrial concentration and the resulting state capture present significant challenges for India's economy and democracy. To safeguard the interests of the nation and ensure a more equitable future, proactive steps must be taken. Striking a balance between promoting big business and fostering a competitive landscape that empowers smaller players is the key to realizing the dream of a truly inclusive India. Only through prudent regulation, enhanced civic engagement, and diversification of economic opportunities can the nation chart a course towards sustainable and holistic growth.

Eye on Emirati Flows

Context:

The recent agreement between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Central Bank of the UAE to establish a rupee-dirham settlement system has potential risks and benefits. This move aims to promote the bilateral use of the Indian rupee and UAE dirham for cross-border transactions, reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar as an intermediary. The establishment of a Local Currency Settlement System between the two countries could lead to a rupee-dirham foreign exchange market, easing trade and encouraging business growth.

Relevance:

GS - 2 (Government Policies & Interventions) (Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests) GS - 3 (Growth & Development) (Role of External State & Non-State Actors)

Prelims:

- Vostro Account

Mains Question:

- Explain the significance of the India-UAE local currency settlement system in reducing dependency on third-country currencies and its impact on trade and business. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Reducing Dependency on Third-Country Currencies
- Development of Rupee-Dirham Foreign Exchange Market
- Precursor for Internationalization of the Rupee
- How it benefits India

Reducing Dependency on Third-Country Currencies

- The Memorandum of Understanding between RBI and UAE's Central Bank paves the way for settling current account payments using either the rupee or the dirham.
- By facilitating local currency settlements, the system aims to minimize reliance on the U.S. dollar as a mediator for trade transactions.
- This measure could potentially shield businesses from exchange rate risks, thus enhancing the ease of doing business and promoting bilateral trade.

Development of Rupee-Dirham Foreign Exchange Market

- The establishment of the settlement mechanism could lead to the creation of a dedicated market for trading the Indian rupee and the UAE dirham.
- Such a market would allow pricing of these currencies independent of their exchange rates with other major currencies like the dollar and euro.
- Indian and Emirati businesses would benefit from not factoring exchange rate fluctuations when conducting cross-border transactions, promoting trade stability.

Precursor for Internationalization of the Rupee

- The India-UAE local currency settlement system sets a precedent for potential bilateral currency agreements in the future.
- According to an RBI Inter-Departmental Group, this step could be vital for advancing the internationalization of the Indian rupee on a global scale.
- However, the success of this initiative hinges on the level of adoption by businesses in both nations and their willingness to embrace this currency settlement system.

How it benefits India:

The India-UAE local currency settlement system offers several benefits to India, which can positively impact its economy and trade relations. Here are some ways in which India stands to gain from this initiative:

- **Reduced Dependency on Third-Country Currencies:** This reduces the vulnerability of the Indian economy to fluctuations in the value of the dollar, which can have significant implications for import and export costs.
- **Exchange Rate Stability:** This stability in exchange rates allows Indian businesses to quote prices for goods and services in a more predictable manner, mitigating the risks associated with fluctuating exchange rates.
- **Boost to Bilateral Trade:** With the option to settle transactions in local currencies, trade between India and the UAE can become more seamless and efficient. Businesses on both sides can avoid the need to convert their currencies, eliminating extra costs and potential delays in payments.
- **Attraction of Foreign Investment:** The availability of local currency settlement can attract foreign investment into India. Emirati businesses may find it more appealing to invest in India if they can use the rupee for their transactions.
- **Strengthening the Rupee's International Position:** As the India-UAE local currency settlement system acts as a precursor for potential bilateral currency accords, it can contribute to the internationalization of the Indian rupee.
- **Enhanced Economic Ties:** Closer economic cooperation can lead to collaborations in various sectors, including infrastructure, energy, and technology, further boosting India's economic growth.
- **Strategic Regional Hub:** As the UAE potentially serves as a currency entrepôt for Indian businesses engaged in transactions with other countries, India gains a strategic regional hub. This could lead to increased access to markets in West Asia, Europe, and Africa, opening up new business opportunities and diversifying India's trade partners.

Conclusion:

The India-UAE local currency settlement system paves way in reducing reliance on third-country currencies for cross-border transactions. However, its success depends on active adoption by businesses in both India and the UAE. Policymakers and the stakeholders must carefully navigate the risks and opportunities associated with this move. The establishment of a rupee-dirham foreign exchange market and the potential internationalization of the Indian rupee underscore the importance of this initiative in a rapidly evolving global economic landscape. Embracing the complexities, India and the UAE have an opportunity to

strengthen their economic ties and boost trade relations, leading to mutual prosperity in the long run.

Fiscal Challenges Faced by Small States in India

Context:

The fiscal landscape of India's States has been a subject of great interest lately. However, most analyses focus on larger States, leaving the small States (with populations less than 1 crore) underrepresented. These small States possess unique characteristics that hinder revenue generation, despite constitutional provisions aimed at addressing their challenges. Consequently, these States heavily rely on the Union government for revenue, creating vulnerabilities for both the States and the Union.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Fiscal Policy, Growth and development)

Prelims:

- Annual Study on State Finances
- Fiscal Deficits
- GDP, GST (Goods and Services Tax)
- Finance Commissions, Human Capital

Mains Question:

- Discuss the fiscal challenges faced by small States in India and the implications of their heavy dependence on Union transfers. Suggest measures to mitigate these vulnerabilities and enhance revenue mobilization. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Rising Tide of Revenue Receipts
- The Weight of Union Transfers
- Limited Capacity for Own Tax Revenues (OTR)
- The Struggle with Own Non-Tax Revenues (ONTR)
- Vulnerabilities Arising from Union Dependence

The Rising Tide of Revenue Receipts:

- Revenue receipts for small States have seen an uptick in recent times, with six out of nine States experiencing growth faster than their gross state domestic product (GSDP).
- However, this growth is primarily driven by Union transfers rather than the States' own revenues.
- For some States, such as **Mizoram, Sikkim, and Tripura**, the revenue receipts have grown slower than their respective GSDP, indicating limited fiscal maneuverability.

The Weight of Union Transfers:

- Small States bear a disproportionate burden of Union transfers in their revenue receipts. While the share of Union transfers in all States combined ranges from 40% to 50%, small States, except Goa, face a significantly higher burden, with the Union's share surpassing 60% for all small States except Goa (2022-23 Budget Estimates).
- Shockingly, five States even experience a colossal 90% share.
- Economic growth hasn't translated into robust revenue mobilization, as current transfers continue to dominate revenue receipts.

Limited Capacity for Own Tax Revenues (OTR):

- The small States grapple with limited capacity to raise their own taxes. Eight out of nine States fare worse than the all-State average in terms of OTR-GSDP ratio.
- The unique characteristics of these States restrict economic activity, hampering their ability to generate tax revenue.
- Furthermore, the States' efforts to mobilize taxes have been lackluster, with only marginal improvements observed in recent years.

The Struggle with Own Non-Tax Revenues (ONTR):

- While small States perform relatively better in mobilizing ONTR, several States, such as Manipur, Tripura, and Nagaland, consistently face challenges in this regard.
- The ONTR-GSDP ratio remains suboptimal for these States, impacting their overall fiscal performance.

Vulnerabilities Arising from Union Dependence:

- The heavy reliance on the Union government exposes small States to numerous vulnerabilities.
- The States are subject to the whims of the Union's political goodwill, leaving them susceptible to sudden declines in Union transfers that can disrupt their expenditures. Disagreements over resource sharing, like GST compensation, have fueled tensions between the Union and the States.
- Excessive dependence on the Union constrains the fiscal freedom of small States, as a significant portion of transferred funds is earmarked for specific purposes. This hampers their flexibility in resource allocation.
- Inadequate own revenues weaken the States' capacity to deliver essential services, impacting social and economic development and, in border-sharing States, even national security.

Way Forward:

1. **Diversification of Revenue Sources:** To mitigate the vulnerabilities stemming from Union dependence, small States must explore new sources of tax revenue and optimize existing ones. For example, learning from Manipur's experience, policies regarding liquor prohibition can be reevaluated to strike a balance between revenue generation and social consequences. Similarly, potential revenue streams from land transactions and sales tax can be tapped, as identified in the case of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. **Strengthening Tax Administration:** Improving tax administration can lead to higher resource mobilization and reduce the variance between actual and budgeted tax revenues. States can revise charges and rates for services and enhance administrative efficiency to boost non-tax revenue collection. Additionally, revitalizing

and corporatizing state public sector enterprises can enhance their revenue contribution, as exemplified by Mizoram's closure of loss-making enterprises.

Conclusion:

The fiscal situation of small States in India calls for urgent attention, as their heavy dependence on Union transfers poses substantial challenges. Diversification of revenue sources, bolstering tax administration, and reviving public sector enterprises are pivotal in mitigating vulnerabilities and enhancing revenue mobilization. Strengthening the fiscal capacities of small States is not just a matter of economic concern but also vital for ensuring their sustainable development and national security.

India's Exports in Peril: Understanding the Downhill Trend with Bursting Resilience

Context:

India's once soaring economy, which achieved record-breaking exports of \$775 billion in the last fiscal year (2022-23), now confronts challenges with a rocky start for outbound shipments.

Relevance:

GS - 03 (Growth & Development) (Mobilization of Resources)

Prelims:

- Top Exporting District in India,
- Russia-Ukraine War.
- Industry 4.0 technologies.
- Space.
- Semiconductor.

Mains Questions:

- Assess the recent trends in India's exports and their impact on domestic growth impulses amid the global slowdown. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Exports Hit Rough Waters: A Decline Amidst Global Turmoil
- Import Bill Conundrum: Commodities and Domestic Demand Dwindle
- Services Exports - An Uneasy Growth Trajectory
- Global Economic Indicators Offer Flickers of Hope

Exports Hit Rough Waters: A Decline Amidst Global Turmoil



- The Indian economy, which soared to unprecedented heights with record-breaking exports of \$775 billion in the last fiscal year (2022-23), is now grappling with the tumultuous challenges of the present.
- During the April to June 2023 quarter, India's exports faced a worrisome 15.1% contraction, dealing a blow to growth expectations.
- The provisional export figures for June stood at a meager \$33 billion, representing a 22% year-on-year plunge, akin to the initial COVID-19 lockdown months.

Import Bill Conundrum: Commodities and Domestic Demand Dwindle

- The slowdown's ripples are also evident in the import segment, though at a slower pace than exports. A 12.7% decline in the import bill during the first quarter is attributed to the moderating commodity prices.
- Last year's surge in the import bill by 44.5% due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict has now given way to a slump in non-oil, non-gold imports by 10.5%.
- The second quarter saw an acceleration in the decline of non-oil, non-gold imports from 2% in May to a concerning 16.7% in June, indicating a dampening of domestic demand triggers.
- Such a scenario might restrict the widening of goods trade deficit but poses a formidable challenge to India's growth impulses, especially in the face of a gathering global slowdown.

Services Exports - An Uneasy Growth Trajectory

- The IT sector, a prominent driver of intangible exports, has expressed cautiousness and pessimism regarding their earnings guidance for the current year, foreshadowing potentially harsher times ahead.
- With global demand also on fragile ground, foreign direct investments might suffer, amplified by tightening monetary policies and looming financial market volatility.
- The Finance Ministry's warning about potential threats to the projected 6.5% growth rate for the year cannot be taken lightly.

Global Economic Indicators Offer Flickers of Hope

- Retail sales in the U.K. exhibited marginal improvement in June, signaling resilience amidst challenges. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's confident outlook suggests that a recession in the world's largest economy could be averted.
- Further encouraging signs emerge from eased inflation numbers in Europe and the U.S., fostering hopes of a shift towards interest rate pauses instead of tightening measures to control demand and activity.

Way Forward:

- **Prioritizing Resilience and Navigating the Downhill Drive:** The focus should lie on nurturing the few bright spots, like the rising shipments of electronic goods. It is imperative to reevaluate and ease trade barriers or restrictions hindering the growth of other products in international markets. Additionally, India must take proactive measures to bolster its competitiveness vis-à-vis countries like **Vietnam** to ensure a robust foothold in global trade.

- **Vigilance and Incremental Growth:** To regain its footing on the global export stage, India must adopt a vigilant approach to track and understand diverse market trends worldwide. By capitalizing on even fractional increments of global demand, Indian exporters can potentially gain momentum in the uphill battle.

Conclusion:

India's export journey has been marked by tremendous achievements and challenges alike. As we confront the headwinds of the global slowdown, it is essential to remember that resilience and adaptability are the cornerstones of success. The decline in exports should serve as a clarion call for concerted efforts from policymakers, businesses, and all stakeholders to navigate this downhill drive with determination and unwavering dedication. By embracing bursts of creativity and strategic insights, India can chart a course towards economic resurgence and secure a brighter future amidst the prevailing uncertainty.

Reimagining Fiscal Priorities - Balancing Complexity and Imbalances

Context:

As the appointment of the Sixteenth Finance Commission looms ahead, it comes at a pivotal moment in our nation's financial landscape. In the wake of critical changes, notably the onslaught of COVID-19 and subsequent geopolitical challenges, the economic dynamics have witnessed a significant shift since the constitution of the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

Prelims:

GS - 02 (Government Policies & Interventions)
 GS - 03 (Growth & Development) (Planning) (Government Budgeting) (Fiscal Policy) (Inclusive Growth)

Mains Question:

Analyse the significance of maintaining fiscal discipline in the face of rising subsidies and fiscal deficits, and suggest innovative measures, such as the proposed loan council, to ensure fiscal prudence across both the central and State governments. (250 words)

Dimensions of the article:

- Unravelling the Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions
- Taming the Unpredictable Fiscal Seas
- The Equalization Principle
- The Roadmap for Fiscal Fortitude
- Confronting Subsidies and Fiscal Prudence

Unravelling the Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions

- The Fourteenth Finance Commission boldly elevated the States' share in the divisible pool of central taxes from 32% to 42%. However, with the reduction in the number of states to 28 and the abolition of the Planning Commission's grants, the Centre managed to maintain equilibrium.
- Yet, the looming question is whether advocating for a further increase in the States' share is prudent, given the existing fiscal imbalances!
- It is imperative to reevaluate the role of non-shareable cesses and surcharges, which have exhibited disproportionate growth and raised concerns over fiscal sustainability.

- The Sixteenth Finance Commission must exercise prudence by potentially capping the share of cesses and surcharges, thereby forging a nuanced approach in line with current economic data.

Taming the Unpredictable Fiscal Seas

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) has long been a subject of scrutiny, and rightly so. In recent years, its performance has faltered, causing a decline in the total divisible pool.
- The silver lining, however, is the buoyancy displayed in GST collections over the last two years. While this is a reassuring sign, the GST demands restructuring to manifest itself as a truly efficient and straightforward tax system.
- As we navigate the tumultuous fiscal waters, it is crucial to enhance the share of individual States in the Centre's divisible pool judiciously, factoring in indicators such as population, per capita income, area, and incentive-related elements.
- Careful attention must be paid to the needs of lower-income states, as they hold the potential to yield a significant demographic dividend if their educational and health requisites are adequately addressed.

The Equalization Principle

- In the spirit of promoting equity and efficiency, the equalization principle emerges as a viable path forward. Rather than being besieged by a multitude of tax devolution criteria, the transfer of resources to individual States can be guided by a select set of indicators, including population, area, and distance.
- The implementation of this principle, bolstered by a thoughtful scheme of grants, resonates with success stories from federations like Canada and Australia.
- By factoring in the needs and costs of providing essential services, the equalization principle assumes the role of a true game-changer, one that warrants fine-tuning to create a harmonious balance.



सत्यमेव जयते

Finance Commission
Of India

The Roadmap for Fiscal Fortitude

- The escalating debt-GDP ratio presents a sobering reality for both the central and state governments. While commendable progress has been made in reducing these ratios, they continue to surpass the stipulated Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) norms.
- The 2018 amendment to the Centre's FRBM demands careful reconsideration, especially in light of the Fifteenth Finance Commission's recommendations. A judicious target, hinging on an underlying nominal GDP growth rate, must be set, and stringent oversight through a loan council can offer the much-needed vigilance over loan magnitudes and profiles.

