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GENERAL STUDIES-1

A Time To Articulate New Constitutional Ideas For India

Context:

The Indian government has undertaken a mission to decolonize the country. This endeavour has witnessed the replacement of iconic buildings and a shift towards using the name "Bharat" alongside "India." As the nation undergoes these changes, it prompts us to question whether the Constitution should also evolve. If so, in what manner, and guided by whose principles?

Relevance:

GS-01, GS-02 (Indian Constitution, Freedom Struggle, Important personalities)

Prelims:

- Freedom Struggle, Gandhian Ideology, Basic structure of the Constitution.

Mains Question:

Discuss the historical perspectives of constitutional ideas in India and the role of visionaries like Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar. Analyze the relevance of revisiting these ideas in contemporary India.

Dimensions of the Article:

- Mahatma Gandhi's Vision

- The Idea of Swaraj

- The Gandhian Constitution

- Limitations of the Gandhian Constitution

- The Role of B.R. Ambedkar

- B.R. Ambedkar's Vision and Gandhi's Disagreements

- The Pragmatic Decision

- Contemporary Relevance

- Crafting New Constitutional Ideas

- Gandhi's Fundamental Question

Mahatma Gandhi's Vision:

- Mahatma Gandhi, well before the Constitution of India came into force in 1950, presented an innovative indigenous vision of what the constitution should embody.

- In 1908, he highlighted the importance of decolonizing not just governance but also the very nature of the government.

- Gandhi's vision aimed to build a constitution based on ancient village republics, favouring decentralized governance.

The Idea of Swaraj:

- For Gandhi, **true "swaraj" or self-rule** could only be achieved if the constitution was grounded in the principles of self-sufficiency at the grassroots level, emphasizing local markets and self-reliance.

- His vision challenged the conventional notion of a centralized government in Delhi.

The Gandhian Constitution:

- To translate Gandhi's ideas into action, Shriman Narayan Agarwal was tasked with drafting the "Gandhian Constitution for Free India."

- However, this draft was more of a moral code than a legal document, intertwining rights with a duty to be loyal to the state.

Limitations of the Gandhian Constitution:

- While Gandhi's vision had moral value, it posed practical challenges. Defining and measuring loyalty to the state could lead to potential oppression, making it legally unfeasible.

- This realization led Gandhi to distance himself from the Gandhian Constitution.

The Role of B.R. Ambedkar:

- In 1947, as India was on the cusp of independence, Gandhi recognized the need for a constitution that could garner widespread consensus.

- He persuaded Rajendra Prasad to appoint B.R. Ambedkar as the Chairperson of the Drafting Committee, knowing that Ambedkar had a distinctly different vision from his.

B.R. Ambedkar's Vision and Gandhi's Disagreements:

- Ambedkar advocated for a strong state capable of maintaining law and order, especially in remote regions. He believed in state intervention to manage the economy and control industries for the common good.

- His vision also included fundamental rights as a means to combat historical injustices such as casteism.

- Gandhi disagreed profoundly with Ambedkar on various fronts, including the size of the state and its role in the economy. Gandhi believed that lasting change could only be achieved through individual transformation, not policies enforced by the state.

The Pragmatic Decision:

- Despite these differences, Gandhi recognized that Ambedkar's ideas enjoyed broad political support. Thus, he allowed his ideal constitution to wait for its moment while acknowledging the need for a constitution grounded in consensus.

Contemporary Relevance:

- Today, India is in a state of transformation similar to that in 1908 when Gandhi penned "Hind Swaraj." This is an opportune moment to reconsider constitutional ideas that align with modern India's needs.

- It is essential to draw inspiration from both Ambedkar's vision and the radical ideas Gandhi proposed but were overlooked.

Crafting New Constitutional Ideas:

- Rather than drafting a new constitution, the focus should be on articulating a vision for fresh constitutional ideas that address India's governance challenges.

- This vision should draw not only from the existing Constitution crafted by Ambedkar but also from the radical Gandhian ideas that were considered too radical at the time.

Gandhi's Fundamental Question:

- This revisiting is not about advocating for a pre-modern approach but rather about addressing the fundamental question that Gandhi posed: What kind of constitution can bring good governance to India?

- The urgency during the tumultuous years of 1947-1950 necessitated bypassing this question, but after 75 years, it is time to address it.

Way Forward and Conclusion:

- Revisiting constitutional ideas should be a thoughtful and deliberative process. Unlike names and buildings, constitutions should not change hastily, but they should remain open to adaptation and improvement.

- The historical perspectives of constitutional ideas in India, championed by Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar, offer valuable insights. It is crucial to acknowledge the differences in their visions and the pragmatic decisions made during the nation's formative years.

- Now, as India undergoes significant transformations, there is an opportunity to revisit and reframe constitutional ideas that align with contemporary challenges and aspirations

Keeping tabs on carbon with an accounting system

Context:

The climate polycrisis, signifies a web of interconnected climate-related crises affecting various sectors. It encompasses the physical impacts of climate change, such as rising temperatures, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events. These, in turn, spawn social, economic, and political challenges. In India, the climate polycrisis weaves through seemingly unrelated sectors like energy, infrastructure, health, migration, and food production.

Relevance:

GS-01, GS-03 (Climate Change, Environmental Pollution & Degradation, Conservation)

Mains Question:

How can a National Carbon Accounting (NCA) system play a pivotal role in addressing the climate polycrisis, and what are its potential implications for India's sustainable development? (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Recognizing Complexity and Interconnectedness
- National Carbon Accounting (NCA) System
- Carbon Accounting in Public Finance
- Goals and Predictions with NCA

Recognizing Complexity and Interconnectedness:

- The climate polycrisis necessitates a holistic approach. Unlike addressing climate change sector by sector, which leads to unforeseen consequences, it needs comprehensive transformation.

- This transformation lays the groundwork for a new eco-conscious economy, akin to the role digital infrastructure plays in modern startups and public services.

- Measuring carbon emissions emerges as the initial step. Without measurement, one cannot account for emissions. Just as we maintain financial balance sheets, carbon accounting becomes essential. Existing methods, like those advocated by Karthik Ramanna at Oxford, track corporate carbon balance sheets.

National Carbon Accounting (NCA) System:

- An NCA system extends these ideas, unifying the nation, starting from individuals to households, under a single carbon accounting framework. This shift marks a profound change in how we view all human and non-human activities.

- This revolutionizes public finance as carbon becomes visible, valued, accounted for, and taxed.

Carbon Accounting in Public Finance:

- Public finance drives development, funded through taxes. Money accounting, from individual spending to central banks like the Reserve Bank of India, monitors the flow of money, enabling public finance.

- In contrast, carbon stocks and flows remain untracked. This absence hinders progressive carbon taxation.

- An NCA makes carbon tracking mandatory for businesses and individuals, rendering carbon circulation visible, and allowing goods and services to be 'financed' using carbon surpluses.

Goals and Predictions with NCA:

- With NCA, once can set targets, predict emission reductions, and monitor progress. It may also envisage a national carbon budget reshaping the entire economy, with a parallel goal of reducing carbon GDP alongside the traditional economic GDP.

Polysolution Approach:

- NCA offers a polysolution to the polycrisis. It not only aids India in achieving its net-zero commitment by 2070 but also fosters new livelihoods and economic organization. By revealing the carbon footprint of activities, it aligns development with ecological sustainability.

Conclusion:

A National Carbon Accounting system emerges as a pivotal solution, enabling comprehensive measurement, tracking, and reduction of carbon emissions. This approach not only aligns with India's net-zero commitment but also opens up new possibilities for sustainable development and economic growth. It's a practical step towards addressing the intertwined challenges posed by climate change and creating a more resilient and equitable future.

The Israel-Hamas conflict and Nusseibeh's analysis

Context:

With the recent conflict going on between Israel and Hamas, it is clear that sooner or later, experts and military analysts will attempt to dissect the ongoing 'war.' These assessments will inevitably be coloured by personal and national biases. However, one aspect stands undebatable – the substantial loss incurred by all parties involved. This article aims to shed light on the key dimensions of this conflict, examining the failure of intelligence, the implications for the Palestinian Authority, and the stance of India in this matter.

Relevance:

GS-02- Bilateral Groupings & Agreements, Indian Diaspora, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests

Prelims:

Israel, Palestine, Middle-East, Arab World, Yom Kippur War, Zionism, Al-Aqsa, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)

Mains Question:

If we apply the insights of Sari Nusseibeh regarding the morality and ethics of persisting in unattainable goals to the Kashmir problem, what can be gleaned about the Kashmir conflict and the need for a potential compromise? (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- A Total Failure of Intelligence
- The Morale Boost for Hamas
- Impact on the Palestinian Authority
- Military Objectives
- India's Support for Israel
- Sari Nusseibeh's Perspective
- Applying Nusseibeh's Logic to the Kashmir Issue

A Total Failure of Intelligence:

- The conflict began with a lightning, brutal, and simultaneous attack by Hamas on multiple Israeli locations. This audacious move caught both Israel and the United States off guard, highlighting a significant intelligence failure.

- Although investigations may identify 'fall guys,' the fact remains that this lapse in intelligence led to Israel's declaration of 'war.' The ramifications of this blunder will be felt long after the conflict subsides.

The Morale Boost for Hamas:

- In a surprising turn of events, Hamas's actions led to Israel's official declaration of war. This, in itself, was a significant morale booster for Hamas. The strong undercurrent of speculation regarding Israel's possible involvement in Hamas's creation further underscores the unexpected nature of this development.

- Hamas's continued rocket attacks, inflicting substantial casualties on Israel, represent a shift from previous conflicts. While the world rightly condemns the cruelty inflicted on innocent Israeli civilians, Hamas views these actions with a sense of 'pride,' often designating those who lose their lives as martyrs.

Impact on the Palestinian Authority:

- Hamas's actions have had far-reaching consequences for the Palestinian Authority, specifically the Fatah party led by President Mahmoud Abbas. His position has become increasingly untenable, potentially leading to his resignation.

- Hamas's influence in the West Bank is poised to grow, and support for the organization on the 'Arab Street' is on the upswing. Remarkably, some western countries may find themselves grudgingly admiring the coordination displayed by Hamas in this conflict.

Military Objectives:

- While Israel may ultimately prevail in military terms, its modified objective of eliminating Hamas raises important questions. Will Israel launch a ground operation into Gaza, and if so, what will the scale and consequences be? The prospect of heavy casualties looms on both sides, raising concerns about the viability of physically reoccupying the Gaza Strip.

- In the end, the true losers in this conflict are the ordinary people on both sides. While not assigning equal blame, it is undeniable that the price of war is paid by civilians caught in the crossfire. The innocent citizens bear the heaviest burden for the bloodthirstiness of leaders on both sides.

India's Support for Israel:

- The Indian government's unwavering support for Israel, motivated by the brutality of Hamas's attack, is a significant diplomatic move. This stance is driven not only by moral considerations but also by the potential to foster stronger relations with West Asian countries, many of which have sought to normalize relations with Israel for technological and investment benefits.

- The unequivocal support for Israel may also resonate positively in Washington, highlighting a shift in India's diplomatic stance.

Sari Nusseibeh's Perspective:

- Sari Nusseibeh's analysis, as expounded in his book 'What Is a Palestinian State Worth?' offers a unique perspective. He posits that the state exists for the people, not the other way around.

- The primary duty of a state is to protect its citizens and facilitate their well-being. However, when a state pursues unattainable objectives and continues to do so knowingly, it acts immorally and unethically. The sacrifice of lives for unattainable goals becomes indefensible.

Applying Nusseibeh's Logic to the Kashmir Issue:

- The Kashmir issue, a longstanding conflict between India and Pakistan, offers an opportunity to apply Nusseibeh's logic. Both nations have pursued maximalist objectives that they recognize as unattainable. The persistence in these objectives, as per Nusseibeh, is both immoral and unethical.

- This prompts the question of whether a compromise, such as the four-point formula considered in the past, should be revisited for the sake of peace and the welfare of the Kashmiri people.

Way Forward:

In the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas conflict, it is imperative for all parties involved to reevaluate their objectives and strategies.

- A path toward a sustainable peace must be sought, and diplomacy should be prioritized over violence. The recognition that unattainable goals only lead to the needless sacrifice of innocent lives should guide future actions.

Conclusion:

In the fog of conflict, the Israel-Hamas war has exposed the pitfalls of persisting in unattainable objectives. The losses incurred by both sides, especially among innocent civilians, are a stark reminder of the need for ethical and moral decision-making. As India takes a firm stance in the global arena, it should also consider the lessons of this conflict when dealing with its own challenges, such as the Kashmir issue. Peace and the welfare of the people should always be at the forefront of any conflict resolution efforts.

The Indian Himalayan Region needs its own EIA

Context:

The Teesta dam breach in Sikkim and the recent floods and landslides in Himachal Pradesh have created an alarm regarding the detrimental impact of our development model on the environment and ecology, particularly in mountainous regions.

Relevance:

GS – 01, GS-03 (Geographical Features and their Location, Disaster Management)

Prelims:

Glacial Lake Outburst Flood, Teesta River, Indian Himalayan Region, Climate change, National Disaster Management Authority, Avalanche

Mains Question:

Analyze the significance of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) process in the context of its role in mitigating environmental repercussions and its applicability in the Indian Himalayan Region. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Basis of EIA

- Evolution of EIA in India

- Role and Applicability of EIA

- The Discrepancy in the Graded Approach

- Addressing the Needs of the IHR

- Challenges in the EIA Process

The Basis of EIA:

- The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process recognized by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**, designed to identify the environmental, social, and economic implications of a project before its execution.

- It involves a comprehensive evaluation of various alternatives for the proposed project and an analysis of potential environmental consequences in different scenarios. The EIA also aids in formulating suitable mitigation strategies.

- To achieve meaningful outcomes through the EIA process, it necessitates robust and trustworthy data. The baseline data forms the foundation upon which future environmental impacts are predicted.

Evolution of EIA in India:

- The initial precursor to the EIA in India can be traced back to 1976-77 when the Planning Commission tasked the Department of Science and Technology with evaluating river valley projects from an environmental perspective.

- This initiative later expanded to encompass all projects requiring approval from the Public Investment Board. Initially, environmental clearance was primarily an administrative decision by the central government. However, the landscape evolved with the promulgation of the first EIA notification under the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (EPA) by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on January 27, 1994.

- This notification made Environmental Clearance (EC) mandatory for specific new projects and expansion or modernization of certain activities. The 1994 notification underwent 12 amendments within 11 years before being succeeded by the EIA 2006 notification.

- The significant change brought by the 2006 notification was the **decentralization of the EC process, allowing state governments to grant EC in specific cases.** This notification has since undergone several amendments, and a draft EIA in 2020 sparked controversy, as it was perceived to favor industry over ecological concerns.

Role and Applicability of EIA:

- Used judiciously, the EIA has the **potential to be a robust regulatory tool** in the domain of environmental governance, aligning with the vision of sustainable development.

- The **EIA 2006 notification** outlines the procedure and institutional setup for granting environmental clearance to projects subject to its provisions. It classifies projects under various categories such as **mining, natural resource extraction, power generation, and physical infrastructure**. Unfortunately, the threshold limits for when an EIA is mandatory remain consistent across the country.

The Discrepancy in the Graded Approach:

- The Indian regulatory framework adopts a **graded approach** for differentiated risk management, varying depending on the project's location within protected forests, reserved forests, national parks, or critical tiger habitats.

- The stringency of environmental conditions imposed during the scoping stage of the EIA process is proportionate to the ecological significance of the habitat affected by the project.

- One glaring omission in this graded approach is the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), which is treated no differently from other regions. Despite the IHR's unique characteristics, ecological importance, and vulnerability to extreme weather conditions, it is not subject to separate environmental standards.

Addressing the Needs of the IHR:

- The specific needs of the Himalayan region should be considered at all stages of the EIA process, encompassing screening, scoping, public consultation, and appraisal.

Projects and activities within mountainous regions should be subject to standards commensurate with the region's ecological requirements.

- General conditions mandated for all projects at the end of the notification should include clauses tailored to the **IHR or high-altitude mountainous areas** with specific characteristics that amplify environmental liability for project proponents.

Challenges in the EIA Process:

- One major issue is the **absence of a national-level regulator**, despite the Supreme Court's suggestion in 2011 for an independent body to conduct objective and transparent project assessments and monitor compliance with EC conditions.

- The EIA process typically reacts to development proposals rather than proactively anticipating them, with a tendency to favor the project due to financial dependence on the proponent. Cumulative impacts of multiple projects in an area are inadequately considered, although some subcomponents or ancillary developments may be addressed.

- The **EIA process is often reduced to a checkbox exercise, leading to formality rather than substantive evaluation.** These limitations are even more pronounced in the IHR, which bears the brunt of the shortcomings. Policymakers should explore alternative tools such as strategic environmental assessment to comprehensively address the unique ecological requirements of the IHR.

Way Forward:

- The EIA process in India requires a re-evaluation and overhaul to accommodate the ecological sensitivities of the Indian Himalayan Region. Implementing differentiated standards, ensuring comprehensive evaluations, and addressing the inherent vulnerabilities of the region are pivotal steps to protect this crucial ecosystem.

- Sustainable development can only be realized through a balanced approach that values environmental preservation alongside development. A revised and more inclusive EIA process is integral to achieving this equilibrium and safeguarding our precious natural heritage.

The shape of climate justice in a warming India

Context:

The G-20 summit convened in Delhi from September 9-10, 2023, reached a consensus to triple renewable energy capacity and voluntarily double the rate of energy efficiency improvement by 2030. However, the summit failed to find a common ground on a pressing issue—the phase-out of fossil fuels, which is the root cause of the ongoing climate crisis.

Background:

Addressing the climate challenge requires adhering to two fundamental principles.

- Firstly, it necessitates those responsible for greenhouse gas emissions to bear the social and environmental costs.

- Secondly, it entails compensating those adversely affected by climate change, recognizing that the contributors to climate change may not always be the ones who suffer its consequences. Therefore, any effective mitigation effort should rectify this carbon injustice by making wealthier nations or classes contribute to the energy transition.

Although these principles are articulated at the global level, their impact on domestic policy and politics often goes unexamined.

- India's stance on this matter has largely been shaped by foreign policy considerations and its commitment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) in international negotiations.

- This principle allows developing countries, especially those in the global south, to prioritize economic growth and development over immediate climate mitigation efforts. Given India's historically lower greenhouse gas emissions, economic growth has understandably taken precedence over climate concerns.

Relevance:

GS-01, GS-03 (Climate change, Conservation)

Mains Question:

- Analyze the challenges posed by climate change and the energy transition on domestic and international fronts. Discuss the impact of these challenges on inequality across various levels within India and propose strategies for addressing these challenges for a more sustainable and equitable future. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Inequality Matrix and Climate Impact

- Greening Development and its Impact on Inequality

- Greening Federalism and Regional Implications

Inequality Matrix and Climate Impact:

- Climate-induced challenges, such as **droughts, have compounded the agrarian crisis and related economic activities**. Fluctuations in rainfall, temperature, and extreme climate events have direct and adverse effects on agricultural productivity, leading to income losses for farmers. Additionally, rising ocean temperatures are depleting fish stocks, adversely impacting fishing communities.

- While the relationship between inequality and carbon emissions is intricate, it is evident that addressing both environmental and socio-economic disparities concurrently is vital for sustainable and fair development. It is increasingly clear that less egalitarian societies tend to have higher carbon emissions per unit of economic activity.

- Given India's pronounced economic inequality, the nation finds itself in a precarious situation. International experience indicates that addressing climate change, which requires public action and strong state capacity, is more challenging in highly unequal settings.

Greening Development and its Impact on Inequality:

- India's **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)** aim to achieve that **40% of total installed power generation capacity** is derived from clean energy, with the country committing to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

- As of 2021, coal remained the dominant energy source in India, constituting 56.1% of the total energy supply, followed by crude oil at 33.4%.

- The industrial sector consumed over half (51%) of the total final energy consumption, with transport, residential, and agriculture sectors following.

- Any increase in energy prices may lead to a contraction in manufacturing, a scenario India cannot afford, given its already modest manufacturing base. Therefore, a just energy transition requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account economic, social, and regional disparities.

- While the adoption of renewable energy sources is crucial, this shift should not exacerbate existing inequalities. Regions heavily dependent on coal production often face unique challenges, including pollution, poverty, and low-quality employment.

- Transitioning to renewable energy sources necessitates a deliberate focus on safeguarding livelihoods, offering alternative job opportunities, and ensuring that vulnerable communities do not suffer adverse consequences.

- The Paris Agreement underscores the importance of a "just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs per nationally defined development priorities." The skills and jobs required for renewable energy significantly differ from those in fossil fuel industries, which also play a crucial role in providing job opportunities for disadvantaged groups in India.

- A transition to renewable energy could potentially disrupt the generational mobility achieved by these marginalized communities. To ensure an equitable and sustainable shift, strategies must target both reducing inequality and promoting green investment simultaneously.

Greening Federalism and Regional Implications:

- Regions heavily reliant on coal production may face a loss of revenue and livelihoods as India transitions towards cleaner energy sources. This regional divide in economic inequality mirrors the energy source divide in India, with coal predominantly located in economically disadvantaged regions in eastern and central India. In contrast, renewable energy hubs, driven by wind and solar photovoltaic technologies, are situated in the more prosperous southern and western regions of the country.

- Despite the environmental challenges posed by the coal sector, which is primarily owned by public sector miners (85%), it remains a significant source of revenue through taxes, royalties, mining fees, and employment for state governments in Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. India's energy transition strategy should take into account these regional inequalities, channel funds to states heavily reliant on coal, and create state-specific programs for skill development and local rehabilitation.

- Therefore, a green transition should be accompanied by a federal approach. India's federal governance structure implies that sub-national governments play a vital role in addressing climate concerns. However, the priorities of these sub-national entities may significantly differ from those of the central government.

- Examining sub-national responses reveals how state governments are essential in addressing climate inequality and mitigation. State governments often implement policies related to climate justice, adaptation, and disaster management that may conflict with the development goals of the central government.

Conclusion:

India's journey toward a greener and more sustainable future is contingent on its ability to tackle climate challenges while also mitigating inequality. By adopting a comprehensive and inclusive approach, India can create a more equitable and resilient society that thrives in harmony with the environment

Carrying Capacity of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)

Context:

Recently, the Supreme Court of India has asked the Union government to provide insights into managing the carrying capacity of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) for towns and cities after the environmental damages that happened in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.