Confronting Subsidies and Fiscal Prudence

- A recurring concern centers around the unchecked proliferation of subsidies and the re-introduction of the old pension scheme in certain states without a clear financing blueprint.
- As a corrective measure, the Sixteenth Finance Commission must meticulously examine non-merit subsidies, striking a delicate balance to avoid political turmoil. Simultaneously, the Commission must remain steadfast in enforcing fiscal discipline among states.

- While incentivizing prudent fiscal behavior with rewards, it must implement consequences for those crossing fiscal deficit limits by curbing borrowing allowances.

Conclusion

The path forward necessitates a robust commitment to address fiscal complexities, guided by the equalization principle and a judicious allocation of resources.

Indian Refiners Paying In Yuan For Russian Oil

Context:

As a result of Western sanctions, which require Moscow and its clients to find alternatives to the dollar for payment settlement, Indian refiners have started paying for part of their imports of oil from Russia in Chinese yuan, according to people with direct knowledge of the situation.

What is the background of the situation?

- Since Russia invaded Ukraine, the West has imposed numerous sanctions on that country. Even Nevertheless, there is still a significant market for Russian oil.
- For a very long time, the US dollar has been utilised as payment in international trade.
- However, after **the sanctions were placed on Russia**, the **US dollar was no longer an option**, and Russians began **looking for alternate forms of payment**.
- The Indian Rupee was also contemplated for use in this context, but it was later eliminated.



How much demand is there for the Russian oil?

- Western nations have implemented sanctions against Russia in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine. The effects of these restrictions on international trade flows have been severe, particularly for Russia's primary export, oil.

- Despite the restrictions, Indian refiners have become the country's biggest consumers of Russian oil transported by sea. To maintain their Russian oil imports, they have been aggressively looking for different payment options.

What was the outcome of using Yuan as a payment option?

- **Change from the US dollar to the yuan:** Historically, India has purchased its oil in US dollars, which has been the major global oil currency. However, Indian refiners have begun paying for some Russian oil imports in the Chinese yuan as a result of Russia's absence from the dollar and euro financial networks.
- **Problems with payment settlement:** For Indian refiners, it has become difficult to make payments for Russian oil because of the shifting restrictions. Banks might be hesitant to help refiners transact in dollars, which would cause them to look at alternative currencies like the yuan.
- **Yuan payments made by Indian Oil Corporation:** The first refiner to make some of its Russian oil purchases in yuan was the Indian Oil Corporation in June. This action reflects a rising trend among Indian refiners to broaden their available payment methods.
- **Private refiners also adopting yuan payments:** At least two of India's three private refiners, Reliance Industries Ltd., Nayara Energy (supported by Russia), and HPCL Mittal Energy Ltd., are said to be using yuan payments for some of their Russian oil purchases.
- **Support for yuan internationalisation:** Beijing's efforts to encourage yuan internationalisation are aided by the rise in yuan payments for Russian oil imports. In particular, Chinese banks actively promote the use of yuan for Russian oil transactions.

What are other currencies used by India Refiners?

- **Use of other currencies:** Indian refiners have resolved certain non-dollar payments for Russian oil using the **dirham of the United Arab Emirates** in addition to yuan payments. This demonstrates how adaptable refiners are when it comes to using multiple currencies.

What could be the negative implications of using the yuan?

- **Market access:** By using the yuan, Indian refiners may have better market access in China. However, since there have been conflicts between China and India, there are relatively few prospects for access to their markets.
- **Risks associated with fluctuating exchange rates:** The yuan is a controlled currency, and the Chinese government controls its exchange rate. When making transactions in yuan, this could increase the level of uncertainty and exchange rate risk for Indian refiners. The profitability of these transactions may be impacted by changes in the yuan's value to the Indian rupee.
- **Limited acceptance:** Although the yuan has become more widely used worldwide, it is still less broadly accepted than the US dollar. Finding vendors or clients ready to take yuan as a form of payment may be difficult for Indian refiners. The options accessible to Indian refiners may be limited by this restriction, which may also raise transaction costs.
- **Political implications:** Considering the continuing geopolitical tensions between China and India, switching from the US currency to the yuan may have political ramifications. It might be interpreted as a step towards greater alignment with China and could have an impact on relations with the US and other nations that have historically utilised the US dollar as the primary global reserve currency.

RBI reports 76% of ₹2,000 notes returned

Context :

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) asked the general population to use the next three months to deposit and/or exchange the 2,000 banknotes that were in circulation as of May 19, 2023, as 76% of those notes had since been returned.

What was the purpose of introducing Rs. 2000 notes?

- **Announcing demonetization:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi unexpectedly announced on November 8, 2016, that the present 500 and 1000 rupee notes would no longer be accepted as legal money.
- **Demonetization's goal:** Demonetization's main goals were to reduce "black money" (undeclared income), do rid of counterfeit money, fight corruption, and stop the funding of illicit acts like terrorism.
- **Retraction of 500 and 1000 Rupee Notes:** Following the announcement, the 500 and 1000 rupee notes were taken out of circulation. A constrained time was given to people to exchange or deposit their old money in banks.
- **New Denominations:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced new banknotes in a range of denominations to replace the previous money. The 2000 rupee note was one of them, and it was released to allow for greater transactions and effectively store value.
- **Features:** The new 2000 rupee note included cutting-edge security measures, including as colour-shifting ink, see-through registers, latent pictures, and other components to deter counterfeiting. Additionally, it included updated visual and design elements.



What were the advantages of demonetization?

- **Currency Stabilisation:** Demonetization can be used as a strategy to maintain currency stability, combat inflation, stop money fraud, and foster formal economic activity.
- **Curbing Black Money:** The government's justification for demonetization is that it helps pump out black money, or unaccounted income held in cash, which can broaden the tax base, lower corruption, and combat crime.
- **Promotion of Digitization:** Demonetization can boost transaction digitisation, formalise the economy, increase transparency, and lower the cost of currency management. It can also increase tax collections for the government and improve the convenience and effectiveness of the payment system.

How did it fail in its goal?

- **Temporary Slowdown:** Due to the disruption created by the withdrawal of old currency and the limited supply of new currency, the demonetization process may cause a temporary slowdown in economic activity. This may affect consumer and company spending.
- **huge Costs:** Demonetization requires major administrative costs, such as printing new currency notes, calibrating ATMs, and informing people about the changes. These expenses may put a burden on the government's finances and take money away from other areas.
- **Impacts:** Cash-driven industries, like retail, hospitality, and small enterprises, may be negatively impacted by demonetization

Why was it removed from the market?

- **Currency management:** The RBI's efforts to maintain a reliable and secure currency system include the elimination of 2000-rupee banknotes.
- **Post-Demonetization Response:** Following the elimination of the 500 and 1000 rupee notes during the demonetization operation, the 2000 rupee notes were created in 2016 to satisfy immediate financial needs.
- **Printing Stopped:** The printing of 2000 rupee notes was discontinued in 2018–19 because the initial goal of satisfying the country's currency needs had been accomplished and there was a sufficient supply of other denominations.
- **Reduced Circulation:** As of March 31, 2023, 10.8% of the total amount of notes in circulation were banknotes worth 2000 rupees.
- **Minimal Effect on the Economy:** It is not anticipated that the withdrawal of 2000 rupee notes will significantly impact daily life or the economy. The impact, according to the governor of the RBI, will be "very very marginal" because there is enough supply of banknotes in other denominations.
- **The objective of Curbing Black Money:** The removal of higher-value notes is viewed as a reasonable form of demonetization that can aid in reducing corruption, black money, and counterfeiting.
- **Increase in Bank Deposits:** Economists predict that the withdrawal will lead to a rise in bank deposits, particularly during a period of rapid credit expansion. This might lower lending rates and help the economy become more formally organised.

What was reported in the recent news regarding RS 2000 notes?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said that as of May 19, 2023, 76% of the 2,000 banknotes in use have been returned. This indicates that 76% of the 2,000 banknotes in circulation had been returned to the RBI.
- The RBI advised the general public to deposit or swap the last 2,000 banknotes within the next three months. This suggests that the RBI set a deadline for people to finish returning or exchanging the 2,000 rupees they had in their possession.

- 2,000 banknotes worth a total of 2.72 lakh crore were removed from circulation from the time of the announcement on May 19 and June 30, 2023. This means that individuals returned or exchanged a significant amount of ₹2,000 banknotes during that period.
- A total of 2,000 banknotes totalling 0.84 lakh crore were still in use as of June 30, 2023. This shows that a sizeable number of the 2,000 banknotes were still in use at the time despite efforts to have them recalled.
- The use of the returned 2,000 banknotes was disclosed by the RBI. According to the report, deposits made up almost 87% of the entire amount of returned banknotes. This shows that a sizable portion of the returned currency was placed into financial institutions.

‘A global rupee may raise volatility’

Context :

Officials of an Inter-Departmental Group of the RBI warn that the internationalisation of the rupee may conflict with domestic monetary policy, but the group maintains that the advantages of internationalisation much outweigh the different worries.

What does the internationalization of the Indian rupee mean?

- The US dollar, Euro, Japanese yen, and pound sterling are the world's major reserve currencies at the moment.
- The US dollar enjoys significant advantages as the dominant global currency, including widespread use in international trade, a sizable economy, networks of trade and finance, liquidity in US financial markets, and a track record of stability and convertibility.
- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) wants to utilise the Indian rupee more frequently in international trade, starting with import and export trade and progressively extending to other current account and capital account activities.**



What led to the rising of demand for an alternative source of global currency?

- The Chinese yuan can compete with the US dollar's hegemony, but whether it does so will rely on future US and Chinese policies, as well as the toughness and stability of the Chinese economy and financial system.
- **Economic sanctions against Russia by the US and growing apprehension over similar sanctions have led nations like China, Russia, and others to look for alternatives to the US dollar and lessen their reliance on established global payment systems like SWIFT.**

What are the possible advantages of internationalization?

- **Promoting the use of the rupee in cross-border transactions has advantages for Indian businesses, including lowering operating costs, facilitating better global business growth, reducing reliance on foreign exchange reserves, and enhancing bargaining power.**
- The option of increasing **international trade to third world countries from the developed nations.**
- Western countries who were **dependent on the oil from Russia** can now approach **India without the fear of getting sanctions.**
- By allowing invoicing, settlement, and payment in local currencies, internationalisation can help **Indian enterprises involved in international trade and investment decrease exchange rate risk.**
- The **cost of financing for local enterprises may decrease as a result of improved access to global financial markets** brought on by internationalisation for Indian entities.
- The term "**seigniorage**" describes the gain or income a government makes through issuing money. Internationalisation **might boost India's seigniorage advantages by increasing demand for the INR abroad.**
- As **transactions can be completed in the local currency, reducing the need for foreign currencies**, the internationalisation of the rupee offers the possibility of **less reliance on foreign exchange reserves.**

What are the recommendations of RBI's working groups?

- **Short term:** Standardised methods for analysing rupee trade agreements, creating accounts in rupees for non-residents, connecting payment systems with those of other nations, and bolstering the rupee market.
- **Medium Term:** Reviewing rupee-denominated bond taxation, utilising Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) for international trade, and incorporating Indian Government Bonds in global bond indices are all medium-term goals.
- **Long-term:** Attempts to add the rupee to the Special Drawing Rights (SDR), a global reserve asset based on a basket of currencies, of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

What does the cautionary report on the internationalization of the Indian Rupee (INR) by the Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) say?

- **Increased Volatility:** The IDG recognises that there may be an increase in INR exchange rate volatility during the early stages of internationalisation. This may be due to a variety of variables, including market speculation, changes in the demand for the rupee on a worldwide scale, and modifications to the dynamics of supply and demand for the currency.
- **The Triffin Conundrum:** The paper makes the point that internationalisation can lead to a contradiction between a country's domestic monetary policy and its duty to supply its currency to fulfil global demand. The Triffin problem, which can result in

conflicts between economic goals when a nation's currency serves as both a domestic unit of account and a global reserve currency, is a common name for this conflict.

- **Increased Impact of External Shocks:** According to the IDG, the internationalisation of the rupee may increase the effect of external shocks. This is so that foreign shocks can more easily be transmitted into the local economy, potentially altering stability and economic circumstances, as well as the free flow of capital into and out of the nation and the conversion of currencies.

Inflation Touches 4.8% As Food Prices Climb and Tomato Shock

Context :

From May's 4.31%, retail inflation accelerated to a three-month high of 4.81% in June, driven by a sharp increase in food prices as a result of rising prices for products such as cereals, pulses, milk, and tomatoes. From less than 3% the previous month, food price inflation accelerated to 4.5% this month.



What is retail inflation?

- **Retail inflation**, commonly referred to as consumer price inflation, is a measurement of increases in the cost of a selection of goods and services that are frequently used by households.
- **Consumer Price Index (CPI):** A consumer price index is often used to calculate retail inflation. A sample basket of products and services that consumers frequently buy is tracked by the CPI to determine their prices.
- **Services and Goods Basket:** The CPI's selection of products and services reflects normal consumer purchasing habits. It encompasses necessities and luxuries alike, such as food, shelter, transportation, healthcare, and education.
- **Percentage Change:** Retail inflation is estimated using the percentage change in the CPI over a predetermined period, usually every year. The rate of price growth or decrease is indicated by the percentage change.
- **Purchasing Power:** Retail inflation has a direct impact on customers' purchasing power. The buying power of money declines when prices of goods and services

increase more quickly than income levels. As a result, consumers can spend the same amount of money on fewer items and services.

- **Impact on Households:** Significant household effects may result from high retail inflation. Savings value is diminished, and discretionary expenditure is constrained. Additionally, consumers may alter their spending habits as a result of prioritizing essentials over non-essentials.
- **Policy Implications:** Retail inflation is actively monitored by central banks and policymakers as a crucial economic indicator. They seek to encourage enduring economic growth and preserve pricing stability. Central banks may have to alter interest rates, undertake monetary policy measures, or employ other tools to combat inflationary pressures in response to high or unstable retail inflation.

What is the current scenario of retail Inflation in India?

- Compared to May's 4.31%, **retail inflation in India increased to a three-month high of 4.81% in June.**
- Food price increases, particularly those for **cereals, pulses, milk, and tomatoes, were the primary cause of the inflation surge.**
- Inflation in food prices increased to **4.5% in June from less than 3% in May.**
- **With food prices rising from 2.4% in May to 4.3% in June,** urban consumers saw inflation of roughly 5%.
- The Consumer Price Index increased in June, on top of the 7% inflation seen in the same month last year.
- In June, the price of cereals increased by 12.7%, ending a three-month trend of declining prices. Additionally, **prices for spices, beans, milk, and eggs increased.**
- **Prices for edible oil decreased by 18.1% from June 2022 levels,** assisting in reducing inflation in the price of food as a whole.
- 13 of India's major states experienced inflation rates in June that were below the 4.8% national average, while four states—**Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Bihar, and Haryana—saw inflation rates that were more than 6%.**
- Concerns about how the monsoon's progression and flooding may affect agriculture and inflation are raised by economists.

What are the possible reasons for inflation in India?

- Even while headline inflation for the fourth consecutive month remained **below the Reserve Bank of India's maximum tolerance limit of 6%,** economists predict that rising vegetable prices, **the effects of flooding, and an erratic monsoon could aggravate pressures on food costs.**
- **Due to reduced irrigation levels, pressure on cereals and pulses is anticipated to persist, adding to inflationary pressures.**
- **Food costs:** Since a considerable amount of the population's spending goes toward food, food prices have a big impact on inflation in India. Price fluctuations in the food industry, particularly for staples like cereals, fruits, and vegetables, can exacerbate inflationary pressures.
- **Prices of gasoline and energy:** Variations in these costs can have a domino effect on other costs associated with production and transportation. Business expenses may rise as a result of higher fuel prices, and these costs may subsequently be passed on to consumers, creating inflationary pressures.
- **Demand-Supply Imbalances:** Inconsistent demand and supply in several industries can raise prices. Prices may be pressured upward if demand exceeds supply. This is evident in sectors including real estate, transportation, and consumer electronics.
- **Monetary Factors:** Inflation is influenced by monetary factors, including changes in interest rates and the money supply made by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Lower

interest rates can encourage spending and borrowing, increasing demand and even inciting inflationary pressures.