Relevance:

GS-03, GS-01 (Conservation, Geographical phenomena)

Prelims:

Indian Himalayan Region, Microclimate, National Mission on Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem, Glacial-lake outburst floods, Uttarakhand Flood 2013.

Mains Question:

Explain "carrying capacity" for a region, and how can it be effectively assessed and managed in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR)? (150 words, 10 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Carrying Capacity

- Government Initiatives in the IHR

- Challenges in Progress

- The Expert Committee

Carrying Capacity:

- The carrying capacity for a region signifies the maximum population size that an ecosystem or environment can support sustainably over a specific period without causing significant harm to its natural resources and overall health.

- It is useful for the balance between **human activities and the preservation of natural ecosystems**, ensuring long-term sustainability.

Government Initiatives in the IHR:

- Over the period, the government has launched various initiatives for the development of the IHR like –

  1. **National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (2010)**

  2. **Indian Himalayas Climate Adaptation Programme**

  3. **Secure Himalaya Project**

  4. Recently guidelines on **'Carrying Capacity in the IHR' issued on January 30, 2020**.

- On May 19, 2023, the Ministry of Environment and Forests sent out a reminder to all states to submit an action plan on carrying capacity if it had not been done already.

Challenges in Progress:

- Despite these initiatives, the progress hasn't been satisfying and the reasons for this stagnation can be attributed to two major factors.

A) The composition of groups created by the Ministry for addressing these issues has been flawed. The same individuals responsible for the environmental issues in the region are now tasked with finding solutions.

B) The focus should shift towards people-centric sustainable development.

- While it is relevant to include the entire IHR, focusing solely on towns and cities' carrying capacity is insufficient. For instance, the road network in Himalayan States

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has led to unplanned settlements. Therefore, the top court should concentrate on the "Sustainable Population" of the Himalayan States, considering the carrying capacity for the sustainable populations of different Himalayan States.

- There is a long-term necessity for evaluating the overall sustainable capacity of the environment within the entire state, including all biological species, food, habitat, water resources, ecology, and agriculture.

The Expert Committee:

- The expert committee should address the social aspects and population sustainability of each state. And the expert committee should not be a bureaucratic or technical group. It should include significant citizen representation, involving panchayats and other urban local bodies.

- Given the importance of the resident population living in towns and villages within the IHR

  - The expert committee should instruct each panchayat samiti and municipality to provide recommendations in response to the established population sustainability criteria. These recommendations should be disseminated to each local government center.

  - It is crucial to acknowledge the concerns of the local populace regarding the construction of hydropower projects and four-lane highways in the IHR. Neglecting these concerns, particularly in the case of Sikkim, has resulted in adverse consequences. Collaborating with the people is essential to build sustainable solutions.

Way Forward:

Addressing the carrying capacity in the Indian Himalayan Region requires a comprehensive and people-oriented approach. The government's recommendation focuses heavily on one institution, the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment, with other institutes playing more minor roles. These institutes are significant players in their respective domains and should have equal say in policy formulation.

The present and future of Dalit politics

Context:

Dalit politics in India has been shaped by the emergence of various independent Dalit political parties like the Republican Party of India (RPI), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and regional parties such as the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) in Tamil Nadu, Puthiya Tamilagam (PT), and the Praja Rajyam Party (PRP) in Andhra Pradesh and neighboring regions.

Relevance:

GS-01 (Indian Society, Indian Heritage and Culture)

Prelims:

Various Dalit movements

Mains Question:

Discuss the contributions of Dr. B.R Ambedkar in awakening of Dalit consciousness. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Changing Political Landscape
- Democratic Functioning

Changing Political Landscape:

- The evolution of Dalit politics in India is a story marked by the formation and growth of independent Dalit political parties.

- These entities, such as the Republican Party of India (RPI) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), have historically played a crucial role in advancing Dalit empowerment and fostering a sense of assertiveness within the community.

- The transformation in Dalit political dynamics is not an isolated event but rather closely connected to the changing socio-political landscape among Dalit communities.

- Factors such as democratic influence, government-led affirmative actions, and rising developmental aspirations have led to a shift in the socio-political profile of Dalit communities.

- Despite their role in the emergence of this aspirational section among marginalized communities, independent Dalit political parties have struggled to provide sufficient political space for this growing segment. The result is a desire for political participation within other political parties. Individual ambitions and an eagerness to wield political power have led to a drift away from Dalit-led political entities.

- One of the primary challenges faced by independent Dalit political parties is the evolution of a "new Dalit mentality" characterized by aspiration for socio-economic

mobility. These parties often rely on conventional politics that focus on identity, dignity, and representation.

Democratic Functioning:

- Independent Dalit political parties must establish democratic internal processes that grant grassroots leaders the necessary political space while discouraging the development of dynastic tendencies within the parties. Unfortunately, some Dalit parties, including the BSP, have been unable to prevent the rise of dynastic political cultures.

- The era of the "chamcha age," as warned against by BSP leader Kanshi Ram, is unlikely to return. Today's Dalit leaders are more politically competent, assertive, and skilled in negotiating with dominant and mainstream parties. This could lead to a dispersion of Dalit masses, cadres, and leaders among various political parties, potentially resulting in a multi-polar Dalit politics landscape in India.

Conclusion:

While these parties have played a significant role in empowering Dalits and fostering political consciousness, their decline in organizational strength and electoral performance is evident. The changing aspirations and identity quest among Dalit communities necessitate a re-evaluation of political strategies. Independent Dalit political parties must adapt by weaving identity politics with the economics of identity. Democratic functioning and the prevention of dynastic trends are essential. The evolving political values of Dalit leaders may lead to a multi-polar Dalit politics in India, marking a new chapter in the country's political landscape.

Kazan Meet makes no headway on equal rights in Afghanistan

Context

India participated in the nine-nation "Moscow Format" meeting on Saturday in the Russian city of Kazan even though it was unclear whether the Afghanistan Embassy in Delhi would close within the upcoming week. The gathering also invited the acting foreign minister of the Taliban. The gathering also included special representatives from Pakistan, Russia, China, Iran, and Central Asian nations.

What is the background on the Social situation in Afghanistan after the USA exited the country?

Afghanistan experienced a humanitarian crisis, a ruined economy, and a Taliban rule that was substantially identical from 1996–2001 after the United States withdrew its forces in August 2021.

Some of the conditions that Afghanistan Nationals faced during the Taliban Regime are as follows:

- A crumbling economy

- Humanitarian emergency

- a Taliban government that has remained largely unaltered since 1996

- No money to pay bills or purchase food

- Western funding has been halted since the Taliban government contains terrorist organizations

- Acute hunger and famine are imminent dangers for millions of Afghans.

- rapid deterioration in the economy

- Malnutrition and the risk of hunger

- global commodity shocks are causing inflation.

- A sharp increase in both urban and rural poverty

- A near-collapse of the national public health system

- Nearly absolute exclusion of women, who make up half the population

What is the Moscow Format Meeting?

The Moscow Format Meeting, also referred to as the "Moscow Format on Afghanistan," is a diplomatic initiative designed to promote communication and cooperation between different nations and players interested in resolving the Afghan crisis. As part of its initiatives to encourage a peaceful conclusion to the violence and instability in Afghanistan, the Russian government initially started it in 2017.

What are the features of the Moscow Format Meeting?

- **Multilateral diplomacy:** A wide range of nations and international organizations with an interest in Afghanistan come together at the Moscow Format Meeting. It consists of nearby nations, regional powers, and international players.

- **Inclusive Approach:** The project encourages inclusivity by bringing together representatives from various Afghan political factions and organisations for conversations with foreign diplomats. With this strategy, we hope to promote a variety of Afghan voices to participate in the peace process.

- **Conflict Resolution:** The Moscow Format Meeting's main goal is to encourage dialogue and negotiations between Afghan parties and regional and international stakeholders in order to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

- **Security and stability:** The meeting frequently touches on issues related to Afghanistan's security and stability, such as counterterrorism initiatives and the part played by various factions in the nation's security environment.

- **Humanitarian Concerns:** During these discussions, humanitarian concerns are also covered, including the protection of civilians, access to relief, and the avoidance of a humanitarian crisis.

- **Taliban recognition:** The Moscow Format offers a forum for engagement and discussion with Taliban officials as one of the main factions in Afghanistan, despite the fact that it does not formally recognize the Taliban as a legitimate government.

What is the Kazan Declaration and what are the areas discussed in the declaration?

The Kazan Declaration is a document that resulted from the fifth regional consultation on Afghanistan, known as the "Moscow Format," which took place in Kazan, Russia. This declaration outlines the key areas of discussion and agreements reached during the meeting.

- **Inclusive Government in Afghanistan**: The Kazan Declaration stressed the need for Afghanistan to have an inclusive government. It emphasized how crucial it was for all ethnic and political groupings to take part in governing the nation.

- **Ethno-Political Representation:** The proclamation made it clear that political pluralism is not achieved by appointing individual members from Afghanistan's numerous ethnic groups to the Kabul government. It demanded a more thorough and impartial portrayal of various communities.

- **Dialogue with Ethno-Political organizations:** The Afghan interim government has been asked to start an effective conversation with members of ethnic political organizations. The objective is to conclude the peaceful settlement process and provide a fair, larger, more thorough, accommodating, and responsible accord.

- **Counterterrorism**: Due to the actions of terrorist organizations, notably ISIS, the proclamation highlighted worries about the security situation in Afghanistan. It emphasized the Taliban's commitment to fighting terrorism and urged Kabul to adopt practical measures to stop terrorist organizations from forming there.

- **Preventing Refugee Inflow:** At the Kazan meeting, it was discussed that Afghanistan's living circumstances must be improved in order to stop the flow of refugees into the surrounding nations. It stressed how crucial it was for the Afghan government to foster the wellbeing of the Afghan people and protect their fundamental rights and freedoms.

- **Women's Rights and Education:** Concerns over the current limitations on women's employment and girls' education in Afghanistan have been expressed. It was requested of the interim administration to establish education at schools in line with international standards.

Conclusion

The Kazan Declaration summarizes the discussions and agreements made at the Kazan, Russia, meeting of the Moscow Format, with a focus on establishing an inclusive government in Afghanistan, addressing security and humanitarian issues, and fostering economic cooperation and regional stability.

Seven dead as glacial lake bursts in Sikkim

Context

Following flash floods that engulfed Sikkim on Wednesday, at least seven people were murdered, and dozens more suffered injuries or went missing.

The lake, which was created by the gradual melting of a Himalayan glacier, is thought to have caused the floods when it abruptly overflowed and submerged the Teesta River basin.

Where is the Teesta River Basin located?

- The Teesta River basin covers an area of 11,888 km2 in India and Bangladesh. The basin stretches from Sikkim in India to Bangladesh's northern Rangpur division. The river has a total catchment area of 12,159 km2 and is 414 km long.

- The Teesta River has the fastest flow rate in India and is the largest river in Sikkim. Before flowing into the Bay of Bengal, it rises in the Sikkim region of the Himalayas and travels through Bangladesh and West Bengal. The river flows into the Brahmaputra River as a tributary.

- The population of the Teesta River basin is over 30 million. The range of the yearly average rainfall is 2000 to 5000 mm. Droughts during the lean season and floods during the rainy season are a crisis for the basin.

What are the Glacial lakes?

- Glacial lakes are bodies of water formed when a glacier erodes land and then melts, filling the resulting depression. They are frequently flanked by steep slopes and can be found in glacier-covered locations.

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- Examples of glacial lakes include Devtal Glacial Lake: The tallest glacial lake in India, located in the Garhwal region. Himalaya

- Glacial lakes can cause floods. For example, in 2008, the melting ice front of Chile's Cachet II Lake broke, quickly draining the lake. The tremendous amount of water flooded the Baker River, causing the flow rate to suddenly quadruple, flooding villages downstream.

What is the difference between flash floods and normal floods?

- Rapid start, high intensity, brief duration, and imminent hazard to life and property are the hallmarks of flash floods. On the other side, floods take a longer time to develop gradually, the water level rises more slowly, and they often persist longer. Both kinds of floods have the potential to be disastrous, but flash floods are more deadly because of how unexpected and abrupt they are.

How to face flash floods?

- **Remain Informed:** Pay attention to weather forecasts and keep yourself updated on local weather conditions. Register for emergency alerts and keep up with local news.

- **Flood-prone regions should be avoided:** Recognise the areas close to you that are vulnerable to flash flooding. Low-lying regions, valleys, and regions close to rivers, streams, or dams may fall under this category.

- **Make a strategy for emergencies:** Create a strategy for emergencies for you and your family. A meeting place, an evacuation route, and a mode of communication in case you become separated should all be included in this plan. Together with your family, run through the plan.

- **Prepare an emergency supply kit**: Fill the kit with non-perishable food, water, batteries, flashlights, a first aid kit, critical papers, and additional clothing. Keep this kit in a place that is simple to get to.

- **Avoid flood-prone areas:** Avoid driving through or walking through flooded areas when it is raining heavily or when a flash flood warning is in effect. Even small amounts of water might knock you off your feet or cause your car to stall. The best course of action is to wait for the floodwaters to subside inside.

Trio wins Chemistry Nobel for 'quantum dots'

Context

Alexei Ekimov, Louis Brus, and Moungi Bawendi have been awarded the 2023 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for their work on quantum dots, which are very small crystals with unusual properties that have found application in a range of disciplines ranging from new-age LED screens to quantum computers.
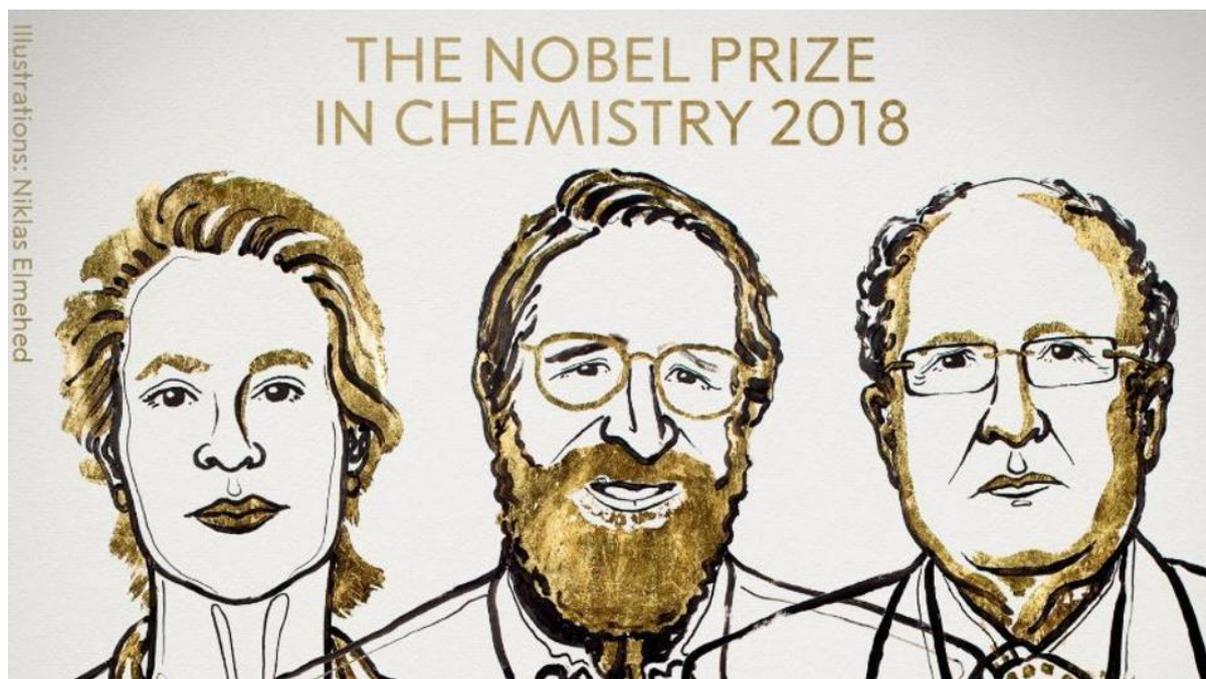
What is the Nobel Prize?

- Each year, the Nobel Prize is given to a person or group of people who have made a significant contribution to humanity. The prizes are awarded in the following fields: Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature, Peace.

- The first Nobel Prizes were awarded on December 10, 1901, the fifth anniversary of the death of inventor Alfred Nobel. The prizes are given to men, women, and organizations.

- Each reward includes:

    o a prize

    o a distinct diploma

    o cash prize

Who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the year 2023?

- Alexei Ekimov, Louis Brus, and Moungi Bawendi were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2023.

- The Nobel Prize was given to them for their groundbreaking research on quantum dots, which are small crystals with unique properties.

- Quantum dots are extremely small, typically a few nanometers across and containing only a few thousand atoms.

What is Quantum Dots and what is the significance of the discovery?

- Quantum dots are small semiconductor particles with dimensions of a few nanometers. They were discovered for the first time in 1980.

- Quantum dots are distinguished by their optical and electrical features. They're known as "artificial atoms" by experts. The size of quantum dots is critical in defining their electrical and optical properties.

- The following are the qualities of quantum dots:

    o **They have an extremely high surface-to-volume ratio.**

    o **The size of the particles can cause them to produce unique hues.**

    o **When energy is given to them, they can emit light of specified wavelengths.**

    o **They can move electrons.**

- Quantum dots are used because of their distinct optical characteristics. They provide great colour fidelity and a larger colour range than is required for high-definition television.

What are the applications of the Quantum Dots?

Quantum dots have found use in a variety of fields, including:

- **Entertainment**: LED screens are utilized to provide vivid and energy-efficient displays.

- **Quantum computers**: The use of quantum dots in quantum computing is being investigated.

- **Flexible Electronics:** Quantum dots have great promise for flexible and high-performance electronic devices.

- **Miniature sensors**: They can be used as tiny sensors for a variety of applications.

- **Slimmer solar cells**: Quantum dots have the potential to improve the efficiency of solar panels.

- **Encrypted quantum communication**: Quantum dots may have a role to play in secure quantum communication.

Conclusion

This Nobel Prize honours these scientists' important contributions to nanotechnology and quantum physics, which have paved the way for numerous technological developments and inventions.

Norway's Jon Fosse wins Nobel for literature

Context

Norway's Jon Fosse, 64, won the Nobel Prize in literature on Thursday. His plays are among the most widely performed by any contemporary playwright in the world.

What is the Nobel Prize?

- Each year, the Nobel Prize is given to a person or group of people who have made a significant contribution to humanity. The prizes are awarded in the following fields: Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature, and Peace.

- The first Nobel Prizes were awarded on December 10, 1901, the fifth anniversary of the death of inventor Alfred Nobel. The prizes are given to men, women, and organizations.

- Each reward includes:
    - a prize
    - a distinct diploma
    - cash prize

Who won the Nobel Prize for literature?

- **Nobel Prize in Literature:** The Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Jon Fosse, a 64-year-old Norwegian dramatist and author, for his outstanding contributions to contemporary literature.

- **Innovative works:** Fosse was   awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his groundbreaking plays and prose. His art is notable for giving voice to the unsayable and for delving into deep and frequently difficult issues.

- **Multifaceted Oeuvre:** Fosse's literary output spans a variety of genres, including:

  - Plays: He is a well-known playwright, with several of his works being performed all over the world.

  - Novels: Fosse's novels frequently feature non-linear narrative forms.

  - Poetry Collections: He has also published poetry collections.

  - writings: Fosse's writings span a wide range of subjects.

  - Books for youngsters: He has written books for youngsters.

  - Fosse's work includes translations, demonstrating his various literary talents.

- **Major Works: Among Jon Fosse's notable works are**:

  - "Boathouse": One of his most important plays.

  - "Melancholy I and II": These pieces demonstrate his pursuit of profound and contemplative themes.

- **Philosophy on literature**: Fosse sees his writing as primarily concerned with being literature for the sake of being literature, emphasizing its artistic and creative components without being pushed by other factors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jon Fosse's Nobel Prize in Literature honours his outstanding contributions to the world of literature through creative plays, novels, poetry, and other literary forms. His ability to dive into complicated and profound issues has gained him international praise and established him as one of the most important modern playwrights and authors.

Nobel Peace Prize 2023 Goes To jailed Iranian Activist Narges Mohammadi

Context

Narges Mohammadi, an imprisoned Iranian feminist, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday in appreciation of her continuous campaigning for women's rights, democracy, and the abolition of the death sentence.

What is the Nobel Prize?

- The Nobel Prize is an international award given to individuals and organizations for their contributions to humanity. The Nobel Prize is administered by the Nobel Foundation in Stockholm, Sweden, and is founded on the fortune of Swedish inventor and entrepreneur Alfred Nobel.

- The Nobel Prize is awarded annually in the following fields: Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature, and Peace.

- The Nobel Peace Prize is given to the person who has done the most to promote international relationships and abolish or reduce standing armies.

- Narges Mohammadi was given the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 for her efforts to end women's persecution in Iran and to promote human rights and freedom for all.

Why was Narges Mohammadi given the Nobel Prize in 2023?

- **The reasons for the Nobel Peace Prize:** Narges Mohammadi received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 for her unwavering support for women's rights, democracy, and her opposition to the death penalty in Iran. Her dedication to these causes, despite many arrests and imprisonment, was a major reason for the prize.

- **Despite Obstacles, Activism Continues:** Despite being arrested multiple times by Iranian authorities and spending several years in prison, Narges Mohammadi persisted in her activity. She remained a prominent presence in the nationwide women-led protests that gained traction following the death of a 22-year-old woman in police custody.

- **Recognizing a Larger Movement:** The Nobel Committee stated that Narges Mohammadi's award was given not only for her accomplishments but also as an acknowledgement of the more significant Iranian reform movement. She was regarded as the movement's unquestioned leader.

- **Encouragement for the Movement:** The Nobel Committee hoped that the prize would encourage the movement to continue its efforts, underlining that it should take any form it considers appropriate to bring about change in Iran.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Narges Mohammadi's Nobel Peace Prize nomination is a symbol of support for the greater campaign for change in Iran, notably in the context of women's rights, democracy, and opposition to the death sentence. Despite the hardships she has endured, her perseverance and hope for a better future in Iran are clear.