- **Government Policies:** Prices can be impacted by government policies including taxes, subsidies, and regulations. The cost of goods and services can be impacted by changes in tax rates, especially indirect taxes like the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which can then have an impact on inflation.
- **Prices of international commodities:** India imports a variety of goods, including gold, crude oil, and pulses. Domestic inflation may change as the price of commodities fluctuates on a global scale. Higher foreign prices may result in higher import costs, which may have an impact on overall inflation rates.
- **Seasonal factors:** Changes in agricultural productivity due to the seasons can affect food costs. Price increases for some agricultural goods may result from crop failures, droughts, floods, or supply chain disruptions, which adds to inflation.

What is 'Tomato Shock' and What is the reason behind the huge price hike?

- Recent increases in tomato costs have raised monthly kitchen budgets for Indian homes, and many people have even quit eating tomatoes. Tomatoes are now costing between Rs 150 and Rs 200 per kilogram in retail marketplaces as of recent weeks.

- The factors that led to the price hike are as follows:

1. environmental elements:

1. The cultivation and production of tomatoes have been hampered by persistent rain and unfavourable weather.
2. Too much rain can harm tomato crops, resulting in lower yields and poorer quality.
3. The availability of fresh tomatoes in the market is impacted by unfavourable weather conditions.

2. Logistical aspects

1. Distribution and transportation are essential for maintaining a consistent supply of tomatoes.
2. Tomatoes may have a difficult time getting from farmers to markets if there are infrastructure problems.
3. The delivery of tomatoes may be delayed by transportation delays such as severe weather or flooding.
4. Lack of inventory and higher prices may be the results of logistical and supply chain management issues.

3. Market factors:

1. Tomato prices are influenced by supply and demand dynamics. Prices increase when demand exceeds supply.
2. Hoarding, in which certain people or organizations store up tomatoes in anticipation of future gains, can lower the supply and raise prices.
3. Due to their influence over tomato distribution and pricing, middlemen can be exploited and cause prices to rise.
4. Price volatility and unjust behaviours may emerge from ineffective market regulation and supervision.

What are the possible ways in balancing the inflations?

- **Monetary Policies:** Inflation can be managed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) via monetary policy tools including interest rates and reserve requirements. Demand can be decreased and inflationary pressures can be managed by raising interest rates.
- **Fiscal Policy:** The government can implement responsible fiscal policies by controlling its spending, lowering the fiscal deficit, and ensuring effective resource

allocation. It should concentrate on lowering unnecessary spending and raising productivity in important industries.

- **Measures on the supply side:** The government needs to take action to increase agricultural productivity and deal with supply chain inefficiencies. This may entail supporting agricultural reforms, including investments in irrigation systems, updating the infrastructure for storage and transportation, and fostering private sector involvement in agriculture.
- **Measures for Price Stabilization:** The government can get involved in the market to keep the prices of key commodities stable by creating strategic reserves, controlling exports and imports, and taking enforcement action against black market and hoarding practices.
- **Enhancing Competition:** Encouraging market competition can aid in price reduction. To entice additional participants into different sectors, the government should promote ethical business practices, prevent monopolies, and simplify laws.
- **Increasing Social Safety Nets:** Helping vulnerable groups in society specifically can help lessen the effects of inflation. The burden on low-income households can be reduced by enhancing and expanding social safety net programs including subsidized food distribution, direct cash transfers, and affordable housing initiatives.

Pakistan gets final IMF nod for \$3-bn loan in stand-by arrangement

Context:

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a \$3 billion "stand-by arrangement" for Pakistan on Wednesday, providing financial respite to the country's cash-strapped government by supporting its attempts to stabilize the struggling economy.

What is IMF and IMF Bailout?

1. Establishment and Goals:

1. To restore the global monetary system following World War II, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was founded in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference.
2. It officially began on December 27, 1945, with 29 member nations and the objective of advancing world financial stability.


2. Membership and Organization:

1. The 190 nations that make up the IMF almost entirely represent the world's population.
2. Each member nation picks a governor to represent its interests when the IMF makes decisions.
3. The IMF's Board of Governors, which consists of representatives from all of its members, is the organization's highest decision-making body. It holds a yearly meeting.

3. Mission Statement and Goals:

1. The main goals of the IMF are to promote international monetary cooperation and ensure global financial stability.
2. Its goals include fostering high employment, achieving sustainable economic growth, and eradicating poverty on a global scale.


3. The IMF wants to give its members a forum for cooperation and multilateral economic problem-solving.



International Monetary Fund (IMF)

[,in-tər-'nash-nəl 'mä-nə-,ter-ē 'fænd]

An international organization that promotes global economic growth and financial stability, encourages international trade, and reduces poverty.

 Investopedia

4. monetary resources

1. Based on their economic size and other considerations, member nations are allotted a certain amount of money to contribute to the IMF's resource pool.
2. Each country's voting power and the amount of IMF funding they are eligible for are determined by quotas.
3. The loan and investment activities of the IMF also bring in money.

5. Last-Resort Lender:

1. The IMF is frequently referred to as the world's last resort lender.
2. It offers financial support to member nations experiencing severe economic crises or balance of payments issues.
3. This aid, which frequently takes the form of loans, attempts to assist nations in stabilizing their economies, carrying out crucial reforms, and resuming growth.

6. Policy Advice and Monitoring:

1. To encourage prudent economic policies and financial stability among its member countries, the IMF conducts surveillance and provides policy advice.
2. It evaluates the economic and financial conditions of nations, makes suggestions, and keeps track of how well policy initiatives are being carried out.
3. Risks, imbalances, and vulnerabilities in national and international economies are uncovered via IMF surveillance.

IMF Bailouts

- Bailouts are financial aid given to a firm or nation that is in financial trouble or at risk of bankruptcy.
- They may take the shape of loans, cash infusions, bond acquisitions, or stock purchases, among others.

- (IMF) is a global institution that offers financial support and assistance to nations that are exposed to serious macroeconomic risks.
- When nations face significant economic difficulties like currency crises, heavy foreign debt loads, or balance of payment issues, they frequently turn to the IMF for assistance.
- IMF bailouts primarily aim to assist nations in meeting their responsibilities under their foreign debt, stabilize their economies, and correct fundamental imbalances.
- The country may get financial assistance from the IMF in the form of loans, credit lines, or financial aid to help it pay for imports of vital goods, support its currency, and improve its overall economic condition.
- Conditions and demands are attached to IMF bailouts that the receiving nation must meet. To address the underlying reasons of the financial troubles, these circumstances frequently entail enacting economic reforms, budgetary restraint, austerity measures, and structural adjustments.

What are the conditions asked by the IMF?

- IMF loan recipients may be required to commit to the implementation of specific structural changes.
- These requirements have drawn criticism for being too onerous on the populace, being influenced by world politics, and being viewed as excessively interventionist by proponents of the free market.
- The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) that the IMF lends to struggling economies typically reflect a basket of five different currencies.
- Various programs, including stand-by agreements, flexible credit lines, and extended credit facilities, are used to carry out the lending.
- Depending on their unique circumstances, the bailout countries may use the SDRs for a variety of purposes.

What are the advantages of IMF Bailouts?

- Bailouts guarantee a nation's existence during challenging economic times by addressing balance of payments (BoP) issues without turning to more drastic measures.
- They aid in preventing a total financial system collapse, particularly when major industries that are too big to fail encounter considerable difficulties.
- Bailouts can keep institutions from going bankrupt, which is crucial for the efficient operation of the market as a whole.
- The IMF can offer governments technical assistance and expertise in addition to financial support to improve institutions and achieve economic reforms.

What are negative impacts it can cause while depending on IMF bailouts?

- The severe requirements set forth by the IMF for economic policy reforms may result in lower public spending, higher taxes, and other potentially divisive policies that could spark societal upheaval.
- It may be more difficult to access international capital markets if a country has a bad image with investors and lenders as a result of seeking an IMF bailout.
- Repeated IMF bailouts may make a country feel dependent on outside money and deter it from making the long-term reforms that are required to solve its economic difficulties.
- IMF bailouts may be interpreted as a government's acknowledgment of economic failure, which could cause political instability or possibly the government's collapse.

How much Bailout is Pakistan getting from IMF?

- **clearance and Amount:** Pakistan has received final clearance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a \$3 billion "stand-by arrangement" to help its efforts to stabilize the economy.
- **Payment:** Pakistan may now immediately receive \$1.2 billion thanks to the IMF's clearance. Subject to two quarterly evaluations, the remaining cash will be paid out gradually throughout the course of the program's nine-month runtime.
- **Program's primary goal:** The implementation of Pakistan's FY24 budget will be the main focus of the IMF program. By facilitating budgetary adjustment, its approach intends to address the nation's economic problems and ensure long-term debt sustainability.
- **Money from West Asia:** Pakistan received financial assistance from West Asian nations before obtaining the IMF loan. United Arab Emirates gave \$1 billion, while Saudi Arabia contributed \$2 billion. These monies were probably acquired under particular restrictions imposed by the IMF.

NITI Aayog report says 13.5-cr. people lifted out of multidimensional poverty

Context:

According to the "National multidimensional poverty index: a progress review, 2023" report, which was released here on Monday by NITI Aayog, India has seen a considerable decrease in the number of multidimensionally poor people, who went from 24.85% in 2015–16 to 14.96% in 2019–21.

What is National Multidimensional Poverty Index?

- The National MPI produced by the **NITI Aayog is India's equivalent** of the **Global Multidimensional Poverty Index**.
- To assess the multidimensionality of poverty among the Indian masses, it employs the rigorous techniques used by the UNDP and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.
- Health, education, and standard of life are the three equally weighted dimensions used by the MPI to measure deprivations. It uses 12 indicators that are in line with the SDGs, such as those related to nutrition, mortality rates, education levels, access to necessities, and financial inclusion.

What are the parameters of the Index?

- The report finds "acute deprivations in **health, education, and standard of living**" using criteria accepted by the United Nations.
- These criteria include **housing, assets, bank accounts, cooking fuel, child and adolescent mortality, maternal health, years of education, school attendance, sanitation, drinking water, and electricity**.

What are the initial findings from the report at a glance?

- **Decline in Multidimensional Poverty:** Multidimensional poverty in India has significantly decreased, falling by 9.89 percentage points from 24.85% in 2015–16 to 14.96% in 2019–21.

- **Number of People Lifted out of Poverty:** During the period covered by the report, about 13.5 crore (135 million) people were lifted out of multidimensional poverty.



सत्यमेव जयते

NITI Aayog

What are the other findings of the report?

- **Reduction of Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas:** Poverty rates fell more quickly in rural areas, from 32.59% to 19.28%. Poverty dropped from 8.65% to 5.27% in metropolitan areas.
- **Progress in Uttar Pradesh:** With 3.43 crore (34.3 million) persons exiting multidimensional poverty, Uttar Pradesh saw the highest decrease in the number of people living in poverty.
- **Fastest Reduction in Poverty:** The proportion of multidimensional poor decreased most quickly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan.
- **MPI Value and Poverty Intensity:** The MPI value practically decreased in half from 0.117 to 0.066, signifying substantial advancement. Poverty intensity dropped from 47% to 44%.
- **Achieving SDG Target 1.2:** India is on track to achieve SDG Target 1.2 of reducing multidimensional poverty by at least half well ahead of the 2030 deadline.

How was the government able to intervene and reduce the points?

- **Governmental Initiatives:** The government's emphasis on just and sustainable development, together with its dedication to the SDGs, has helped to reduce poverty. The Poshan Abhiyan, Anaemia Mukta Bharat, Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagya, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, and Samagra Shiksha are some of the most important initiatives.
- **Changes in Indicators:** The health, education, and standard of living indicators, among the other 12 MPI characteristics, have all significantly improved.

What can be done further to eradicate the below Line poverty?

- **Promoting economic activities:** Encourage sustainable economic growth and the creation of jobs to increase employment possibilities and earnings. Governments, corporations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can invest in infrastructure development, encourage small companies and entrepreneurship, and assist industries with the potential to generate employment.
- **Improve skilled training:** Increased emphasis on education and skill development is necessary to end the cycle of poverty. Everyone should have access to inexpensive education, especially in poor communities, as this can give them the information and skills they need to get better employment and enhance their standard of living.
- **Ensure gender equality:** Ending poverty requires empowering women and girls. Poverty reduction can be aided by addressing gender-based violence and discrimination, as well as ensuring that all people have equal access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities.
- **Enhance availability of basic facilities:** Enhance access to clean water, sanitary facilities, and high-quality healthcare services to help people escape poverty. Improved productivity and well-being can result from spending money on healthy practices, disease prevention, and healthcare infrastructure.
- **Increase agricultural productivity:** For many individuals in developing nations, agriculture serves as their main source of income. Providing smallholder farmers with better access to tools, education, markets, and technology can increase agricultural output and lower rural poverty.

Exports dip in the face of global uncertainty

Context:

The government is playing it safe by not declaring a specific target for outbound shipments this year and is likely to choose a variety of scenario-based targets in its place. This is due to the fact that merchandise exports shrank by 15.1% in the first quarter of this year after reaching a record \$450 billion in 2022–2023.

What is the situation faced currently by the exports?

- **Record Exports in 2022–23:** The country set a record for merchandise exports in the preceding fiscal year (2022-23) by shipping a record \$450 billion worth of goods abroad.
- **In Q1 2023–24, exports declined:** However, compared to the same quarter last year, exports of goods have significantly decreased in the first quarter of the current fiscal year (2023–24) by 15.1%
- **reduction in Goods Exports:** The reduction in goods exports, which slowed by 12.6% in April, 10.2% in May, and recorded a greatest fall of 22% in June 2023, is reflected in the decline in merchandise exports. The export total for June, \$32.7 billion, was the lowest since October 2022.
- **Services Exports growth Slows:** services exports are slowing down, which is another sign of the general recession. Services exports significantly increased by nearly 28% in 2022–2023 to reach \$325 billion. However, the growth in exports of services, which totalled \$80 billion in the most recent fiscal year, was just 5.2%.

what are the possible causes for the decline?