Prof. Swaminathan's contributions

Early Life and Education:

Swaminathan was born on August 7, 1925, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. He continued his schooling in agriculture, earning a Bachelor of Agricultural Science degree from the University of Madras. Later, he earned a PhD in Genetics and Plant Breeding from the University of Cambridge.

Green Revolution in India:

Swaminathan was a key figure in India's Green Revolution, a time of enhanced agricultural production gained via the adoption of high-yielding crop types, mainly wheat and rice. His work in breeding and promoting these high-yielding varieties aided in the transformation of Indian agriculture and raised food output tremendously.

Collaboration with Norman Borlaug:

Swaminathan worked closely with Norman Borlaug, another well-known Green Revolution figure. They collaborated on the development and implementation of new agricultural technology and techniques to increase crop yields and food security.

Leadership at IRRI:

Swaminathan was the Director General of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. His leadership at IRRI was critical in expanding rice research and production around the world.

World Food Prize:

Swaminathan received the first World Food Prize in 1987 in recognition of his remarkable contributions to agriculture and food security. This prize is regarded as one of the finest awards in agriculture.

Contributions to the Environment:

He was also acknowledged for his efforts to promote ecological sustainability. The United Nations Environment Program dubbed him "the Father of Economic Ecology."

Contributions to Research:

Swaminathan made substantial contributions to cytogenetics, ionizing radiation, and radiosensitivity, notably in the context of crops such as potato, wheat, and rice.

Political and social involvement:

He was a member of the Indian Parliament from 2007 to 2013. During his term, he pushed for women farmers' recognition and rights in India.

Awards and Honors:

Throughout his career, Swaminathan won various accolades and honours, including the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, and the Albert Einstein World Science Award.

Vision of the "Evergreen Revolution":

In 1990, he invented the term "Evergreen Revolution," emphasizing the significance of sustainable agriculture practices that assure high yield without harming the environment. Swaminathan established a research foundation that continues to concentrate on agricultural and rural development challenges.

Claudia Goldin wins the 2023 Economics Nobel Prize

Context

Professor Claudia Goldin of Harvard University received the Nobel Prize in Economics on Monday for her work advancing our knowledge of the gender wage gap.

What is the Workplace Gender Pay Gap?

- The discrepancy between the average gross hourly salaries of men and women is known as the gender pay gap. It is based on salaries that are directly paid to employees before income tax and social security deductions.

- In 2022, the average income of women in the US will be 82% that of males. For Black and Hispanic women, this disparity is even more pronounced.

- In India, men receive 82% of the work income and women only receive 18%. Women in India earn 19% less than men, according to the Monster Salary Index (MSI) published in March 2019.

- Employee retention may be negatively impacted by the gender wage disparity. Employees who earn less than their male counterparts for the same job are more inclined to look for jobs with higher pay elsewhere.

Who won the Nobel Prize for their work on the Gender Pay gap?

- Claudia Goldin Receives the Nobel Prize in Economics Claudia Goldin, a professor at Harvard University, received the Nobel Prize in Economics for her ground-breaking studies on the gender wage gap. Her work has made a substantial contribution towards knowledge of this ongoing problem.

- Out of 93 laureates, Claudia Goldin is just the third female to win the Nobel Prize in Economics. This draws attention to the gender gap in economics and emphasizes the importance of her accomplishment.

- The majority of Goldin's study has been devoted to examining women's labour force involvement over 200 years. Her research tries to clarify why women's salary hasn't regularly caught up to men's salaries despite ongoing economic growth. This study contributes to illuminating the persistent gender pay discrepancy.

How is personal situation impacting the gender gap in the workplace?

- According to Goldin's study, a woman's earnings and position in the labour market are affected not just by general cultural and economic developments but also by her own choices. Women frequently pick lower-paying positions that allow them to juggle work and family obligations. It's important to take job and home issues into account when working toward gender equality.

- Young girls frequently base their professional options on their moms' experiences and preferences, according to Goldin's observation. Every generation gains knowledge from the triumphs and failures of the one before it, which may explain why the gender wage gap has been difficult to close.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Claudia Goldin's Nobel Prize–winning research has been praised for its important contribution to comprehending the gender wage gap and the intricacies underlying it. Although her study doesn't offer quick fixes, it offers insightful information that policymakers can utilize to create more focused and successful plans for achieving gender equality in the workplace.

Kaziranga Sanctuary reopens with tribute to British-era officer

Place:

- The State of Assam is home to Kaziranga National Park.
- It is spread across 42,996 hectares of land.
- In the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain, it is regarded as the single biggest intact and typical area.

Historical Background :

- **Kaziranga Proposed Reserve Forest (1905):**

  o The proposed reserve forest of Kaziranga was visited in 1904 by Baroness Mary Victoria Leiter Curzon, who was the wife of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India.

  o She became aware of the critical need for wildlife protection during her tour, given the sharp fall in the rhino population.

  o After she persuaded her husband to act, Lord Curzon proposed the establishment of a reserve in Kaziranga on November 4, 1904.

  o September 1905 was the date on the official proposal documents for the Kaziranga Reserve Forest.

  o The 232 square kilometre Kaziranga Proposed Reserve Forest was established on June 1, 1905.

- **Reserve Forest and Game Sanctuary Kaziranga-A (1908–1939):**

  - The European community of tea planters and the natives opposed a proposal to extend the Kaziranga reserve forest eastward.

  - In 1908, the park was expanded by 152 square kilometres to the banks of the Brahmaputra River despite the opposition.

  - It was renamed the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary in 1916, and although hunting was forbidden, visitors were welcome.

- **The Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park (1950–1974) declared:**

  - To dissociate itself from links with hunting, the Kaziranga Game Sanctuary was renamed the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary in 1950.

  - The Rhinoceros Bill, passed by the Assam government in 1954, severely penalized rhino hunting.

  - The Assam National Park Act of 1968, passed by the Assamese government in 1968, established the framework for the establishment of a national park.

  - Eventually, the region was expanded to 430 square kilometres and designated as Kaziranga National Park in 1974.

- **The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kaziranga (1985–2005):**

  - Kaziranga was recognized for its exceptional natural setting and the necessity of its preservation when it was inducted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, not long after it was made into a national park.

  - The Park area celebrated its centenary in 2005

Legal Status:

- In 1974, Kaziranga National Park was officially designated as a national park.
- With a core area of 430 square kilometres, the entire area of the reserve is 1,030 square kilometres, and it has been declared a tiger reserve since 2007.
- **International Status:**
- In recognition of its significance for biodiversity and protection, it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.
- BirdLife International has also designated Kaziranga as an Important Bird Area, demonstrating the importance of the area for bird species.

Notable Species Discovered:

- The largest population of one-horned rhinos in the world, with the highest density of these rhinos worldwide, may be found in Kaziranga.
- The 'big four' species of Asiatic water buffalo, rhinos, elephants, and Royal Bengal tigers are the major targets of conservation efforts in Kaziranga.
- There were 2,413 rhinoceros and about 1,100 elephants in the park according to the 2018 census.
- With an estimated 103 tigers according to the 2014 tiger census, Kaziranga has the third largest population of tigers in India.

- Nine of the 14 species of monkeys that inhabit the Indian subcontinent also live in Kaziranga.

Conclusion

Being a UNESCO World Heritage Site highlights Kaziranga National Park's significance in the worldwide context of biodiversity preservation. The park is well-known for its diverse fauna, which includes the renowned one-horned rhinoceros.

NCERT panel suggests replacing 'India' with 'Bharat' in textbooks

Context

The National Council of Educational Research and Training established a high-level committee to review the social sciences curriculum, and the committee's recommendation was to replace the word "India" in school textbooks with the word "Bharat." The NCERT stated on Wednesday that the idea had not yet been authorized and that it was "too premature" to comment on the matter in response to protests from opposition parties.

What is the historical background behind the name?

- Origins of the Names: Historically, outsiders have used "India" and its Arabic variations, such as "Hind," which have foreign roots. When Afghanistan and the Mughals ruled, the term "Hindustan" was used; during the British administration, "India" was the geographical title.

- Indian Renaissance and Nationalism: The concept of an Indian nation was greatly influenced by the Indian Renaissance. Some of the movement's supporters favoured the moniker "Bharat" to emphasize the indigenous origins of Indian nationalism.

- Name Controversy: As a result of political and religious differences, "India" and "Pakistan" had different names during the 1947 Indian split. Many supported the syncretic word "Hind."

How is the balance between Bharat and India maintained through different dimensions?

- **Adoption of the Constitution:** The historical and legal significance of the Indian Constitution was emphasized during its initial adoption in English. In 1950, a translation into Hindi was also released.

- **Official Status of Both Versions**: Under Indian law, the Constitutions in Hindi and English are both considered official. This guarantees that the Constitution can be accessed in India's two official languages.

- **Constitutional Amendments:** The 58th Amendment, passed in 1987, allowed the President the authority to publish the official text of the Constitution in Hindi and addressed the usage of Hindi and English in official documents.

- **Article 1(1):** The Constitution's Article 1(1) states that the name of the nation is "India, that is Bharat." This highlights how the Constitution uses both terms.

- **Examples of Names**: Dual-language official documents are reflected in Indian periodicals like the Hindi-language "Bharat ka Rajpatra" and the English-language "Gazette of India".

Which are the other countries that changed from their past?

- **Siam to Thailand (1939):** Siam was the previous name for Thailand. In response to Western colonial influence in Southeast Asia, the country's unity and identity were emphasized by the name change. "Thailand" signifies "Land of the Free" and embodies the nation's pride in its freedom.

- **Zaire to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1997):** Mobutu Sese Seko, the tyrant who ruled the Democratic Republic of the Congo for more than thirty years, referred to the country as Zaire. The country attempted to underline the restoration to a democratic form of government and separate itself from Mobutu's autocratic rule by changing its name.

- **Burma to Myanmar (1989):** The country's official name was changed from Burma to Myanmar by the military regime. Since "Myanmar" is a more inclusive name, the move was perceived as an attempt to reflect the ethnic variety of the nation. Nonetheless, there is ongoing political discussion surrounding the change, and **opinions differ.**

- **East Pakistan to Bangladesh(1971):** After a bloody conflict, East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan to become the new nation of Bangladesh. This symbolized the political, linguistic, and cultural divide between the two areas and signalled the conclusion of the Bangladesh Liberation War.

## What are the benefits of changing the name to Bharat?

- **Cultural and Historical Relevance:** In India, "Bharat" holds great cultural and historical importance. The word has been in use for millennia in several Indian languages, and supporters of the name change contend that it more accurately captures the history and legacy of the country. One could interpret this shift as an attempt to reestablish ties to pre-colonial history and culture.

- **Promotion of Indigenous Identity:** Proponents of the term "Bharat" contend that it can serve to bolster pride in Indian languages, customs, and culture by emphasizing an indigenous identity. It might represent a move away from colonial legacies and toward more genuinely Indian origins.

- **Unity and Nationalism:** Advocates claim that the term "Bharat" can strengthen the sense of nationalism and unity among India's diverse population. It might strengthen the notion of "One Nation" and foster a sense of national identity.

- **Linguistic Unity:** The term "Bharat" is comprehensible and accessible to a large majority of people because it is uniform across numerous Indian languages. There may be symbolic significance to this linguistic homogeneity.

- **International Recognition**: "Bharat" has the potential to become the main term used to refer to India worldwide if it is formally recognized and used regularly. This would highlight the historical and cultural relevance of India on the global scene.

What are the potential drawbacks of the change?

- **Transition:** Changing a nation's name is an expensive and time-consuming procedure. It entails making changes to legislation, official documents, and international agreements. Confusion during the changeover time may also result from it.

- **Different Preferences:** The linguistic, cultural, and regional preferences of India's vastly diverse population are different. There may be disagreements among the populace on the name change, which could spark arguments and rifts.

- **Economic Repercussions:** Renaming organizations, government publications, and money could have an impact on the economy. These expenses can take funds away from other urgent problems.

- **Political Controversy**: With opposing views from various parties and organizations, the name change may turn into a contentious political issue. Political turmoil and disagreements may result from this.

- **worldwide Identity:** Throughout the years, India has solidified its identity as "India" on a worldwide scale. To make sure that international institutions, organizations, and nations recognize and adjust to the new name, changing the name to "Bharat" might involve a significant amount of work.

Conclusion

To sum up, renaming a nation is a difficult choice that can have advantages in terms of cultural and historical significance, but it can also present difficulties due to transition, a range of personal preferences, and possible political and economic repercussions. A choice of this nature would need to be made after much thought and broad agreement.
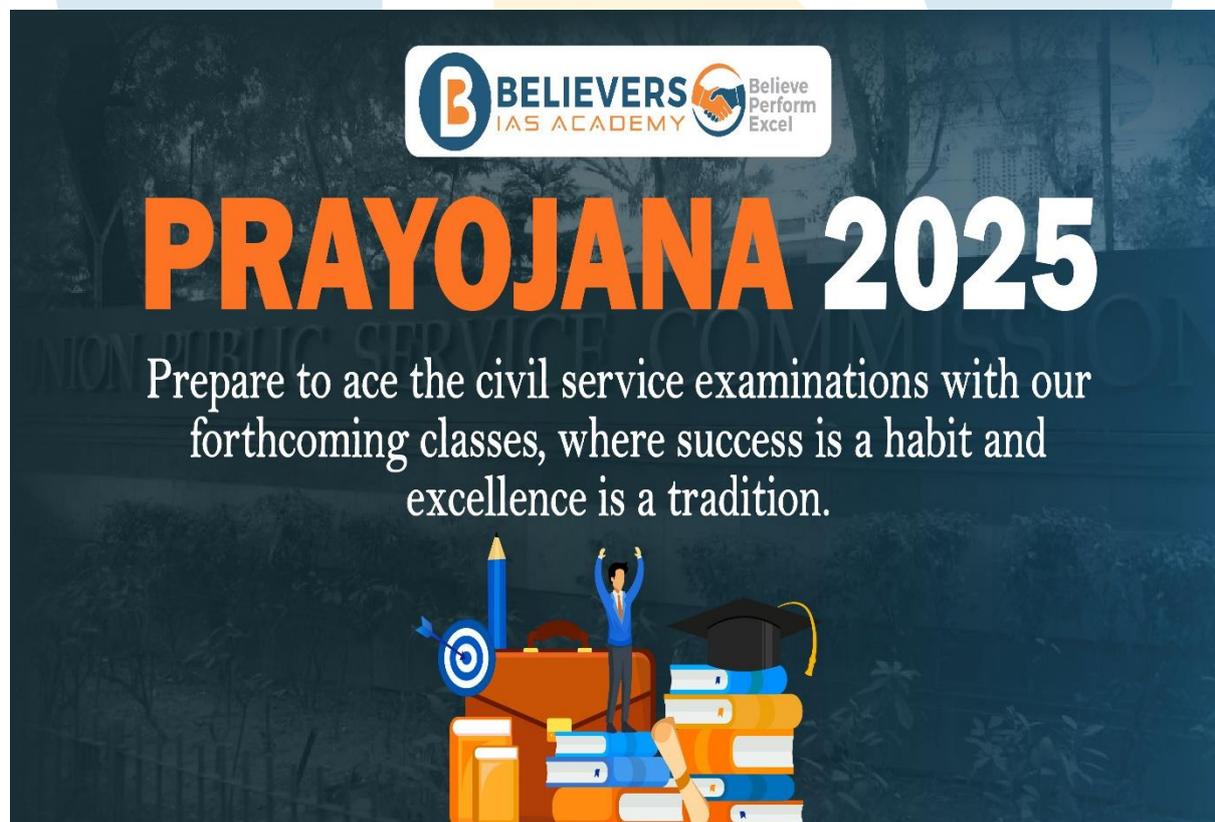
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NEW BATCHES FOR UPSC 2025

Batch	Start Date	Time	Duration
RBMCCP-25	October 16th 2023	7:00 AM - 10:00 AM	2.5 Years
RBACCP-26	December 24th 2023	11:00 AM - 2:00 PM	2.3 Years
RBECCP-27	December 24th 2023	5:30 PM - 8:30 PM	2.3 Years
RBMCCP-28	January 24th 2024	7:00 AM - 10:00 AM	2 Years
RBACCP-29	March 08th 2024	11:00 AM - 2:00 PM	22 Months
RBMCCP-30	May 17th 2024	7:00 AM - 10:00 AM	20 Months
RBECCP-31	May 17th 2024	5:30 PM - 8:30 PM	20 Months
RBACCP-32	June 24th 2024	11:00 AM - 2:00 PM	18 Months
RBMCCP-33	August 04th 2024	7:00 AM - 10:00 AM	15 Months

GENERAL STUDIES-2

India's statistical performance on the global stage

Context:

The World Bank's Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) placed India 67th among 174 countries in 2019. This evaluation highlights both India's strengths and areas needing improvement in SPI. This article emphasizes the significance of SPI assessment for global competitiveness and offers recommendations for enhancing key aspects. Furthermore, it advocates for better representation to the World Bank to refine SPI.

Relevance:

GS – 02 (Important International Institutions, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

Mains Question:

Evaluate India's performance in the World Bank's Statistical Performance Indicators (SPI) assessment in 2019 and discuss the implications for its national statistical system and global competitiveness. Suggest measures to improve India's ranking in SPI. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Understanding SPI and Its Dimensions
- India's SPI Scores in 2019
- The Significance of 'Data Use'
- The Importance of 'Data Products'
- Assessing 'Data Infrastructure'
- 'Data Services' and 'Data Sources' Performance
- SPI Score's Relevance

Understanding SPI and Its Dimensions:

- The World Bank compiles SPIs to assess the performance of national statistical systems across 174 countries.
- SPI evaluates five dimensions, referred to as the "five pillars" of a national statistical system: Data use, Data services, Data products, Data sources, and Data infrastructure.

India's SPI Scores in 2019:

- In 2019, India received an overall SPI score of 70.4, ranking 67th among assessed countries. However, a closer look at the pillar-wise scores reveals weaker performance in 'Data use' and 'Data products,' resulting in rankings of 101 and 105, respectively.

The Significance of 'Data Use':

- 'Data use' evaluates how various sectors, including the government, civil society, and international bodies, utilize statistics generated by the system. India's performance in this pillar depends on data usage by international bodies.

- While India excels in some aspects, it loses points due to unavailability of comparable poverty estimates for the World Bank over the last decade.

The Importance of 'Data Products':

- The 'Data Products' pillar focuses on essential data required for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- India has initiated steps to improve in this area, conducting surveys to collect data on SDGs.

Assessing 'Data Infrastructure':

- In 'Data Infrastructure,' India scores 55, ranking 73. This pillar encompasses areas like Legislation and Governance, Standards and Methods, Skills, Partnership, and Finance.

- India performs well in legislation and governance but lags in standards and financial support.

'Data Services' and 'Data Sources' Performance:

- India excels in 'Data Services' with a score of 88, ranking 35. 'Data Sources' also score high at 68.9, ranking 31. These pillars assess censuses and surveys, administrative data, and geospatial data.

- Censuses and surveys contribute most to India's ranking, while administrative data's lower score is due to low birth registration coverage.

SPI Score's Relevance:

- The SPI score for 2019 underscores **India's strength in censuses and surveys compared to administrative data.** A thorough examination of SPI is essential for identifying areas of improvement.

- Setting attainable goals could significantly improve rankings. Proactive engagement with the World Bank to enhance the SPI's robustness is crucial, including using reliable sources for data estimation.

Way Forward:

Achieving a substantial increase in scores in critical pillars like 'Data products,' 'Data use,' and 'Data infrastructure' is essential to improve India's ranking. India should also strengthen its collaboration with the World Bank for a more accurate SPI assessment.

Conclusion:

The SPI assessment offers valuable insights into India's national statistical system and its global competitiveness. India's performance in 2019 reveals strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the need for focused improvements. By addressing these shortcomings and

actively engaging with international organizations like the World Bank, India can enhance its standing in the global statistical landscape.

An ageing India needs age-responsive TB care

Context:

India is seeing a demographic shift with an increasing proportion of elderly citizens which by default attributes to advancements in healthcare and extended lifespan demands. By 2030, it is estimated that 12.5% of India's population will be aged 60 and above, compared to the 9% in 2011.

Relevance:

GS – 2 (Health, Government Policies & Interventions, Important International Institutions)

Prelims:

Tuberculosis, BCG vaccine, Indian Demography

Mains Question:

- Discuss the problems and particular healthcare needs of the elderly population in India, with a focus on tuberculosis (TB) and also suggest strategies to counter these challenges and ensure age-responsive care for the elderly. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Impact of TB on the Elderly

- Unique Challenges Faced by Elderly TB Patients

- Complexities in TB Management

- Healthcare Accessibility Issues

- Economic Dependence and Stigmatization

- Creating Elder-Friendly TB Care

- Technical and Operational Protocols

- Addressing Socio-Economic Needs

- Data Collection and Analysis

- A Research Agenda

Impact of TB on the Elderly:

- India is facing a substantial burden of tuberculosis patients (over 25 lakh individuals annually and claiming at least 1,000 lives each day).

- The National TB Prevalence Survey of 2021 disclosed an alarming statistics: a prevalence rate of 588 (per one lakh population) among individuals aged 55 and above, significantly higher than the national average of 316.

Unique Challenges Faced by Elderly TB Patients:

- Symptoms of TB, such as **cough, fatigue, and weight loss**, are often misattributed to other ailments or dismissed as natural consequences of aging.

- Consequently, elderly individuals are at a heightened risk of delayed or missed TB diagnoses.

Complexities in TB Management:

- Once diagnosed, managing TB in the elderly presents multifaceted challenges. Many elderly TB patients contend with multiple comorbidities, particularly diabetes, which complicates treatment due to higher pill counts and increased susceptibility to side effects.

- This can lead to erratic treatment adherence and adverse outcomes, including fatalities. Furthermore, some elderly individuals express a diminished "will to live," especially in the absence of robust social and emotional support systems.

Healthcare Accessibility Issues:

- Elderly individuals, especially women, encounter specific hurdles in accessing healthcare services. In rural and hilly regions, they struggle with transportation to healthcare facilities, often relying on assistance.

- Access to reliable health information dwindles as their social networks naturally shrink with age. Infrastructure-related challenges, such as inadequate seating at healthcare facilities, further compound these issues. Additionally, many elderly individuals lack access to high-quality, nutritious food, a critical component of recovery.