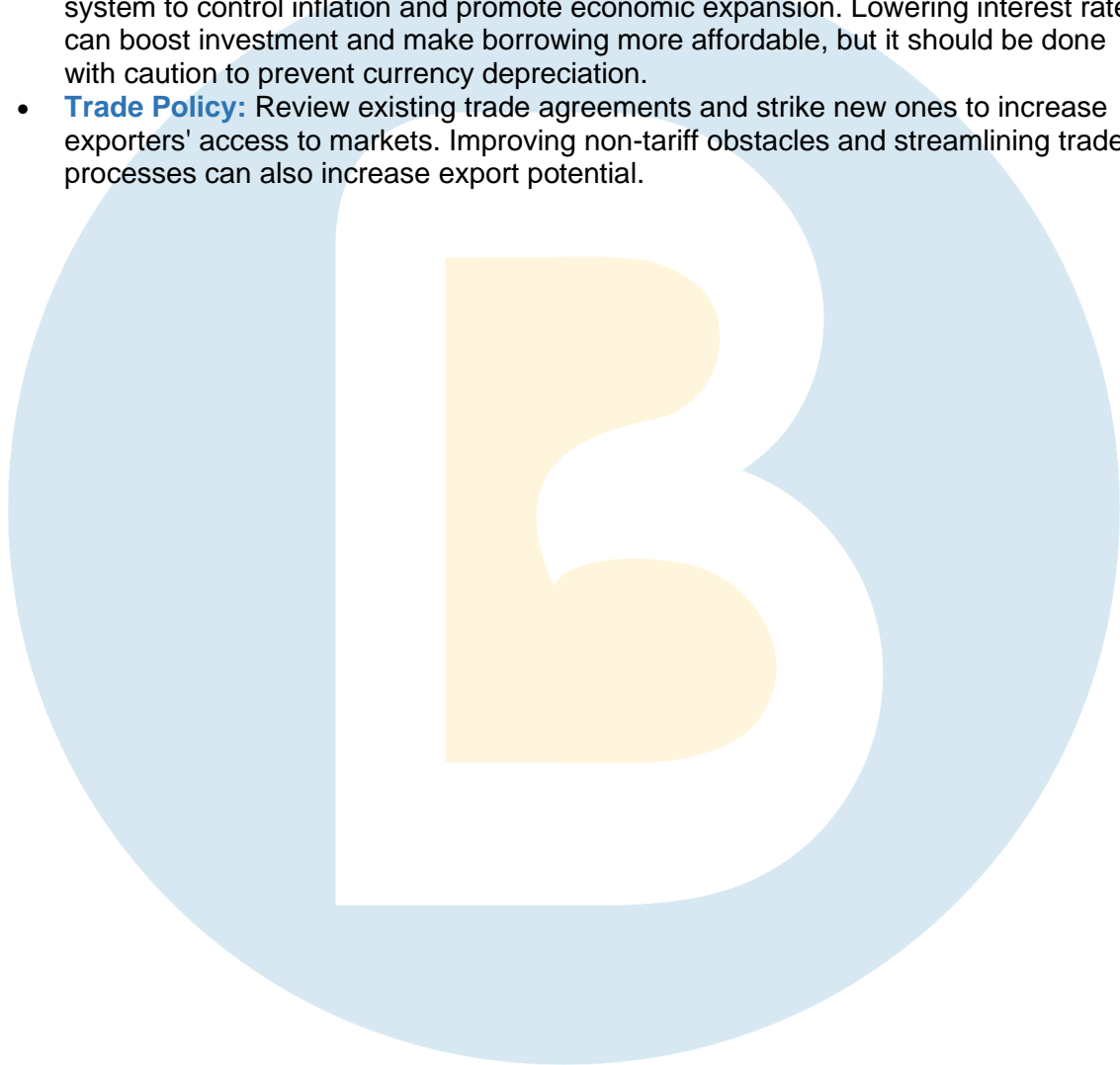
- **Global Economic Slowdown:** A more generalized global economic slowdown may be a major factor in the drop in exports. Reduced demand for goods and services from the target country is possible if significant trading partners or areas are seeing slower economic growth.
- **Trade conflicts and protectionism:** policies adopted by other nations can have a negative effect on a country's exports. It may be more difficult for exporters to enter foreign markets and compete on a global scale when there are tariffs, quotas, or other trade restrictions in place.
- **Fluctuations in Commodity Prices:** If the export of commodities, such as petroleum, is a major source of income for the nation, then export revenues may be considerably impacted by changes in global commodity prices. For instance, a severe decline in oil prices globally may result in a decline in petroleum exports.
- **Disruptions in the supply chain:** Due to natural catastrophes, logistical issues, or geopolitical events, there may be a decrease in the number of commodities that are available for export as a result of supply chain disruptions.
- **Exchange rates:** Changes in exchange rates might affect an exporter's ability to compete. A country's export demand may decline if its domestic currency is strong enough to make its goods and services substantially more expensive to international consumers.
- **Domestic Economic Conditions:** The nation's general economic state might also have an impact. The performance of exports may be impacted by domestic economic difficulties like high inflation, rising production costs, or decreasing consumer demand.
- **Impact of the Pandemic:** The COVID-19 pandemic may still be having an impact on international trade, supply chains, and consumer demand, which may have an impact on exports.
- **Gains for competitors:** Increased rivalry between nations in important export markets may result in a drop in market share and a decrease in export earnings.

How is it going to affect forex and Currency valuation?

- **Currency depreciation:** If the drop in exports is significant and long-lasting, it may cause the demand for the nation's currency on the forex market to diminish. The value of the currency may decline in relation to other currencies as fewer overseas purchasers require it to buy goods and services from the nation. Exports may become more competitive if the currency is lower since they will be comparably more affordable to foreign consumers.
- **Inflationary Pressures:** As the cost of importing goods and services rises, currency depreciation can cause imported inflation. Higher consumer costs and inflationary pressures in the economy may result from the nation's heavy reliance on imports for some vital items.
- **Trade Balance:** By making exports more desirable and imports more expensive, a weaker currency might benefit the trade balance. As the value of the currency declines, the trade imbalance may decrease as imports become relatively more expensive for local consumers and exports become relatively cheaper for overseas buyers.
- **Foreign Debt Burden:** If a government owes a considerable amount of money in foreign currency, the cost of servicing that debt in local currency may rise as a result of currency devaluation. The government and companies that have taken on foreign debt may feel the burden as a result.
- **Having an effect on foreign investment:** Foreign investors may be drawn to a weaker currency because it makes domestic assets more accessible in other currencies. However, it can also reflect a lack of optimism for the nation's economic prospects.

How to control the decline and way forward?

- **Export Promotion:** Implement targeted strategies for export promotion to increase export competitiveness. To get access to new trading partners, this could involve offering financial incentives, export subsidies, and support for market diversification.
- **Currency Stabilization:** If a currency becomes overly volatile or weak, the central bank may intervene in the foreign exchange market to stabilize it. The central bank can help maintain the value of the native currency by purchasing it on the foreign exchange market.
- **Fiscal Policy:** Use fiscal tools to boost domestic demand and the economy as a whole. Spending by the government on infrastructure projects and other development efforts can increase employment and stimulate the economy.
- **Monetary Policies:** Adjust the money supply and interest rates in the monetary system to control inflation and promote economic expansion. Lowering interest rates can boost investment and make borrowing more affordable, but it should be done with caution to prevent currency depreciation.
- **Trade Policy:** Review existing trade agreements and strike new ones to increase exporters' access to markets. Improving non-tariff obstacles and streamlining trade processes can also increase export potential.





POLITICAL SCIENCE

Upholding Constitutional Morality in Personal Relations

Context:

A recent judgment by the Allahabad High Court has attracted national attention due to its refusal to grant protection from police harassment to an inter-faith couple involved in a live-in relationship.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Indian Polity- Personal liberty, Judiciary)

Prelims:

- Fundamental Rights- Articles 12-35
- Rule of Law
- Supreme Court
- Article 141

Mains Questions:

- Critically analyze the court's reasoning and the conflict between conventional social morality and constitutional principles in the context of personal relationships. (150 words)

Dimensions of the article:

- The Petitioners' Case:
- Unacceptable Departure from Constitutional Principles:
- Rejection of Supreme Court Verdicts:
- An Inclination towards Orthodoxy
- Supreme Court Verdicts and Fundamental Rights
- Upholding Personal Liberty

The Petitioners' Case:

- The petitioners, a Muslim man and a Hindu woman, are living together based on mutual love and affection. They approached the court seeking protection from police harassment, alleging mistreatment by the local authorities.
- Their case was straightforward and aimed to uphold their fundamental rights.

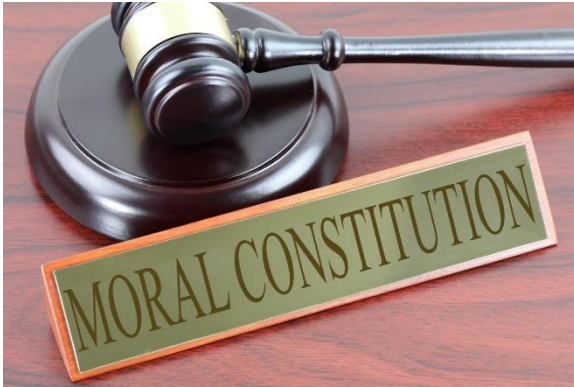
Unacceptable Departure from Constitutional Principles:

- The judgment delivered by the High Court is unacceptable from a constitutional standpoint.
- The court seems to be swayed by **conventional social morality rather than adhering to the principles of individual autonomy and personal liberty** enshrined in the Constitution.
- Despite citing several Supreme Court judgments, the High Court discarded them using untenable reasoning.
- This disregard for precedents undermines the rule of law and the authority of the apex court.

Rejection of Supreme Court Verdicts:

- The Allahabad judgment questioned the intention of Supreme Court verdicts such as **D. Velusamy (2010), Indra Sarma (2013), and Dhanu Lal (2015) regarding live-in relationships**, asserting that they were not meant to "promote such relationships." It also asserted that the law has traditionally been "biased in favor of marriage."

- By rejecting the precedential value of these top court verdicts, the High Court demonstrated a departure from established legal principles.



An Inclination towards Orthodoxy:

- While there were deficiencies in the petition, the High Court should not have assumed that marriage is a prerequisite for constitutional protection and the exercise of fundamental rights.
- In effect, the court acted as a theological authority, disregarding the concepts of individual liberty and autonomy within its jurisdiction.
- This verdict reflects a clear inclination towards social orthodoxy and religious revivalism.
- Under the guise of constitutional adjudication, the court attempted to reinforce traditional beliefs on marriage and morality.

Supreme Court Verdicts and Fundamental Rights:

- The Supreme Court's judgments on fundamental rights go beyond mere adjudication of disputes between parties.
- The law laid down by the Supreme Court is binding on all courts in the country, as mandated by **Article 141 of the Constitution**.
- Constitutional adjudication does not involve "encouraging" or "discouraging" social practices or personal conduct. For instance, in **Joseph Shine vs Union of India (2018)**, the Court decriminalized adultery, emphasizing that the state's police power should not be utilized to punish individual moral choices. Similarly, in **Navtej Singh Johar (2018)**, while substantially striking down **Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that criminalized same-sex relations**, the Supreme Court engaged in constitutional adjudication rather than passing moral judgments.
- These landmark judgments uphold the libertarian values and limit the state's interference in personal choices.

Upholding Personal Liberty:

- The Supreme Court verdicts cited in the Allahabad judgment also upheld personal liberty and established the law in this regard.
- In **Lata Singh (2006)**, the Court directed police authorities across the country to prevent harassment of adults involved in inter-caste or inter-religious marriages.
- In **S. Khushboo vs Kanniammal & Anr. (2010)**, the Supreme Court stated that while mainstream societal views may favor sexual relations within marriage, there is no statutory offense when consenting adults engage in sexual relations outside the institution of marriage. This was a mere restatement of existing law.
- The Allahabad High Court dismissed the observations made by the Supreme Court in these judgments, arguing that they were specific to the facts of each case and therefore not binding precedents. However, this does not justify the High Court's

disregard for the legal propositions established by the Supreme Court concerning fundamental rights.

Way forward:

- **Upholding Constitutional Principles:** It is crucial to reaffirm the importance of constitutional morality in personal relations, as repeatedly affirmed by the Supreme Court of India.
- **Ensuring Consistency with Supreme Court Verdicts:** Lower courts should align their judgments with the precedential value of the Supreme Court verdicts.
- **Eliminating Biases and Irrelevant References:** It is important to remove biases and irrelevant references, such as personal laws on marriage, from the judicial process when dealing with cases of live-in relationships.
- **Judicial Discipline and Adherence to the Constitution:** Lower courts should exercise judicial discipline and adhere to the constitutional tenets when making judgments.

Conclusion:

- The Allahabad High Court's judgment, which denied protection to an inter-faith couple in a live-in relationship, represents a significant departure from constitutional principles. By prioritizing social morality over individual autonomy and personal liberty, the High Court has strayed from established legal precedents. This judicial inclination towards orthodoxy and religious revivalism undermines the foundational principles of the Constitution. It is essential for the Supreme Court to rectify this judicial indiscipline and reaffirm that the moral lessons of personal laws should not supersede constitutional tenets.

Digital Personal Data Protection Bill

Context:

The Union Cabinet's approval of the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, scheduled for tabling in the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament, has sparked concerns.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government Policies and intervention)

GS-03 (Cyber security)

Prelims:

- Digital Personal Data Protection Bill
- Right to Privacy
- Puttaswamy Judgement
- Data Protection Laws of Other Nations

Mains Questions:

- Analyse the impact of the proposed Digital Personal Data Protection Bill on the Indian citizen's right to information and its potential consequences for democracy. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Power of Right to Information (RTI) Act
- Embracing the RTI
- Misused Exemption: Section 8(1)(j)
- The Threat of the Data Protection Bill

The Power of Right to Information (RTI) Act:

- The Indian Right to Information (RTI) Act, a pinnacle of transparency laws, has empowered citizens since its implementation on October 12, 2005.
- It emerged as a result of tireless struggles led by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, originating in rural Rajasthan and culminating in the law's drafting in 2004. Crafted with meticulous deliberation by an all-party parliamentary committee, the RTI Act embodies the essence of democracy by recognizing the importance of informed citizens and transparent governance.
- This harmonious blend of an efficient government and democratic values has made the RTI Act an indispensable tool for the people of India.

Embracing the RTI:

- Governments and those in positions of power have been unsettled by the empowerment the RTI Act bestows upon ordinary citizens.
- The ease with which citizens have embraced the RTI Act has posed a challenge for public officials who attempt to deny legitimate information requests.
- Despite these obstacles, many citizens have wielded this democratic instrument to unveil corruption and malpractices.
- The Act stipulates that citizens have the right to access almost all government information, with only ten carefully outlined categories of exemptions (Section 8(1) a to j) to prevent potential harm or disruptions to government operations.



Misused Exemption: Section 8(1)(j):

- Of the exemptions, Section 8(1)(j) has been a subject of widespread misuse. This provision exempts personal information not related to public activity or infringing on an individual's privacy.
- The law, however, presents an acid test to establish exemption validity: 'Provided that the information, which cannot be denied to the Parliament or a State Legislature shall not be denied to any person.' This proviso asserts that personal information can be exempted only if it fails to pass scrutiny before the highest legislative bodies.
- Unfortunately, some refusals of information misuse this provision, with public officials denying access without proper justification.

The Threat of the Data Protection Bill:

- Alarming concerns have emerged with the proposed Data Protection Bill, particularly regarding the amendment of Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act.
- The amendment seeks to broaden the scope of exempted personal information, potentially allowing the denial of any information associated with an individual.

- If implemented, this amendment could pave the way for a right to deny information for Public Information Officers (PIOs).
- Any information could be linked to an individual or entity under the bill's broad definition of 'person,' rendering the RTI Act a mere façade of its original intent.

Way Forward:

To uphold the democratic principles enshrined in the Right to Information Act and protect the citizen's right to access vital information, it is crucial to address the potential threats posed by the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill. Balancing data protection concerns with the need for transparency and citizen empowerment should be the focal point of any legislative action in this domain.

Reservation in Promotion for Persons with Disabilities in Government Jobs

Context:

The issue of reservation in the promotion of persons with disabilities in government jobs and the subsequent withdrawal of reservation in promotion for disabled individuals in Groups A and B by the Department of Personnel and Training.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government Policies and Intervention) (Judiciary)

Mains Questions:

- Examine the role of the judiciary in upholding justice and equality for persons with disabilities and discuss the impact of government apathy in the implementation of reservation in promotion. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Historical Evolution of Reservation for Persons with Disabilities
- Department of Personnel and Training's Interpretations
- Legal Battle for Reservation in Promotion
- Legal Perspectives on Reservation for Persons with Disabilities
- Government's Delayed Response and Denial of Justice

Historical Evolution of Reservation for Persons with Disabilities:

- The concept of reservation for persons with disabilities in government jobs emerged with the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- This legislation recognized the right of disabled individuals to be employed and promoted in government jobs on an equal basis with others.
- Initially, the reservation was limited to Groups C and D, but with progressive measures, it was later extended to Groups A and B, aiming to ensure dignity and equality for disabled individuals at all levels of their career in government service.

Department of Personnel and Training's Interpretations:

- The Department of Personnel and Training played a pivotal role in interpreting the provision of reservation in promotion for persons with disabilities.
- In 1998, it issued an order recognizing reservation in promotion as an integral part of reservation, providing disabled individuals with opportunities to advance in their organizations.
- However, the scenario took a disappointing turn in 2005 when the same department reversed its order, withdrawing reservation in promotion for Groups A and B.
- This reversal reflected apathetic attitudes of the administration, denying disabled individuals' equal space and place at higher organizational levels.

Legal Battle for Reservation in Promotion:

- In 2008, Rajeev Gupta filed a case against the Union of India in the Supreme Court, challenging the withdrawal of reservation in promotion. After eight years of deliberations, the Supreme Court ruled in 2016 in favor of granting reservation in promotion for disabled individuals in Groups A and B.
- However, the government failed to implement the judgment, prompting a contempt case filed by Mr. Gupta in 2017, which is still ongoing.
- Another case, Siddaraju vs State of Karnataka & Ors., also upheld reservation in promotion for the disabled, nullifying the Department of Personnel and Training's 2005 order.

Legal Perspectives on Reservation for Persons with Disabilities:

- The courts' stance on reservation for persons with disabilities aligns with Article 16(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees equality of opportunity in state employment or office.
- The judiciary emphasized that Article 16(4) does not prevent providing preferential treatment, such as reservation, to backward classes, including disabled individuals.
- However, such preferential treatment should not be based on caste, religion, or other grounds. The courts recognized that physical disability, the basis of providing reservation for disabled individuals, is not forbidden under Article 16(1).