Economic Dependence and Stigmatization:

- Economic independence diminishes significantly after the age of 60, with many relying on savings or family support. Although some social welfare programs exist for the elderly, they are limited and challenging to access.

- While data on TB-related stigma among the elderly is scarce, it is essential to recognize that ageism exists and negatively impacts the health and social integration of older individuals.

- Some elderly interviewees mentioned deteriorating mental health, exacerbated by feelings of purposelessness, isolation resulting from the loss of loved ones, and anxiety about perceived uselessness.

Creating Elder-Friendly TB Care:

- To provide elder-friendly TB care, a paradigm shift is needed from disease-specific, fragmented care models to holistic approaches that reduce the elderly's interactions with multiple healthcare providers and facilities.

- Healthcare professionals at all levels must receive training to improve their clinical understanding of TB in the elderly and enhance the management of comorbidities.

- Effective case-finding among the elderly can be facilitated through improved sputum collection and transportation systems, mobile diagnostic services, and active case identification in geriatric outpatient departments and residential facilities.

Technical and Operational Protocols:

- Clear and comprehensive technical and operational protocols are crucial for diagnosing and treating TB in the elderly. These should encompass sample extraction procedures, thorough assessments of comorbidities, and appropriate dosage adjustments.

Addressing Socio-Economic Needs:

- Elder-friendly support protocols must be thoughtfully designed and implemented, with input from elderly TB patients.

- These could include community care models tailored to the elderly, doorstep delivery of medications, peer support and counseling services, special assistance desks at healthcare facilities, and guidance for accessing social support programs.

Data Collection and Analysis:

- Gender- and age-disaggregated data collection and analysis should be conducted to identify TB trends among different age groups, ensuring that the elderly are recognized as a distinct demographic in TB reports.

- Collaboration within the healthcare system should also be strengthened to build elderly-friendly systems.

A Research Agenda:

- It should investigate state-specific trends in case identification and outcomes among elderly TB patients, substance use patterns, drug resistance, comorbidity profiles across regions, uptake of TB preventive therapy in the elderly, and intersections with other equity dimensions like gender, disability, socioeconomic class, and caste.

Way Forward:

Addressing the unique healthcare needs of the elderly population, particularly regarding TB, requires a comprehensive approach. Policymakers, healthcare providers, and society as a whole must prioritize elder-friendly care models, training, and support systems to ensure that our elderly citizens receive the care and respect they deserve.

Conclusion:

The demographic transformation unfolding in India necessitates a renewed commitment to the health and well-being of the elderly. TB, a prevalent and deadly disease, presents distinctive challenges for this demographic. By adopting holistic care models, improving healthcare accessibility, and addressing socio-economic needs, we can pave the way for elder-friendly TB care. Rigorous data collection, research, and collaboration within the healthcare system are vital steps towards building a healthcare system that respects and prioritizes the elderly.

Criminal law Bills and a hollow decolonization

Context:

With the introduction of Three Criminal Law Bills and the Committee for Reforms in Criminal Law in 2020, there was an anticipation that these Bills would eventually show the path towards the decolonization of Indian criminal law.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government Policies and Interventions, Judiciary)

Prelims:

Supreme Court, Article 348, Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita Bill 2023, Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita Bill 2023, Bharatiya Sakshya Bill 2023

Mains Question:

Examine the key provisions of the criminal law Bills introduced in 2023 and their impact on the relationship between the state and its citizens. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Nature of Colonization

- The Need for Change

- Overbroad and Constitutionally Suspect Provisions

- Expansion of Suppression

- Ignoring Police and Prison Reform
- A Broader Perspective

The Nature of Colonization:

- Colonization is essentially a process of oppression, where those colonized become tools for the dominant colonial power to fulfill its desires. The colonized subjects unquestioningly serve the colonial state and are at its mercy. Those in power possess rights, while those without are obligated to comply.

- Simultaneously, the colonial state perceives itself as perpetually under threat from the people it governs. Therefore, its primary concern is to safeguard its interests, not those of the subjects, who are viewed as not only inferior but also inherently suspicious.

- This forms the core essence of colonial laws—to protect and secure the colonial state, not the colonized people. Laws like the Indian Penal Code (1860), which the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) aims to replace, were not solely intended to maintain law and order but also served as a means for the colonial state to legitimize its status as a potential victim, ostensibly under threat from the very populace it subjugated.

The Need for Change:

- A truly 'decolonized' or post-colonial law must reflect the altered relationship between citizens and the state. In this paradigm, independent citizens are meant to be served by the state and government they empower, rather than being forced into servitude. This fundamental shift should influence the process of law-making and the priorities and objectives of the law itself.

- Regrettably, the Bills fall short on these crucial criteria both in their creation and their content. Their framework views citizens with heightened suspicion and distrust, creating a sense that the state is almost in opposition to the citizens it is supposed to serve.

Overbroad and Constitutionally Suspect Provisions:

- The Bills introduce sweeping changes that undermine the rights of individuals while empowering the state. Most of the proposed alterations to the BNS, such as those related to organized crime, spreading false information that endangers sovereignty, acts that put sovereignty at risk, and terrorist acts, are excessively broad and raise constitutional concerns.

- This isn't merely a result of poor drafting but a deliberate attempt by the state to broaden the definition of offenses as much as possible, consequently expanding the scope of police powers. Many of these 'new' offenses already fall under existing laws, either special legislations or the Indian Penal Code, adding an extra layer of criminalization that serves to increase police authority without genuine necessity.

Expansion of Suppression:

- A significant aspect of colonization is the use of suppression under the guise of security by providing the executive branch unchecked police powers. This feature is deeply ingrained, with the Indian state actually increasing its police powers post-Independence.

- The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, significantly enhances these powers. For instance, it allows for longer periods of police custody than what the current Criminal Procedure Code permits. Certain provisions in the BNS, like those related to terrorist acts, grant the police considerably broader powers than even harsh laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

- This legislative trend of augmenting police powers, either directly or through other laws, perpetuates colonial-era authority rather than dismantling it.

Ignoring Police and Prison Reform:

- Despite widespread acknowledgment that the police and prison systems are vestiges of colonization, the decolonization envisioned by the Bills provides no avenue for their transformation. Without a fundamental reorientation of these institutions, calls for decolonization remain hollow.

- The Bills, by increasing the length of sentences across the board, as well as broadening police powers, essentially replicate the logic of colonial criminal law. The implications for India's overcrowded prisons and the impact on policing, including who is targeted and how, are either disregarded or given insufficient attention.

A Broader Perspective:

- The narrative of decolonization surrounding the Bills should not be considered in isolation. Concurrent developments in other areas of criminal law are pushing us back toward colonial methods and outcomes of lawmaking.

- For example, laws like the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022, which authorizes the police to take measurements of convicts, accused individuals, and even those taken into custody for preventive detention, further the colonial objectives of increased surveillance of the population and greater state control.

Conclusion:

The concept of decolonization is not solely about countering colonization but also embodies the optimistic pursuit of a populace shaping their own destinies. It heralds a shift in the relationship between the state and its citizens, with the focus squarely on serving the people. However, behind the rhetoric of decolonization in the criminal law Bills lurk exaggerated fears of colonial power, undermining the true essence of this transformative movement. To genuinely achieve decolonization, it is essential to challenge and reform not just the laws but also the institutions that perpetuate colonial legacies.

The Evolution of BRICS: A Long-term Perspective

Context:

In August, South Africa witnessed the induction of six new members into the BRICS grouping. While some may argue that this particular meeting failed to yield substantial results, it's crucial to view BRICS through a lens that considers its evolution over time rather than assessing it based on a single event.

Relevance:

GS – 02 (Groupings & Agreements Involving India)

Prelims:

- BRICS
- UNSC
- Beijing Declaration

Mains Question:

Discuss the evolution and significance of BRICS as an economic alliance and its potential impact on global dynamics. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Economic Compulsion as the Genesis of BRICS

- BRICS as a Counterbalance

- Seeking Alternatives in a Polarized World

- The Rise of Digital Currencies

- Africa: The Continent of Promise

Economic Compulsion as the Genesis of BRICS:

- BRICS emerged primarily from economic compulsion.

- Unlike alliances involved in military and security endeavors, BRICS does not engage in nation policing or peacekeeping operations. This grouping places its focus on economic prowess and potential.

- BRICS, comprising countries with robust economies, collectively accounts for 36% of the global GDP and is estimated to represent 47% of the world population by 2050. India and China, two BRICS members, are amongst the fastest-growing economies globally. Their burgeoning economic stature is expected to position them within the top three world economies by 2030.

BRICS as a Counterbalance:

- BRICS carries the potential to challenge the dominance of the G7 nations, which include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- Its expansion with new members presents an intriguing prospect for the global balance of power.

Seeking Alternatives in a Polarized World:

- In recent times, polarization between the United States and other regions has become increasingly evident, particularly during the Trump administration.

- Many countries find themselves at odds with the U.S.'s stance on China, resulting in trade conflicts and tariffs. This has prompted countries to seek alternatives that involve China, where BRICS serves as a platform where democratic nations such as India, South Africa, and Brazil can provide a counterweight to China's influence.

The Rise of Digital Currencies:

- The global economic landscape is witnessing a shift away from the dominance of the U.S. dollar. Digital currencies are poised to replace traditional currencies.

- India and China have made substantial strides in digital currency technology, surpassing the U.S. and Europe in this arena. Together, through BRICS, they have the potential to promote their currencies as alternatives to the U.S. dollar.

Africa: The Continent of Promise:

- Africa holds substantial promise for economic growth in the 21st century. France's intervention in Niger and Europe's treatment of migrants have cast a negative image over Europe in the eyes of Africans.

- Africa is increasingly looking towards China and India for partnership in trade and investment, believing in their development potential. Indian efforts to extend its influence within Africa, such as proposing full membership for the African Union at the G20 summit in New Delhi, are indicative of this emerging trend.

Way Forward:

- BRICS is not just a headline-making gathering; it's a long-term endeavour. Each summit contributes to the formation of networks and alliances that will shape the future.

- BRICS remains a grouping with enduring potential. As Goldman Sachs suggested back in 2003, "If things go right, in less than 40 years, the BRICs economies together could be larger than the G6 in U.S. dollar terms."

Conclusion:

- BRICS has evolved from a group driven by economic compulsion to a potentially transformative force on the global stage. It represents a counterbalance to existing power dynamics and offers an alternative narrative in an increasingly polarized world.

- As digital currencies rise and Africa emerges as a continent of promise, the long-term prospects for BRICS continue to gain momentum. It is not just a flash in the pan; it is a grouping poised to shape the future.

Electoral Bonds

About Electoral Bonds:

- Electoral Bonds are a type of financial instrument that can be used to make payments to political parties.

- The bonds are available in denominations of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh, and Rs. 1 crore, with no upper limit.

- The State Bank of India is authorized to issue and redeem these bonds, which have a fifteen-day validity period.

- These bonds can be redeemed in a registered political party's designated account.

- The bonds are available for purchase by any person (who is an Indian citizen or who is incorporated or founded in India) for ten days in each of the months of January, April, July, and October, as determined by the Central Government.

- Individuals can purchase bonds either alone or collectively with other individuals.

- The name of the donor is not included on the bond.