Government's Delayed Response and Denial of Justice:

- The government's response to the issue has been disappointing. The filing of miscellaneous applications and orders lacking mention of reservation in promotion since 1996 indicates attempts to delay justice for disabled individuals.
- Such delays hinder their progress to higher positions in organizations, impacting their inclusion in society and preventing active contributions to India's development. By prolonging the adjudication process, the judiciary indirectly compounds government apathy towards the needs and aspirations of disabled individuals, undermining its role in promoting equal opportunity and a just environment for their growth.

Way Forward:

To rectify the current situation and uphold the principles of justice and equality, the judiciary should proactively enforce the judgments granting reservation in promotion for disabled individuals. The government must take immediate steps to implement the rightful reservations and create an inclusive and supportive environment for disabled individuals to thrive in their careers. Additionally, raising awareness and sensitizing the public and organizations about the importance of inclusive policies and diversity can foster a more accepting and empowering society for persons with disabilities.

Conclusion:

The issue of reservation in promotion for persons with disabilities in government jobs remains a pressing concern. While the legislative framework acknowledges their rights and potential for career advancement, the inconsistent implementation and government apathy hinder their progress. The judiciary's role in ensuring justice and equality has been commendable, but prompt action is necessary to enforce the judgments and promote inclusive policies. By taking affirmative steps, India can create an environment that upholds the principles of justice and equality, providing disabled individuals with opportunities to contribute actively to the nation's development.

Rebuilding Trust in Data: Analyzing the New Standing Committee on Statistics

Context:

The establishment of a new Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in India that is tasked with advising on official data, including household surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

Relevance:

GS-02, GS-03 (Indian Economy) (Government Policies and intervention)

Mains Questions:

- Analyze the significance of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) in revising economic indicators and understanding people's living standards. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- A Broader Mandate for Quality Guidance
- Challenges Surrounding the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)
- The Role of Independent Assessment

A Broader Mandate for Quality Guidance

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's decision to establish the new Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) brings fresh hope for India's statistical system.
- Led by the country's first Chief Statistician, Pronab Sen, the SCoS aims to go beyond its predecessor's role and design surveys for various data sets.
- With a leaner panel of 14 members, the SCoS is well-positioned to provide coherent and quality guidance, compared to its earlier 28-member counterpart that struggled to establish a unified consensus.

Challenges Surrounding the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES)

- The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) holds immense importance in gauging people's living standards and recalibrating critical economic indicators like the Consumer Price Index and Gross Domestic Product.
- However, the survey's credibility has been questioned in the past, leading to the government discarding the findings of the 2017-18 survey due to alleged data quality issues.

- This skepticism over official statistical machinery has persisted, with members of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister recently reviving such concerns, possibly to preempt negative outcomes from the latest HCES.
- Such actions, if not addressed, could further exacerbate the trust deficit in the statistical system.

The Role of Independent Assessment

- To restore trust and ensure transparency, the decision of whether data is fit for release should be entrusted to the independent National Statistical Commission.
- However, the commission is grappling with vacancies despite being reconstituted late last year. Blindly discrediting the official statistical machinery might provide short-term relief for governance obfuscation but risks long-term damage to credibility and governance outcomes.
- Bridging the trust deficit between data users and the statistical system becomes the onus of the SCoS, which can play a proactive role in this regard.

Way Forward:

Empowering the National Statistical Commission

- It is imperative to empower the National Statistical Commission with sufficient resources and staffing to ensure its independent assessment of data and decision-making process. This would enhance credibility and instill confidence among data users, thereby reducing the vacuum of official data.

Transparent Communication and Interpretation

- The SCoS must focus on transparently communicating the methods employed in surveys, especially the HCES results. It should provide interpretational nuances to users, thereby enabling a better understanding of the data's implications for policymaking.

Nurturing a Culture of Data Trustworthiness

- To overcome the prevailing trust deficit, the SCoS can spearhead efforts to create a culture of data trustworthiness. Encouraging open dialogue, addressing concerns, and embracing diverse perspectives will foster credibility in India's statistical system.

Conclusion:

The formation of the Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) presents a valuable opportunity to revitalize India's statistical system. By expanding its mandate and focusing on transparent communication, the SCoS can bridge the trust deficit between data users and official statistics. Upholding the credibility of data through the independent assessment by the National Statistical Commission will enable the government to make informed decisions and address pressing ground realities effectively. It is essential for the Centre to trust its own data and invest in rebuilding the faith of the people in the statistical system for a brighter future.

Upholding the Rule of Law Amidst Technological Challenges: A Struggle for Justice

Context:

The weakening of the rule of law in contemporary Indian society, with a specific focus on the case of Indian medal-winning wrestlers who faced alleged sexual harassment and the challenges posed by the ongoing technological revolution.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Issues Related to Women) (Gender) (Sports & Affairs)

Prelims:

Sexism, Gender Disparity, Women Safety, POCSO Act.

Mains Question:

- The autonomy and supremacy of the law are contingent upon political commitment and a robust rule of law culture. Analyze the present weakening of the rule of law in contemporary Indian society, considering the trust deficit in the colonial model and the emergence of faith-oriented majoritarian re-imagination of laws. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- An Unsettling Erosion of the Rule of Law
- The Courageous Voices of Wrestlers Echo
- The Prolonged Battle for Justice
- The Enigmatic Pace of Investigation
- Demanding Equal Justice under the Rule of Law
- Embracing Course Correction

An Unsettling Erosion of the Rule of Law:

- In the relentless march of technological advancement, the very foundations of the rule of law appear to be tested. Contemporary Indian society finds itself grappling with a disturbing erosion of this essential pillar, primarily fueled by two interconnected factors.
- First, there exists a pervasive trust deficit in the archaic colonial model of the rule of law. Second, a majoritarian re-imagination of laws, rooted in divine providence, adds complexity to an already intricate legal landscape.
- Amidst this backdrop, the plight of Indian medal-winning wrestlers embroiled in allegations of sexual harassment stands as a poignant exemplar of the crisis we face.

The Courageous Voices of Wrestlers Echo:

- For nearly a decade, female trainee wrestlers, even those of award-winning caliber, have endured alleged sexual advances and grave indignities during their training.
- In January 2023, these wrestlers took a bold stand, commencing a sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi. Despite the Sports Ministry's referral of the complaints to an oversight committee, the wrestlers' plight remained unresolved, drawing attention to the sluggish response of the rule of law.

The Prolonged Battle for Justice:

- Dealing with insensitive probing during depositions, the wrestlers restarted their sit-in protest in late April, gaining increased public support. The survivors' pursuit of justice led them to the Supreme Court of India, which took cognizance of their grievances.
- Consequently, the Delhi Police registered two FIRs under relevant provisions, bringing the sexual harassment complaints within the purview of criminal justice. However, a campaign of vilification orchestrated by the alleged perpetrator and his followers, targeting the wrestlers and even questioning the legitimacy of the POCSO Act, complicated matters further.

The Enigmatic Pace of Investigation:

- The Delhi Police, as the foremost investigative agency, had a crucial responsibility to respond swiftly to allegations involving internationally acclaimed wrestlers and a prominent politician within the sports realm.

- However, their approach seemed lackadaisical, exhibiting selectivity in fact gathering and focusing more on the credentials of the complainants rather than the accused.

Demanding Equal Justice under the Rule of Law:

- The **essence of the rule of law hinges on universal and equal applicability. In the realm of sexual harassment complaints, this demands a free, fair, and impartial investigation, ensuring swift resolution.**
- While the accused is entitled to a fair trial, the rule of law necessitates efficient checks on police powers and judicial oversight.
- The Lalita Kumari case underscored the importance of judicial intervention, empowering magistrates to monitor investigations. Yet, in the present case, the survivors have faced bureaucratic delays and inadequate judicial support.

Embracing Course Correction:

- The struggle to uphold the rule of law extends beyond individual cases, resonating with the very essence of constitutional justice. A united front, driven by a commitment to fundamental principles, must seek course correction to salvage the integrity of the rule of law.
- The Stockholm Criminology Symposium of June 2023, delving into "principled and equitable law enforcement," serves as a reminder of our shared global pursuit for justice.

Way Forward:

The onus lies not just on the judiciary but also on those who value the rule of law and uphold constitutional justice. It is imperative to stand firm and embark on a course correction to safeguard the soul of the rule of law. This challenge is not unique to India; democracies worldwide face similar threats. The Stockholm Criminology Symposium's theme of 'principled and equitable law enforcement' resonates, underscoring the need for unwavering commitment to the rule of law.

The Impact of Internet Shutdowns on Manipur and National Apathy

Context:

Manipur, a state in Northeast India, has been experiencing a tumultuous period of unrest, violence, and an Internet shutdown that started on May 3, 2023.

Relevance:

GS - 02, GS - 03 (Poverty and Developmental Issues) (Communalism) (Issues Related to SCs & STs) (Issues Related to Minorities) (Government Policies & Interventions) (Pressure Groups)(North East Insurgency)

Prelims:

Meitei Tribe, Kuki Tribe, Naga Tribe, 6th schedule, Inner Line Permit (ILP), Lokur Committee 1965, Bhuria Commission, Xaxa Committee, Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).

Mains Question:

- Discuss the implications of Internet shutdowns in states like Manipur and their impact on national apathy. How can the government strike a balance between security concerns and safeguarding citizens' rights and access to information during such crises? (250 words)

Internet Shutdowns

- The alarming rise of internet shutdowns garnered global attention in 2011 with the first major incident in Egypt. From 2016-2021, the #KeepItOn coalition documented a staggering 931 shutdowns in 74 countries, with Asia and Africa experiencing the majority of these episodes.
- India stands out more than 100 instances of internet blockage or disruption so far, with a significant portion at least 80% of episodes concentrated in Jammu & Kashmir
- Internet shutdowns cast a dark shadow over electoral processes, as they hinder digital tools crucial for campaigning, public discussion, voting, and overseeing elections. Beyond political implications, internet shutdowns inflict heavy economic costs across all sectors, disrupting financial transactions, commerce, and industry.
- For instance, Myanmar experienced an approximate loss of USD 2.8 billion in economic progress from February to December 2021 due to shutdowns.
- Internet shutdowns adversely impact education, hindering learning outcomes and communication between teachers, school administrators, and families. Furthermore, critical health and humanitarian assistance services suffer disruptions.

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Blanket Order and Lack of Supportive Data
- A Glimpse into the Suffering of Manipur's People
- Judicial Response and the Supreme Court's Avoidance
- The Vital Role of Information Flow

The Blanket Order and Lack of Supportive Data

- The Internet shutdown in Manipur has been an indiscriminate blanket prohibition, affecting all web traffic and mediums of connectivity throughout the entire state. The orders issued by the Commissioner (Home) of Manipur under the Telecom Suspension Rules vaguely state the intention to thwart anti-national and anti-social elements by curbing the spread of disinformation and false rumors on social media.
- However, there is a conspicuous absence of concrete data or instances demonstrating the effectiveness of the shutdown in preventing violence.
- Notably, these orders lack specificity, merely being repetitive with minor date changes, possibly implying an indefinite extension.
- This raises concerns about compliance and questions the adherence to the Supreme Court's judgment on Internet shutdowns in Jammu and Kashmir (Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India).

A Glimpse into the Suffering of Manipur's People

- During the Internet shutdown, reports have emerged revealing the harsh reality faced by the people of Manipur. While protests erupted in Delhi, the information flow from Manipur depicted tales of financial hardships faced by students pursuing education in metropolitan cities and difficulties in evacuating residents to relief camps.
- In response to these circumstances, petitions challenging the orders were filed in the High Court of Manipur, leading to partial restoration of Internet access after several hearings.

- The primary objective of limited Internet usage for essential services raises constitutional concerns and highlights the institutional grammar surrounding Internet shutdowns.



Judicial Response and the Supreme Court's Avoidance

- The High Court of Manipur has taken steps in alignment with judicial doctrine and practices, permitting provisional access for certain services. However, the lack of clarity in defining terms like "social media" and continued prohibition on smartphone Internet usage effectively prolongs the ban on Internet access in Manipur.
- The Supreme Court, on the other hand, has displayed a pattern of judicial avoidance. Despite opportunities to adjudicate on the Internet shutdown, the apex court has refrained from decisive action, even while examining broader issues of violence.

The Vital Role of Information Flow

- Ironically, an Internet ban often leads to an increase in misinformation rather than curbing it. Reports have shown how disinformation fuelled sexual violence against women from the Kuki-Zo community in Manipur.
- Therefore, the video clip depicting the violence becomes a crucial moment for national awakening, but it must be handled sensitively to avoid harm to survivors and prevent communal hatred. Information flow also plays a crucial role in holding the State and central governments accountable for truth, justice, and reconciliation.
- To achieve this, the judiciary must build upon the precedent set by the Anuradha Bhasin case and demand accountability from the executive.

Way Forward

The situation in Manipur demands immediate attention and decisive action from the government and the judiciary. The Internet shutdown's propriety and its impact on national apathy need to be deeply assessed and addressed through open dialogue with the affected communities. Restoring Internet access while ensuring appropriate measures to tackle disinformation can lead to better accountability and transparency in governance.

The Complexity of Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and Bursting the Myths of Homogeneity

Context:

The article discusses the intricacies and complexities surrounding the concept of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India and emphasizing the importance of embracing diversity and equality to navigate the complexities of the UCC and Indian secularism successfully.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Indian Polity- Fundamental Rights, DPSP)

Prelims:

- Uniform Civil Code
- Fundamental Rights
- Law Commission
- Directive Principles of State Policy.

Dimensions of the Article:

- **The Ideological Agenda:** Decoding the BJP's UCC Pursuit
- **Entangled Threads:** Caste Inequalities and the UCC Conundrum
- **Embracing Multiculturalism:** UCC and Gender Equality
- Unraveling Muslim Personal Law
- The Struggle for Reforms
- **Gender Justice and AIMPLB:** A Tumultuous Relationship



The Ideological Agenda: Decoding the BJP's UCC Pursuit

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent advocacy for the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Bhopal raised eyebrows and questions alike.
- The BJP's unwavering commitment to three core ideological agendas - the abrogation of Article 370 and the construction of the Ram Mandir being the other two - adds fuel to the intrigue.

Entangled Threads: Caste Inequalities and the UCC Conundrum

- The fate of India's relentless pursuit of egalitarianism hinges upon resolving two closely intertwined questions: Why should Hinduism perpetuate a rigid four-caste system, with some groups asserting dominance over others, especially the marginalized Dalits? And, in a nation akin to a family, can disparate laws for various communities coexist harmoniously?

- As we delve into the UCC discourse, it becomes evident that the Hindu Right's enthusiasm for uniformity overshadows concerns over caste inequalities, leaving us pondering over their true motivations.

Embracing Multiculturalism: UCC and Gender Equality

- Beyond the borders of India, many Western liberal democracies grapple with the paramount issue of gender equality, an essential pillar of the UCC. France's courts frequently encounter cases involving Muslim immigrants from Morocco and Algeria, while Canada, Australia, and the U.S. resort to religious-based alternative dispute resolutions.
- The mosaic of multiculturalism offers valuable lessons for India as it navigates the treacherous waters of gender justice.

Unravelling Muslim Personal Law:

- The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) came into existence in 1973 with the primary mission of safeguarding Muslim personal law. This history stretches back to 1772 when colonial rulers utilized religious doctrines to shape personal laws.
- Acts like the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937, and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939, lay the groundwork for Muslim personal law.
- Recent developments, such as the passage of the triple talaq bill in 2019, have sought to bring about substantial changes.

The Struggle for Reforms:

- While some advocate internal reforms within the Muslim community, progress has remained sluggish. Muslim women activists have long knocked on the doors of community leaders, imploring for reforms and the codification of Muslim personal law.
- Surprisingly, during Nehru's era, other Muslim-majority countries like Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, and Pakistan undertook reforms based on The Ottoman Law of Family Rights, 1917. Alas, in independent India, the lack of independent Muslim leadership has impeded any substantial efforts for internal reforms.

Gender Justice and AIMPLB: A Tumultuous Relationship

- The AIMPLB's image as an all-male body has come under heavy criticism, particularly since the Shah Bano case.
- While facing mounting pressure, the board has reluctantly allowed limited representation of women.
- However, the push for codification of family law and broader personal law reforms remains stagnant, leaving many feminist and Muslim women's groups disheartened.

Conclusion:

The path to a Uniform Civil Code in India is fraught with complexities and contradictions, embodying a crisis of Indian secularism. The delicate balance between gender justice and interpretations of religious texts complicates matters further. As we chart this uncharted territory, our choices must embrace multiculturalism, unity in diversity, and a genuine pursuit of gender equality. Only then can we usher in an era of true egalitarianism, transcending the artificial boundaries of majoritarianism.

The Never-ending Tussle

Context:

The ongoing legal dispute between the Government of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi and the Centre over the powers and governance of Delhi.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (Co-operative Federalism) (Constitutional Amendments)

Prelims:

- Special Provisions for Delhi under Article 239AA
- NCT
- Schedule VII
- Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Act 2021
- President
- Ordinance

Mains Question:

- Analyse the constitutional implications of the President of India's ordinance and the powers of the Delhi government and the Centre in light of the Article 239AA. (250 words)

Dimensions of the article:

- The Legal Saga
- The Dilemma of the Ordinance
- The Constitutional Conundrum

The Legal Saga

- The ceaseless legal entanglement between the Centre and the Government of NCT Delhi regarding their respective powers continues to be an ongoing enigma. The latest episode in this saga revolves around the legality of the recent presidential ordinance, an attempt to establish a new scheme for service regulation in Delhi.
- This contentious move has prompted the formation of a Constitution Bench, marking the third occasion in the past few years where a five-member Bench is called upon to adjudicate the powers of these two feuding entities.

The Dilemma of the Ordinance

- Central to the issue is the ordinance's endeavour to nullify a significant verdict delivered by a prior Constitution Bench. This verdict had unequivocally ruled that 'Services,' classified under Entry 41 of the State List, falls within the executive and legislative domains of the Delhi government, not the Centre.
- The Court's rationale was lucid: Article 239AA, governing the affairs of NCT Delhi, merely excluded three subjects - police, public order, and land - leaving the remaining subjects under the Delhi government's jurisdiction. Consequently, the verdict upheld the Delhi government's authority over appointments, postings, and transfers, stressing that any attempt to extend the Centre's reach by excluding 'Services' would contradict the constitutional framework of Delhi's governance.

The Constitutional Conundrum

- The three-judge Bench, responsible for referring the ordinance matter to the Constitution Bench, astutely observed that the creation of a new 'Authority' to regulate 'services' essentially amends Article 239AA of the Constitution, adding it as a fourth subject to the list of excluded ones. However, this action might not necessarily render it invalid.
- **Clause 7 of Article 239AA grants Parliament the power to enact laws "for giving effect to, or supplementing" the Article**, asserting that such a law would not be deemed a constitutional amendment, despite its consequential impact.
- While the Court acknowledges Parliament's legislative authority, it also reserves the right to assess the validity of its exercise, especially when it results in the complete exclusion of 'services' from the purview of the elected Delhi regime.
- Additionally, the Court highlights a perceived contradiction, wherein one clause seemingly safeguards the existing governance structure of Delhi, while another seemingly allows alterations. A definitive ruling is imperative.

Conclusion:

Despite the legal intricacies and constitutional quandaries that this dispute poses, the political undercurrents and personal interests involved guarantee that the struggle will persist unabated. As India's highest legal authority scrutinizes the ordinance and the powers of the Delhi government and Centre, the resolution remains uncertain. Only time will reveal the final chapter in this never-ending tussle over the governance of Delhi.

Rethinking the Age of Consent and the POCSO Act

Context:

The recent developments and judgments related to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, in India. Specifically, focusing on cases involving consensual sexual relationships between minors and the accused.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (Issues Related to Children) (Government Policies & Interventions)

Prelims:

- (POCSO) Act
- Child Abuse Prevention and Investigation Unit
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

Mains Question

- Discuss the recent judgments of various High Courts that have quashed FIRs and criminal proceedings under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, and their impact on the age of consent and safeguarding vulnerable children. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Defining Consent
- The Burstiness of Cases: Towards a Solution
- Role of Judiciary and Parliament

Defining Consent:

- The recent judgments by different High Courts have sparked debates on the definition of consent under the POCSO Act. The Act defines a 'child' as any person below the age of 18 years and aims to safeguard children against penetrative sexual assault, regardless of their consent.
- However, the Courts seem to have disregarded the age of consent and the mandatory legal presumption in favor of the prosecutrices. Even the significant age gaps between the victims and the accused have been overlooked.
- Drawing parallels with other protective legislation, like the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, where intention need not be separately proved if the prohibited acts are committed based on the victim's caste, the Courts should have treated children as a separate vulnerable category.
- Consent should be irrelevant if the accused had knowledge of the victim being a child, thus upholding the spirit of POCSO.



The Burstiness of Cases: Towards a Solution

- The pattern of judgments in 'consensual sex' cases raises pertinent questions. Should all such cases be quashed, and if so, what should be the bottom-line age of consent? This complex issue demands a thoughtful resolution.
- Lowering the age of consent to 16, as suggested by some, needs thorough consideration. Can the IPC's general provision under Section 90, which deals with consent for a child even below 12 years of age, be a viable approach?
- Resolving this burstiness in the interpretation of consent requires a comprehensive analysis by the Bureau of Police Research and Development. By studying consensual sex cases across States, the government can make informed decisions on reducing the age of consent, while also allowing the judiciary some discretion in cases where the victim is of a lower age based on the child's understanding of consequences. However, the paramount consideration must always be the 'best interest of the child.'

Role of Judiciary and Parliament

- While the High Courts have not declared any provision of the IPC or POCSO unconstitutional, the discrepancies in interpretations need to be urgently addressed. The Supreme Court's intervention is crucial to reconcile the gap between the laid-down law as understood by investigating agencies and the diverse interpretations by different High Courts.
- However, it is essential to strike a balance. Lowering the age of consent, though within Parliament's purview, should be done carefully, considering societal implications. The Supreme Court's guidance is vital in shaping this policy change.

Conclusion:

The recent judgments by various High Courts have thrown the issue of consent under the POCSO Act into the spotlight. It is essential to strike a balance between protecting children from sexual offenses and ensuring a fair legal process. Reducing the age of consent requires thoughtful consideration and must be done in the best interest of the child. The judiciary and Parliament must collaborate to ensure a comprehensive and robust legal framework that addresses the complexities of this sensitive issue.

The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill

Context:

The recently passed Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023, has elicited mixed reactions and significant concerns from the public and environmental experts. Although its Preamble boasts ambitious environmental goals, the operative part of the Bill raises questions about its true intentions.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government policies and Intervention)
GS-03 (Conservation)

Mains Question:

Critically analyze the implications of the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023, with regard to the narrowed definition of forests, exclusion of ecologically significant tracts, and the granting of sanction to additional activities. Discuss the potential environmental and socio-economic consequences of these provisions and suggest measures to ensure a balanced approach between development and conservation. (250 words)

Dimensions of the article:

- Narrowed Definition of Forests: Impact on India's Forest Cover
- Exclusion of Fragile Ecosystems: Security vs. Biodiversity
- Unfettered Powers: Concerns about Environmental Scrutiny
- Disenfranchising Forest People
- Exclusions that Raise Eyebrows

Narrowed Definition of Forests: Impact on India's Forest Cover

- One of the contentious aspects of the Amendment is its restriction of the Forest Conservation Act to only legally notified forests and those recorded in government records after October 25, 1980.
- This seemingly innocuous change may have far-reaching consequences, impacting around 28% of India's forest cover, encompassing nearly 2,00,000 square kilometers. Such forests include not only fruit orchards and plantations but also pristine forests of exceptional conservation value.
- For instance, the Unclassed Forests in Nagaland, which have enjoyed centuries of protection and use by autonomous clans, have not been officially recognized as forests. Now, under the Amendment, these ecologically significant areas could be susceptible to destruction for construction and development, signaling a potential setback to conservation efforts.

- Additionally, regions like the Aravalli Hills in the Delhi National Capital Region, vital to the water security of the area, might also face adverse effects due to this amendment.

Exclusion of Fragile Ecosystems: Security vs. Biodiversity



- Another contentious issue is the exclusion of security-related infrastructure up to 100 km of international borders from requiring forest clearances. Although aimed at fast-tracking strategic and security projects, this move has raised concerns about the implications for biodiversity hotspots.
- Forests in northeastern India and high-altitude Himalayan forests and meadows, recognized globally for their ecological importance, could now face potential threats from unchecked development in the name of national security.

Unfettered Powers: Concerns about Environmental Scrutiny

- The Amendment introduces exemptions for construction projects such as zoos, safari parks, and eco-tourism facilities. While promoting tourism and recreational spaces is essential, these artificially created green areas cannot fully replace the ecosystem services provided by natural forests.
- Furthermore, granting unrestricted powers to the Union government to specify 'any desired use' beyond the Act's scope raises legitimate concerns about potential resource exploitation without sufficient environmental scrutiny.
- Striking a balance between development and conservation is crucial, and transparency in decision-making becomes paramount.

Disenfranchising Forest People

- Notably, the Amendment makes no mention of other relevant forest laws, like the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest-dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The exclusion and ease of diversion of forest areas imply that forest people's institutions may no longer be consulted, which raises concerns about equity and inclusivity.
- Contrasting this with Nepal's experience, where handing over forests to local community forest user groups resulted in a remarkable increase in forest cover, India should consider further engaging forest communities to achieve its net zero carbon commitments and enhance forest cover. Disenfranchising the very communities whose livelihoods depend on these forests could hinder the Bill's intended goals.

Exclusions that Raise Eyebrows

- While some argue that forest clearances under the previous Act needed improvements, blanket exemptions for certain sectors might not be the optimal solution.
- Instead, rectifying the flaws in existing processes would ensure adequate assessment of project impacts and environmental mitigation measures.
- Certainly, fast-tracking strategic and security-related projects is justified, and administrative processes can be expedited. However, the Amendment should not lead to undermining the value of India's natural ecosystems.

- Recent incidents in Joshimath, Uttarakhand, underscore the importance of rigorous geological and environmental assessments for all development projects, especially in regions proximate to ecologically sensitive areas.

Way Forward

- To uphold the true spirit of the Bill's Preamble and align with India's commitments towards net zero emissions and increased forest cover, it is imperative to address the concerns raised by environmental experts. The Bill must be reevaluated to strike a balance between development and conservation, and safeguards must be put in place to protect ecologically significant regions from unfettered exploitation.
- Furthermore, meaningful consultation with forest communities and acknowledgment of their rights are essential to foster sustainable forest management and enhance forest cover. Embracing transparency and involving stakeholders in decision-making processes will promote equitable and environmentally responsible outcomes.

Conclusion

The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023, despite its promising Preamble, requires thoughtful reconsideration to ensure it aligns with India's environmental commitments and sustainable development goals. Narrowing the definition of forests, excluding ecologically significant areas, and granting unfettered powers without adequate environmental scrutiny are concerns that need urgent attention. Empowering forest communities and upholding their rights can pave the way for a more inclusive and effective approach to conservation. Striking the right balance between development and environmental protection will safeguard India's natural ecosystems, which are indispensable for the well-being of both the nation and its people.

Upholding Justice: The Menace of Mob Violence in India

Context:

The Supreme Court's recent admonishment to the Union Government and various State governments for their consistent failure to combat mob violence and lynching against Muslims and marginalized communities, particularly by "cow vigilantes," is a glaring shame.

Relevance:

GS - 02 (Government Policies & Interventions) (Indian Constitution)

Prelims:

- States which have passed laws against mob lynching.
- Poonawala case
- Provisions available against mob lynching.

Mains Question:

Explain the Supreme Court's guidelines and measures to tackle mob violence and lynching and analyse the current situation in various states regarding their implementation. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Lingering Specter of Lynching
- Social and Economic Boycott: A Deplorable Reality
- Courts' Call for Accountability
- Civil Society's Crucial Role

The Lingering Specter of Lynching:

- The fact that lynching, mob violence, and so-called "cow vigilantism" continue to persist even after the 2018 judgment highlights the nonchalance of the Union Government and the concerned States, particularly in northern India.
- Such incidents, which involve criminals perpetrating violence against minorities under the guise of cattle transportation, reflect a broader issue stemming from stereotyping and demonization of minority communities.
- The ideological underpinnings of certain political entities, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party, have contributed to the perpetuation of such violence.

Social and Economic Boycott: A Deplorable Reality:

- In addition to vigilantism, the minority communities also face social and economic boycott in states where they receive political patronage. This patronage fosters an environment where discrimination and violence against these communities thrive.
- Addressing mob violence demands confronting these deeply ingrained practices and dismantling the systems that enable such discrimination.

Courts' Call for Accountability:

- The Supreme Court's intervention, through the issuance of guidelines and orders to state agencies, signifies a push for accountability.
- By reminding the authorities of their duty to implement measures against mob violence, the Court seeks to curb these atrocities and safeguard ordinary citizens.
- However, solely relying on judicial fiat will not suffice to eradicate mob violence entirely.

Civil Society's Crucial Role:

- Effectively combatting mob violence necessitates collective action from civil society. Initiatives that promote fraternity and understanding between communities are vital in countering the "us versus them" mindset that fuels violence.
- Drawing lessons from regions like Tamil Nadu, where secular and rational movements historically thrived, we find that incidents of mob violence are rare, and political representatives face public outrage when they occur.

Way Forward:

Strengthening the Judiciary: To ensure the proper implementation of guidelines, the judiciary must continue to play an active role in monitoring state agencies' actions and holding them accountable for their failures. Regular reviews and assessments of the progress made in tackling mob violence will be essential.

Comprehensive Legislative Reforms: Addressing the root causes of mob violence requires comprehensive legislative reforms that specifically target hate crimes, vigilantism,

and lynching. Stricter laws with severe penalties for those involved in such acts will act as a deterrent.

Public Awareness and Sensitization: Government agencies, in coordination with civil society organizations, must engage in extensive awareness campaigns and sensitization programs to promote communal harmony and discourage violence based on religious or caste differences.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's stern reminder to the Union Government and several State governments of their failure to combat mob violence and lynching is a much-needed wake-up call. The guidelines issued by the Court in 2018 provide a framework for action, but their implementation remains lacking. Eradicating mob violence demands a concerted effort from the government, judiciary, and civil society to foster an environment of fraternity and mutual respect. A future free from the horrors of mob violence can only be realized through a unified commitment to safeguarding the lives and dignity of all citizens.

Court's Bid To Spur Animal Protection

Context :

In a groundbreaking decision, a Sessions Court in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district mandated that the informer get half of the penalty amount levied against a defendant in a chinkara killing case as compensation for their assistance in identifying wildlife crimes. The court ruled that it would increase societal awareness of the need to safeguard wildlife.

Why was the killing of Chinkara considered a crime?

- **The Indian gazelle, also known as the chinkara or *Gazella bennettii*, is a type of antelope that is indigenous to the Indian subcontinent.** One of the tiniest gazelle species, it inhabits a variety of environments, including grasslands, shrublands, and desert regions.
- **Indian gazelles are medium-sized antelopes with long, lean legs and slim bodies.** It has a coat that ranges in colour from light brown to sandy, which offers great camouflage in its natural environments. There is a noticeable white patch on the throat, and the underparts and insides of the legs are both white.
- **Conservation Status:** On the **IUCN Red List of Threatened Species**, the Indian gazelle is classified as a species of Least Concern. However, habitat loss, poaching, and competition for resources with livestock may pose challenges to local populations. The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 protects this species.
- **Cultural significance:** The Indian gazelle has cultural significance in India, where it is frequently portrayed in literature and traditional art. Its grace, beauty, and agility are admired. It serves as Rajasthan's state animal.

What is the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and how does it protect wildlife?

- **Enactment and Amendments :**
 1. The Wildlife (Protection) Act was passed in 1972, and the most recent revision was made in 2006.
 2. The Rajya Sabha received an amendment bill in 2013, but it was later withdrawn in 2015.

- **Constitutional Provisions:**

1. Article 48A of the Indian Constitution, which was adopted by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, instructs the state to protect and enhance the environment while also preserving wildlife and forests.
2. People are subject to fundamental obligations under Article 51A, one of which is to safeguard and develop the environment, especially wildlife.

- **Historical Background:**

1. The Wild Birds Protection Act, of 1887, passed by the British Indian Government, was the country's first legislation protecting wildlife.
2. The Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act, another law, was adopted in 1912 and later revised in 1935.
3. In 1960, the protection of wildlife became a hot topic, and the Wildlife (Protection) Act was passed in 1972.



- **Need for the Wildlife Protection Act:**

1. India is home to a wide variety of plants and animals, but many of these species were seeing a sharp drop in population.
2. Ecological imbalance brought on by a loss of flora and fauna can harm the ecosystem and the climate.
3. The Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act (1935), the old British-era statute protecting wildlife, needed to be amended because the penalties for violators were insufficient.

- **Salient features:**

1. The Wildlife Protection Act's key provisions include the creation of biologically significant protected areas as well as the protection of listed species of animals, birds, and plants.
2. It established the Central Zoo Authority, which is in charge of governing India's zoos, as well as wildlife advisory boards, wildlife wardens, and zoos.
3. The CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Act made it easier for India to participate.

4. It established schedules that provide various levels of protection for various species of flora and animals, with Schedule I and Schedule II (Part II) offences carrying the worst penalties.
 5. The Act restricted the sale, transfer, and ownership of specific animal species as well as the hunting of endangered species.
- **Protected Areas:**
 1. National parks, conservation reserves, community reserves, tiger reserves, and sanctuaries are the five categories of protected areas that are specified by the Act.
 2. Sanctuaries are locations, where abused, abandoned, and injured wildlife, can find refuge, with little to no human interference.
 3. To preserve the ecosystem and species, national parks have stronger rules.
 4. Community reserves can be either private or public lands that have been voluntarily conserved for wildlife. Conservation reserves are regions next to sanctuaries or parks.
 5. Tiger reserves have been set aside, particularly for the preservation and protection of tigers.

What are the schedules under this act?

- **Schedule I** encompasses the **most critically endangered species**, granting them the **highest level of protection**. Violations concerning Schedule I species result in **severe penalties, such as imprisonment and substantial fines**. Examples of species included in Schedule I are the **Bengal Tiger, Indian Rhinoceros, Asiatic Lion, Snow Leopard, and Indian Elephant**.
- **Schedule II** includes species that **may not be as endangered** as those in Schedule I **but still require significant protection**. Offences related to **Schedule II species carry penalties, albeit less severe**. Examples of species listed under Schedule II are the **Indian Wild Dog (Dhole), Sloth Bear, Indian Wolf, and Great Indian Bustard**.
- **Schedule III** comprises **species that receive protection**, although not to the same extent as those in Schedules I and II. **Penalties for offences involving Schedule III species are comparatively less severe**. Examples of species listed under Schedule III include the **Common Leopard, Sambar Deer, and Indian Hare**.
- **Schedule IV** covers species that are **relatively common and widespread** but still **necessitate a certain level of protection**. Offences related to Schedule IV species typically incur minimal penalties. Examples of species listed under Schedule IV are the **Indian Wild Boar, Indian Gazelle, and various species of monkeys and langurs**.
- **Schedule V** encompasses **species classified as vermin**, which can be hunted under specific circumstances. Examples of species listed under Schedule V include the **Common Crow, Fruit Bats, and mice**.
- **Schedule VI** contains the **plants on this list that are prohibited from cultivation**. Examples include the **pitcher plant, red, blue, and kuth vandas**.

SC asks NGO to move Centre against the issue of sarpanch-patism in politics

Context :

The NGO claimed that the practice of unelected male relatives controlling politics and decision-making behind women amounted to a "sheer mockery of constitutional democracy." The NGO was represented by attorney Swati Jindal. This is how things stand thirty years after the 72nd Constitution Amendment Act of 1992 established a one-third quota for women in village, block, and district levels of panchayat governance.

What is Sarpanch-Pati system?

- Through the **73rd constitutional amendment**, women were given a third of the **seats in Panchayats**. Several states increased the percentage of **reserved seats to 50%**. This had the goal of **empowering women and assuring their involvement in local politics and decision-making**.
- However, the planned benefit of the emergence of women leadership at the Panchayat level was not **completely realised due to the weak socioeconomic situation of women** and the **current patriarchal system**. Husbands of elected women's representatives effectively **control politics and make decisions**. '**Sarpanch pati**' is the name given to this phenomenon.

What does the 73rd constitutional amendment bring to society?

The **Panchayati Raj Act**, also known as the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act**, was passed in 1992 to decentralise authority and foster local self-governance in India's rural regions. The following are some of the 73rd Amendment Act's standout characteristics:

- **System of Three Tiers for Panchayati Raj:** The amendment required each state to set up a system of three tiers for Panchayati Raj institutions. In this system, the village level is represented by Gramme Panchayats, the block level by Panchayat Samitis, and the district level by Zila Parishads. This system of tiers makes sure local government is well-organized and carried out.
- **Direct Elections:** The Panchayat members are chosen through a direct election. Members of the Gramme Panchayats are chosen by the villagers. The Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad members are chosen by the elected Gramme Panchayat members. As a result, the community can hold the Panchayat members accountable.
- **Reservation of Seats:** The 73rd Amendment Act mandates the reservation of seats in the Panchayats for women and members of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), two marginalised groups in society. Women are given one-third of the seats, and SCs and STs are given seats according to the local population of each group.
- **Powers and Duties:** The Panchayats have been given the right and responsibility to create plans for local social and economic development. They can take on a range of development projects, including the building and upkeep of roads, sewage systems, water supplies, health and educational facilities, programmes to fight poverty, and rural development efforts. The Panchayats are also in charge of carrying out government initiatives at the local level.
- **State Finance Commissions:** State Finance Commissions must be established in each state, according to the 73rd Amendment Act. These commissions are in charge of examining the Panchayats' financial standing and recommending how funds should be distributed between the state governments and the Panchayats. The Panchayats are given financial autonomy and a fair and equitable allocation of resources for local development as a result.

What were the reasons for the rise of the Sarpanch Pati system?

- **The poor social standing of women:** Women generally have limited access to education, are confined to home settings, lack economic freedom, and are not

permitted to participate in family decision-making. They are reduced to having 'titular heads' as a result of their lesser social status, which makes it difficult for them to oppose their husbands. Most of the time, these "takeovers" have occurred without the wife's knowledge.

- **Lack of skills:** This predicament resulted from raising the reserve for women to 50% without making any effort to improve their capability, train them, or instil confidence in them.
- **Social barriers resulting from traditional society:** Indian society is still traditional and conservative in rural areas, for example, the tradition of wearing a veil or parda is very strong in North Indian states. Women are discouraged from being in public places, and even local government officials avoid interacting with women because of their conservative outlook. This effectively gives husbands power over the day-to-day operations of panchayats. Even in Gramme Sabha meetings, elected representatives' husbands take the lead. Women are also expected to perform the duties associated with managing household responsibilities.
- **Government inaction:** Despite this pervasive problem, the government did not take any action to stop it, whether through strong legal deterrence or increased public awareness.

What was the instruction given by the Supreme Court in this matter?

- On the subject of men using their influence to support elected women in local politics, the Supreme Court of India released a statement.
- The court advised the NGO Mundona Rural Development Foundation to address its issues with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- The NGO maintained that it was unconstitutional for male relatives to represent women in politics and decision-making.
- The court argued that the petitioner's objections should be taken into account and that the Ministry of Panchayati Raj should look for more effective ways to carry out the goals of the reservation.
- In the end, the court concluded that the government should deal with the problem of men controlling elected women in local politics rather than the judiciary.

Women-Only Courts For Alternative Resolution

Context:

Women-only courts will be established at the village level as an alternative conflict resolution forum for matters like domestic violence and property rights, as well as to challenge the patriarchal system, as part of an effort that will be launched by the Union administration.

What is Nari Adalat and how is it going to impact society?

- **Objective:** The Nari Adalat programme seeks to give women in India a different means of resolving grievances at the Gramme Panchayat level, including cases of harassment, subversion, and restriction of rights or privileges.
- **Women Collectives:** To create women collectives, or Nari Adalats, committed and well-respected women will be picked. These groups will deal with the social, economic, and cultural problems that women in their various regions confront.

- **Awareness-Building:** During the first year, a campaign will be launched to inform women about their legal and constitutional rights as well as their entitlements to various schemes and programmes.
- **Training:** In the second year, committed and well-respected women will be found and given in-depth instruction in laws and programmes that pertain to women. They will be more prepared to deal with women's issues and offer mediation as an alternate dispute resolution method thanks to this training.
- **Composition of Women collectives:** Women collectives will be made up of seven to eleven members who will work together to handle women's complaints and connect them with the duty bearers. Half of the members will be elected representatives of the gram panchayat, while the other half will include teachers, doctors, and social workers nominated by the villagers.
- **Awareness and Education:** In addition to addressing specific situations, the Nari Adalat will promote knowledge of government initiatives as well as women's legal rights and privileges. The objective is to increase awareness and provide women with the power to exercise their rights.
- **Non-Legal Status:** Important to keep in mind is that the women-only courts will not have any legal standing. Instead of acting as official legal institutions, their main role is to offer a forum for conflict resolution, counselling, and awareness-raising.
- **Nyaya Sakhis and Mukhya Nyaya Sakhi:** Individuals referred to as Nyaya Sakhis, or legal friends, shall be included in the Nari Adalat. The gram panchayat will propose them or choose them. The Mukhya Nyaya Sakhi, or chief legal friend, will be selected from among the Nyaya Sakhis to serve as the head of the Nari Adalat. The head will typically hold the position for six months.



Where will it be implemented across the country, and who is working with whom to carry out this initiative?

- **Launch on a Pilot Basis:** In August, the programme will be implemented in 50 villages each in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir. The pilot aims to evaluate the viability and efficacy of the women-only courts before expanding the programme nationally.
- **Ministry and Collaboration:** Under the Sambal sub-scheme of Mission Shakti, which focuses on women's safety, security, and empowerment, the programme will be managed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Rural Development, and Common Service Centres run by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology would be required for the implementation process.

What is Mission Shakti and what are its objectives?

- **'Mission Shakti' is an integrated programme for women's empowerment** with the following objectives:
 1. **Providing for the safety, security, and empowerment of women.**
 2. **addressing topics that concern women at all stages of life.**
 3. **equalising women as partners in national development.**
 4. **encouraging citizen ownership and convergence in development driven by women.**
- **Implementation Period:** The 15th Finance Commission, which runs from 2021–2022 to 2025–2026, will implement the plan. The scheme's rules went into effect on April 1st, 2022.

What are the two sub-schemes of Mission Shakti?

A) Sambal Sub-Scheme (Safety and Security):

- **One Stop Centre (OSC):** Offers assistance and support to women who have been victims of violence.
- **Women Helpline (WHL):** Women's Helpline is a hotline where women in need can call to get support.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** BBBP is an initiative that promotes the welfare and education of girls.
- **Nari Adalats:** Nari Adalats are women's organisations that support gender equality in society and families and alternative dispute resolution.

B) Samarthya Sub-Scheme (Empowerment):

- **Ujjwala:** Offers women living in poverty-free LPG connections.
- **Swadhar Greh:** A programme that offers refuge, rehabilitation, and support to women in challenging situations.
- **Working women's hostel:** Accommodations for working women are available at the working women's hostel.
- **National Creche Scheme:** Facilities for child development and care for children of working moms are provided by the National Creche Scheme.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a maternity benefit programme that offers financial aid to expectant and nursing mothers.
- **Gap Funding for Economic Empowerment:** A brand-new element created to offer financial assistance for programmes promoting women's economic empowerment.

What are the advantages of having a Nari Adalat?

- **Accessible and Localised Resolution:** Nari Adalats give women a place to voice their complaints and seek redress in their communities. It becomes easier for women to seek redress by lowering barriers like distance, expense, and cultural inhibitions by bringing judicial procedures closer to women's communities.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Nari Adalats are essential in empowering women by educating people about their legal privileges and rights. Women are enabled to exercise their rights, confront discriminatory practices, and assert themselves in a variety of spheres of life by equipping them with knowledge and information.
- **Alternative Dispute settlement:** Nari Adalats supports mediation and other forms of conflict settlement. They offer a venue for counselling, awareness-raising, and conflict resolution, which can assist to settle disagreements more amicably and with the active participation of the persons concerned. This strategy can encourage reconciliation and be quicker, less combative, and less burdensome for women.
- **Strengthening of Women's Collectives:** Nari Adalats help to build women's collectives by giving women a place to congregate, talk about their problems, and support one another. This group effort fosters solidarity and mutual empowerment while assisting in tackling social, economic, and cultural issues that women confront locally.
- **Advocacy and Awareness-Building:** Nari Adalats also function as forums for these activities. They not only address particular instances but also spread awareness of government efforts and women's legal advantages. A culture of gender equality and justice is promoted as a result, raising awareness among women and communities.
- **Complementary to Legal System:** Legal institutions are complemented by Nari Adalats, which provide an additional forum for resolving disputes **even though** they lack legal standing. They can reduce the burden on the formal legal systems and give women access to justice that is more accessible and centred on the community.

Concluding, The **major goals** of Nari Adalats are to **empower women, promote awareness of their rights, and offer a venue for non-judicial dispute resolution**. It also seeks to ensure efficient service delivery, solicit feedback from the general population, and improve existing programmes.

Forest Bill Goes To House Unchanged

Context :

The full amendment Bill has received the unanimous support of a parliamentary committee formed to look into the contentious suggested changes to the Forest (Conservation) Act, of 1980.

What is Forest (Conservation) Act 1980?

- The act's goals are to preserve and safeguard India's forests and control the use of forest areas for non-forest activities.
- **Applicability:** The act applies to the entire nation of India.
- **definitions (Section 2):** The legislation defines keywords including "forest," "non-forest purpose," "forest land," and "diversion."
- **Forest Land Diversion (Section 3):**

1. **Prior Approval:** The legislation stipulates that, except for certain exemptions, the central government must first give its consent before diverting forest land for non-forest uses.
 2. **Proposal Submission:** Guidelines for submitting plans for diversion are given, along with information on the amount of forest land that will be diverted, compensatory afforestation, and the intended use of the diversion.
 3. **Consideration Factors:** Before approving or rejecting diversion applications, the central government takes into account several considerations, including the availability of non-forest land alternatives, the ecological impact, and the significance of the forest area for animals, residents, or tribal members.
 4. **Public Hearing:** In some circumstances, the act requires holding a public hearing before deciding whether to accept or reject diversion proposals.
- **Rules and Regulations (Section 4):** Central Government Power: The act gives the central government the authority to create regulations to carry out its provisions.
 - **Rule-making Authority:** The rules may specify how to submit and review diversion plans, collect fees, and handle other administrative issues.
 - **Infractions and Punishments (Section 5):**
 1. Anyone who violates the terms of the act or its regulations will be held accountable for their actions.
 2. Penalties for breaking the law or its norms are specified in the act as imprisonment and/or a fine.

Has the FCA ever been amended?

- The FCA has undergone at least two significant revisions, in 1988 and 1996.
- **Before 1996:**
 - the Forest Conservation Act (FCA) only applies to forests that had been declared under the Indian Forest Act of 1927 or any other local law.
 - Additionally, it encompassed forests that were under the Forest Department's management or supervision.
- **Supreme Court Decision from 1996:**
 - In response to a suit submitted by Godavarman Thirumulpad, the Supreme Court broadened the meaning of "forest" in India.
 - The types of areas included in the extended definition were as follows: a. Any area that is listed as "forest" in a government document, regardless of ownership, acknowledgement, or classification. b. Locations that fit the "dictionary" definition of a "forest." c. Locations designated as "forests" by a committee of experts assembled by the Supreme Court under its 1996 order.
- **The Expanded Definition's Consequences:**
 - **Net Present Value (NPV) calculation:** The more inclusive definition made it possible to determine the economic worth of the forest area being destroyed for development. The NPV was demanded from project backers as compensation for the depletion of forest resources.
 - **Compensation Fund:** A compensating afforestation fund was established to lessen the impact of the loss of forests. The initiative aims to provide funding for reforestation or afforestation efforts in other regions.
 - **Provision of Non-Forestry Land:** Under the broadened definition, compensation in the form of non-forestry land might be given when forest land was diverted for non-forest uses.
- **The expanded definition's goals are:**
 - **Strengthen Forest Conservation:** By encompassing a larger range of lands as "forest," the extended definition sought to support India's efforts to save its forests.

- **Environmental Impact Assessment:** The broadened definition made sure that the effects of development projects including forests on the environment were properly evaluated and that appropriate mitigation steps were adopted.
- **Preservation of Forest Resources:** The extended definition aims to conserve and safeguard forest resources by determining the economic worth of forests and putting in place corrective actions.

Why is the FCA again being amended?

- The Forest (Conservation) Act, of 1980, which was created to stop the unauthorised use of forest land for non-forestry uses, is intended to be changed by the proposed modifications.
- The Act applies to land that is not formally designated as "forest" in government records and gives the federal government the authority to demand compensation for forest land diverted for non-forestry uses.

What are the features in the bill that is going to be amended?

- **Property covered by the Act:**
 - The Indian Forest Act of 1927 or any other law that declares or notifies land as a forest is covered by the Act. (ii) Land that is not included in the first category but was noted as a forest in a government record on or after October 25, 1980.
 - The requirements of the Act do not apply to land that was converted from forest use to non-forest use on or before December 12, 1996, by any authorised state or union territory (UT) authority.
- **Exempted categories of land:**
 - Some forest land categories are exempt from the Act, such as (i) Forest land adjacent to a government-maintained public road or rail line that provides access to a residence or a rail, up to a maximum size of 0.10 hectare. (ii) Land for the building of a strategic linear project of national significance and national security that is located within 100 km of international borders, the Line of Control, or the Line of Actual Control. (iii) Up to 10 hectares of land for security-related infrastructure development. (iv) Land up to five hectares in size that are planned to be used for defence-related projects, paramilitary force camps, or public utility projects in an area where left-wing extremism is a problem.
 - These exemptions are subject to conditions laid out in guidelines issued by the central government.
- **Assignment/Leasing Of Forest Land:**
 - A state government must obtain prior clearance from the federal government before leasing or assigning any forest area to an organisation that is not owned or under its control.
 - The Bill extends this responsibility to all organisations, including those that the government owns and controls.
 - The central government's rules and conditions must be met for the prior approval to be granted.
- **Permitting Activities:**
 - **Activities that are permitted on forest land are limited by the Act**, which prohibits the de-reservation of forests and the use of forest land for non-forest uses.
 - With prior central government consent, **restrictions on the use of forest land for non-forest activities may be waived.**

- Any use of land other than reforestation, such as **growing horticulture crops, falls under the category of non-forest purposes.**
- The **Act lists some actions that are not considered non-forest** uses, such as installing checkpoints, fire lines, fencing, and wireless communication for the development, management, and conservation of forests and wildlife.
- The **Bill includes zoos and safaris run by the government or any authority** under the Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972 in forests that are not protected areas, as well as ecotourism facilities, silvicultural operations (encouraging forest growth), and any other activity that the central government specifies.
- The federal government may additionally lay forth circumstances under which some surveys (such as seismic surveys and exploratory activities) are not considered to be conducted for non-forest objectives.
- **The power to give instructions:**
 - The Bill gives the federal government the ability to direct any authority or organisation that is part of or acknowledged by the federal government, a state government, or a union territory (UT) to carry out the Act.

Centre to record the biometrics of "illegal migrants."

Context:

Ajay Kumar Bhalla, the Union Home Secretary, had requested the state governments of Manipur and Mizoram to collect "biographic and biometric details of illegal migrants" days before ethnic violence broke out in Manipur. The biometric data will comprise fingerprint, iris, and retinal scans.

Where are these illegal immigrants from?

- Following a **military takeover in Myanmar in February 2021**, Mizoram became the destination for **thousands of Myanmarese refugees**. Additionally, 4,000 refugees arrived in Manipur. The **Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic group**, which has strong linkages to populations in Mizoram and Manipur, makes up the majority of these refugees. For the refugees, the Mizoram government set up relief camps.

Who are the Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic groups?

- **Kuki-Chin-Zo:** The Zo people are an ethnic group that can be found in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, Myanmar, and India. They are also known by other names, such as Chin, Mizo, and Kuki, depending on where they are from and what dialects they speak.
- **Common Origin:** The Zo people belong to the Kuki-Chin ethnic group and have a common ancestry. They are thought to have come from a region called Sinlung, also called Chhinlung, Khur, Khul, and other names that are related.
- **Dispersal across countries:** British colonial practises contributed to the dispersal of the Zo people across international frontiers. Political factors were taken into account when drawing the borders rather than concerns of ethnicity.
- **Geographic Distribution:** The Zo people can be found in a variety of places across the world. They can be found in the northeastern Indian states of Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Assam. They live mainly in Chin State, Sagaing

Division, and Arakan State in Myanmar. They can be found in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts.

- **Dialects: More than fifty dialects of the Kuki-Chin language family are spoken by the Zo people.** The dialects are a reflection of the linguistic diversity among the several Zo people subgroups. The vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar of these dialects might differ greatly.

What is India's Policy on Refugees?

- **Absence of particular legislation:**
 - India lacks a thorough legal system specifically devoted to resettling refugees.
 - The determination of refugee status, rights, and protection are not covered by any explicit laws.
- **Non-party to the 1951 Refugee Convention:**
 - Neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol are signed by India.
 - The commitments contained in these international treaties are not binding on India because it is a non-party to them.
- **Assimilation and humanitarian tradition:**
 - India has a long history of welcoming and assimilating refugees.
 - Throughout its history, the nation has hosted and helped several refugee communities.
 - India's cultural values and moral legacy are the foundation of this humanitarian strategy.
- **Constitutional safeguards:**
 - All people, including those who are not citizens, are guaranteed fundamental rights by the Indian Constitution.
 - The right to equality and the right to life are just two examples of the fundamental rights that non-citizens, including refugees, are guaranteed by the Supreme Court.
- **Right to non-refoulement:**
 - The right to life, which incorporates the idea of non-refoulement, is guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.
 - The principle of non-refoulement forbids the deportation of people to their native countries where they might experience persecution or dangers to their life or freedom.
- **Ad hoc policies and measures:**
 - To control refugee inflows, India has used ad hoc policies and measures.
 - On a case-by-case basis, refugees from particular nations or regions have received temporary housing, documentation, and restricted support.
 - Depending on the refugees' country of origin and current situation, different actions are used.

What are the existing laws that India has to address refugees?

- **Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920:** This act gave the government the authority to enact regulations mandating that everyone entering India must have a passport. Additionally, it gave the government permission to expel anyone who entered India without a passport.
- **Foreigners Act of 1946:** This law replaced the Foreigners Act of 1940 and gave the government broad authority over foreign nationals. It gave the government the authority to take the necessary actions, including using force if necessary, to stop illegal immigration. According to the Supreme Court, the onus of proof for establishing one's status as a foreigner is on the individual.

- **Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 (amended in 2019):** The authority to create tribunals to determine whether a person residing in India unlawfully is a foreigner or not was enhanced by this change. Initially, only the government had this authority, but thanks to the amendment, district judges in all States and Union Territories can now create these tribunals as well.
- **Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939:** Foreign nationals visiting India on a long-term visa (more than 180 days) are required by the Registration of Foreigners Act of 1939 to register with a Registration Officer within 14 days of arrival, except for Indian citizens living abroad. No of how long they plan to stay, Pakistani nationals visiting India must register within 24 hours.

What are the concerns that government have?

- **Security:** The government is frequently worried about potential hazards to national security from receiving refugees. They might be concerned that terrorists or criminals could infiltrate refugee populations and endanger our nation.
- **Impact on the economy:** The cost of resettling refugees may worry the government. They can be concerned about the burden placed on government services like healthcare, education, and social welfare systems. Concerns about heightened job rivalry and its implications on pay may exist.
- **Social cohesion:** The state might be worried about the cohesiveness of its citizens. They can be concerned that there would be social difficulties, discrimination, or confrontations as a result of potential cultural and religious differences between the host population and the refugees.
- **Legal and administrative issues:** The management of refugee populations may present legal and administrative issues for the government. This covers matters including assessing a person's status as a refugee, handling asylum claims, offering legal help, and ensuring conformity with domestic and international laws.

What steps did Indian Government take recently as a Precaution?

- The **state administrations of Manipur and Mizoram received a letter from the Ministry of Home Affairs on June 22.** The letter gave them the **go-ahead to take retina, iris, and fingerprint scans as well as other biographic and biometric information from unauthorised immigrants.** It was decided that this exercise will be finished by September 30.
- In a letter to the state governments of Manipur and Mizoram, the Ministry of Home Affairs **stressed the importance of collecting the biometric information of undocumented immigrants and emphasised the need for action now.**
- The letter from the Ministry referred to earlier directives and directions on overstaying visas and unauthorised immigration of foreign people. On March 30, 2021, these regulations were first released, and on October 21, 2022, they were once again distributed to all state governments for compliance.
- The **governments of Manipur and Mizoram designated Nodal Officers** to help with the process, and they were tasked with **entering the collected data into the central portal on illegal immigrants** kept up by the **Bureau of Immigration and the Ministry of Home Affairs.**

SC Collegium's quiet transparency is driving change

Context :

Through a selection process that includes "meaningful discussion on and assessment of candidates' judicial acumen," the Supreme Court Collegium, led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, has subtly and transparently streamlined the appointment process of judges to the constitutional courts.

What is Collegium and how do they work in choosing the Judges?

- **Appointment of Judges:** Judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President following consultation with the Chief Justice of India and other senior judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, according to Article 124 of the Indian Constitution.
- **Evolution of the collegium System:** The Bar Council of India's recommendations from 1981 are what gave rise to the idea of the collegium system, in which a group of judges recommend nominations to the President.
- **Second Judges' Case (1993):** In this case, the Chief Justice of India and the senior-most judges were consulted before the President was appointed, overturning the earlier process of appointment. With the opinions of senior judges taken into consideration, the Chief Justice's judgement was regarded as collective.
- **Third Judges' Case (1998):** A nine-judge panel improved the collegium structure in this case. The collegium, which consists of the Chief Justice and the four senior-most Supreme Court judges, should be consulted before the Chief Justice forms an opinion, the document emphasised. Senior judges from the pertinent high courts were also asked for their opinions in writing.
- **Composition of the collegium:** The collegium system, which was developed in India, was originally intended to have a broad base and incorporate representation from many authorities. However, only judges of the higher courts remained in the final composition.
- **The Collegium System's rules:** The Third Judges' Case specified a number of rules for the collegium system, such as the significance of consensus in recommendations, taking judges' seniority into account, and offering compelling justifications for a candidate.
- **Collegium System Criticisms:** The collegium system has been criticised for its narrow representation and lack of extensive engagement with non-judicial bodies. These concerns highlight the requirement for changes to increase accountability and openness in the appointment process.
- **Justifications for the Collegium System:** Despite its flaws, we might contend that the collegium system is the best way to protect judicial independence and public confidence in the judiciary within the confines of the Indian constitutional framework. It guarantees that judges' independence and qualifications are taken into consideration while making appointments.

What are the changes done by the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud in making the Collegium system more transparent?

- **Streamlined Appointment Procedure:**
 - The collegium has attempted to simplify the selection procedure for judges in India's constitutional courts.
 - To achieve a skilful balance between seniority and merit in the selection of judges, it has implemented reforms.

- **Emphasis on Transparency:**
 - The collegium has made transparency a priority in both its resolution-making and decision-making processes.
 - The qualifications for applicants being taken into consideration for appointments to the Supreme Court and High Courts are made public.
- **Focus on Judgement Quality:**
 - The collegium places a high priority on candidates' judgement quality.
 - The collegium members receive candidate evaluations well in advance for review.
 - To aid in the evaluation process, the Centre for Research & Planning of the Court provides pertinent background information.
- **Committee for Judgement Evaluation:**
 - To carefully assess applicants' judicial work, the collegium established a Judgement Evaluation Committee.
 - The committee assigns a grade to the decisions, with "outstanding" being given to the best ones.
 - This impartial evaluation procedure attempts to guarantee a thorough assessment of candidates' relative merit.
- **Criteria for Supreme Court Appointments :**
 - The collegium takes into account three main factors when suggesting candidates for Supreme Court appointments:
 - senior puisne judges and chief justices at their respective parent high courts.
 - The judges' integrity, performance, and merit are being taken into account.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:**
 - The Supreme Court needs to be inclusive and diverse.
 - The collegium's discussion on diversity and inclusion in the judiciary is its main topic.
 - It strives to provide Supreme Court representation for underrepresented High Courts.
 - It takes into account gender diversity, ethnic representation, and the selection of judges from socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
- **Criteria for Chief Justices of high courts:**
 - The Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) outlines the collegium's objective criteria for choosing Chief Justices of High Courts, which are followed by the collegium.
 - When choosing Chief Justices, the various High Courts are fairly represented.
 - Based on their seniority, puisne judges are considered for inter-se seniority in their own High Courts.
- **Gender Diversity:**
 - To advance gender diversity, the collegium suggested Justice Sunita Agarwal as Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court.
 - The High Courts did not have a female Chief Justice at the time the proposition was made.
- **Objectivity in Decision-Making:**
 - By refusing to allow three High Court judges' requests to object to their out-of-state transfers, the collegium displayed objectivity.
 - The transfers were suggested to ensure improved justice administration.
 - The government swiftly informed the transfers and agreed with the collegium's judgement.
- **Governmental Support:**
 - The government is no longer as critical of the collegium system's secrecy as it once was.
 - The government now receives notice of recommendations made by the collegium within days.

- A more collaborative approach resulted from the Law Ministry's new top-level leadership.

Cinematograph Bill aimed at curbing piracy passed by RS

Context:

The Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2023, which adds strict anti-piracy provisions and broadens the law's purview beyond censorship to include copyright, was approved by the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

What is Digital Piracy?

Digital piracy is the term for the unauthorized copying or dissemination of intellectual property through the Internet. The creative industries—including publishing, music, gaming, television, and film—are adversely impacted.

How is Digital Piracy affecting the Indian Entertainment industry?

- In India's entertainment and music sector, digital piracy is a serious issue that results in annual revenue losses of up to USD 2.8 billion.
- Due to its high levels of piracy, India is ranked 43rd out of 55 nations in the International IP Index. With the rise of the internet and social media, piracy has increased, with streaming making up more than 80% of pirated content. Film piracy increased by 62% during the pandemic.
- A lack of understanding and strict IP laws are contributing factors to the rise of piracy, along with easy access to inexpensive or free content and technological improvements. Piracy interferes with original works, has an effect on livelihoods, and hinders the expansion of the creative sector.

What is the recent bill passed to counter this issue and how is it going to help the industry?

- **Amendment to the Cinematograph Act of 1952:**
 - The proposed legislation aims to change the existing Cinematograph Act, which handles film certification and screenings.
 - The new anti-piracy and copyright protection laws will be incorporated into the legislation.
- **Anti-Piracy Provisions:**
 - The bill enacts strict regulations to stop movie piracy.
 - It broadens the reach of the legislation to include censorship in addition to violations of copyright.
- **Punishments for piracy:**
 - People who are discovered producing or sending illegal copies of movies while utilizing audiovisual recording equipment in a theatre will face repercussions.
 - A prison sentence of up to three years is one of the suggested punishments.
 - In addition, fines of up to 5% of the cost of making the video are possible for offenders.

- **Central Board of Film Certification:**
 - Even after the bill is put into effect, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), which certifies films for showing, won't have its choices subject to government review.
 - The goal of this is to preserve the CBFC's autonomy and independence while deciding whether to provide certification.
- **Age Ratings:**
 - The bill calls for the implementation of age ratings for movies, which would identify the target audience by age.
 - U/A 7+ (Parental guidance for children above 7), U/A 13+ (Parental guidance for children above 13), and U/A 16+ (Parental guidance for children above 16) are the three age ratings that are suggested.
- **Adult-Rated Films Banned on Television:**
 - Since a 2004 Bombay High Court ruling, adult-rated (A-rated) films have mostly been banned from being broadcast on television.
 - The measure formalizes the practice of broadcasters voluntarily removing adult-rated movies from television broadcasts to receive a lower classification (U/A) from the CBFC.
- **Adoption and application:**
 - The proposal has already been approved by the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament).
 - The measure must be approved by the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) to become law.
 - The President's approval is necessary for the bill to become an Act after it has been approved by both chambers of Parliament.