Background:

- The Electoral Bond Scheme serves as a deterrent to traditional under-the-table payments by requiring cheque and digital paper trails of transactions. However, the scheme's key components make it very controversial.
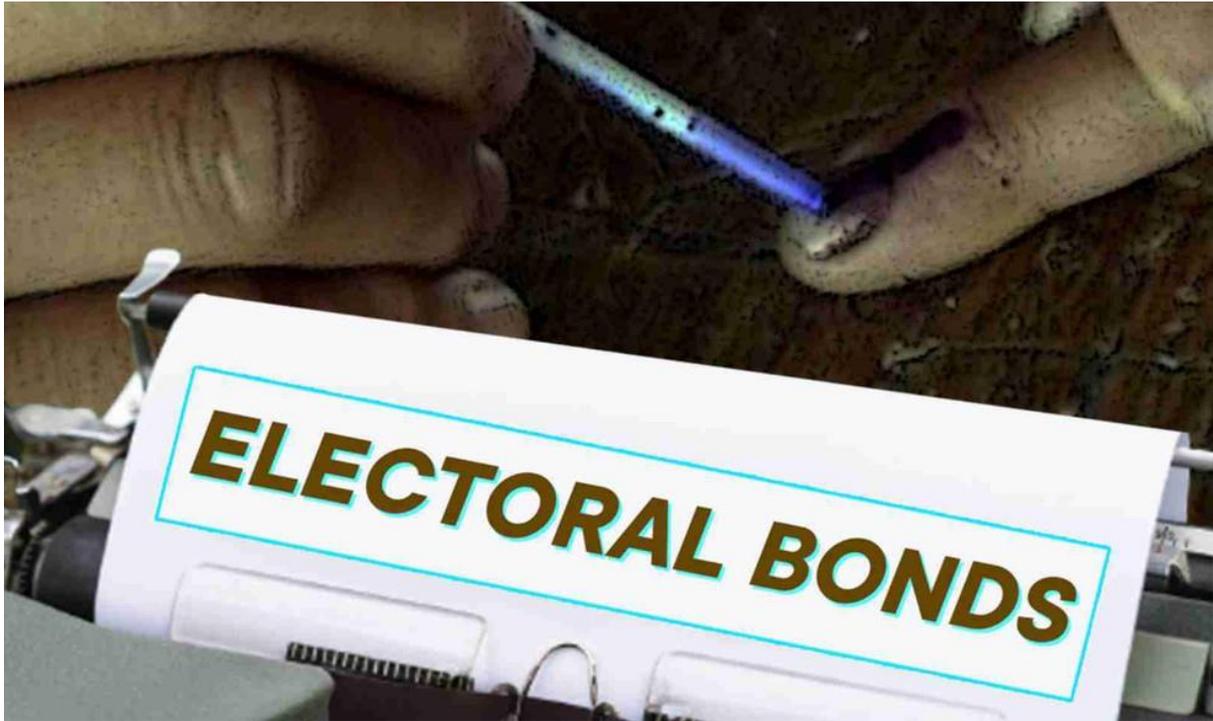
The Supreme Court Observed the Misuse of Electoral Bonds:

- Anonymity: Neither the donor (who could be an individual or a corporation) nor the political party is required to disclose the source of the donation.

- Because the bonds are bought through the State Bank of India (SBI), the government always knows who the contributor is.

- This knowledge asymmetry has the potential to skew the process in favor of whichever political party is in power at the moment.

- The removal of a 7.5 percent cap on corporate donations, the necessity to disclose political contributions in profit and loss statements, and the requirement that a corporation be three years old all undercut the scheme's aim.

- A shell company can anonymously donate an unlimited amount to a political party, providing a simple avenue for businesses to round-trip funds stashed in tax havens in exchange for a favor or advantage.

Defence by the Government:

- Only parties registered under the Representation of the People Act 1951 were eligible to accept donations through electoral bonds, and they could not have received fewer than 1% of the votes cast in the previous election.

- To Combat the Threat of Black Money in Politics: The Bonds include solely white money, as the amounts are paid only by check or demand draft.

KYC requirements are also adhered to.

- Support from the Election Commission of India (ECI): The ECI was not opposed to the bonds, but was concerned about the anonymity component.

- It also urged the court not to halt the bonds, claiming that the program is a step forward from the previous system of unaccountable cash funding.

Next Steps:

- Effective political financing regulation, as well as radical reforms, are required to break the vicious cycle of corruption and deterioration of democratic polity quality.

- To make the entire governance machinery more responsible and transparent, it is critical to close the gaps in current laws.

- Voters can also have a role in bringing about significant changes by requesting public awareness campaigns. Democracy would advance a notch if voters rejected candidates and parties that overspend or bribe them.

India-UAE relations

Relations between the two countries:

- In the United Arab Emirates, approximately 3 million Indians live in peace.

- India finds a ready partner in the UAE as it wants to strengthen economic engagement and security collaboration with the Gulf.

- With security concerns arising from the turbulence in West Asia and the increased threat of terrorism, the UAE finds a natural partner in India as it 'Look[s] East' seeking partners for its economic expansion.

- Due to its business-friendly environment, desire to invest in the Indian economy, and essential role in ensuring regional peace and stability, the UAE holds a unique position.

Creating a Long-Term Relationship:

- The UAE plays an important role in India's West Asian policy.

- The high-level visit by both sides has given this alliance a new lease on life.

- In 2017, the two parties inked a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement (CSP).

The UAE's inclination toward India is due to the following factors:

- As far as geopolitical conditions are concerned, Iran has often threatened to seal the Strait of Hormuz in the event of a conflict with Saudi Arabia or the United States. This will have a negative impact on the United Arab Emirates as well.

- The United Arab Emirates saw Pakistan as a partner and established a strong economic and security connection with it. However, Pakistan does not appear to be of much assistance to the UAE at the moment. Pakistan has failed to assist Saudi Arabia in its war against Iran-backed rebels in Yemen and has been unable to control terrorists operating from its territory across West Asia, despite domestic problems.

- Because the United States is on the verge of becoming hydrocarbon-independent, India is a vital source of oil and energy. The huge sovereign wealth funds of the United Arab Emirates can be a valuable resource in India's infrastructure development.

- Given the fact that five UAE diplomats were killed in an incident in Kandahar, Afghanistan, there has been a growing convergence between India and the UAE on the terror issue. Both countries spoke of the necessity to confront terror groups without distinction.

- Violent wars afflict countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has failed to deliver on its promises.

Economic Cooperation:

- The backbone of bilateral ties is trade and business.

- The United Arab Emirates has been one of India's most important FDI sources.

- After China and the United States, the UAE is India's third largest trading partner.

- The UAE supplies 8% of India's oil imports and is the country's fifth largest crude oil supplier.

Cooperation in Security and Defence Sector:

- Another important aspect of India-UAE relations is the expanding cooperation in the security and defence sectors.

- With the rise of radicalism in the Gulf and South Asia, India seeks to strengthen security cooperation with the UAE in order to tackle terrorist threats and radicalization.

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- The Indian and UAE air forces participated in 'Desert Eagle II,' a ten-day air combat exercise.

Concerns:

- In terms of investments, India's sluggish implementation is a key stumbling block.

- In recent years, bilateral trade has decreased dramatically.

- Labour from other nations, such as Filipinos and Bangladeshis, have been noticed to be replacing Indian workers.

Next Steps:

- India must ensure that investment initiatives are carried out with the necessary skills.

- Défense trade, food and agricultural products, as well as autos, are all potential sectors for increased bilateral commerce.

- Medical tourism is one area where India may be able to lure Emiratis.

- Indian firms with experience in the renewable energy sector are welcome to invest in the UAE.

- There is a need to improve cooperation in the defence sector through cooperative training programs.

Conclusion:

- The relationship between India and the United Arab Emirates has become a focal point of India's Extended Neighbourhood and Look West Policy in the region.

- Shared economic and geopolitical perspectives have prompted the two countries to strive to strengthen collaboration in a variety of areas, including investment, technology and the knowledge economy, and military and security.

- The Abraham Accords, which were just signed, have opened up a new window of opportunity for stronger India-UAE coordination and cooperation.

- Dr. S. Jaishankar, who recently visited the UAE, noted that the Accords would strengthen the UAE's position as a logistical hub for Asian countries, including India's—another encouraging sign that the India-UAE relationship is poised to reach new heights.

News Click non-case

Context:

The recent FIR lodged by the Delhi Police has brought forth a perplexing situation involving Prabir Purkayastha, the founder of NewsClick, and several others. This FIR appears to be an amalgamation of sweeping allegations that lack clarity on any specific offense, particularly one related to terrorism. Rather than citing concrete published content, the FIR accuses individuals of a wide range of offenses, including conspiring against national security and disrupting essential services. Strikingly, it does not pinpoint any overt unlawful or terrorist activity, raising questions about its legitimacy.

Relevance:

GS – 03 (Role of Media & Social Networking Sites in Internal Security Challenges, Role of External State & Non-State Actors)

Prelims:

- Major provisions of UAPA, UAPA Tribunal.

Mains Question:

Critically evaluate the implications of the FIR filed against Prabir Purkayastha and NewsClick, emphasizing the potential misuse of anti-terror laws and its impact on media freedom and individual rights in the Indian context. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Ambiguous Accusations and Lack of Specifics
- Misuse of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)
- Prolonged Detention and Its Chilling Impact
- Electoral Implications and the 'Chinese Conspiracy' Narrative
- Shell Companies and the Role of Legal Service
- Alarming Trend of Misusing Anti-Terror Laws

Ambiguous Accusations and Lack of Specifics:

- The FIR presents an intricate web of accusations without offering any reference to published content. These accusations span from conspiracies against national security to disruptions of essential services.

- However, the absence of specific details or evidence of unlawful activities perplexingly leaves the charges hanging in uncertainty.

Misuse of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA):

- The FIR's invocation of the UAPA, with its expansive and intricate terminology, raises concerns about the potential misapplication of anti-terror laws.

- This misinterpretation could potentially lead to individuals facing criminal charges for what could be perceived as mere 'thought crimes,' thus creating intricate challenges around freedom of expression and civil liberties.

Prolonged Detention and Its Chilling Impact:

- The utilization of the UAPA in this context is intricately designed to strategically extend the detention of dissenters and individuals who may have fallen out of favor with the authorities.

- This strategy intricately sends out an alarming message to the broader media community, creating an intricate atmosphere of fear and self-censorship.

Electoral Implications and the 'Chinese Conspiracy' Narrative:

- The potential electoral implications of this FIR present a complex scenario. It may be leveraged for political gains as the Lok Sabha elections draw nearer.

- The intricate narrative of a 'Chinese conspiracy' could be employed to shape public opinion and divert attention away from other intricate and pressing issues.

Shell Companies and the Role of Legal Service:

- The FIR's inclusion of alleged shell companies established by telecom firms, seemingly unrelated to the primary case, leaves us with perplexing questions about the necessity of a separate inquiry into these conduits for funding terrorism.

- Additionally, the mention of a lawyer who played a role in establishing a legal network for these companies' defense perplexingly suggests the potential criminalization of legal services, further complicating the situation.

Alarming Trend of Misusing Anti-Terror Laws:

- This case illuminates a concerning trend under the current regime, marked by intricate and potentially wrongful applications of anti-terror laws and the exploitation of national security sentiments.

- Such actions not only intricately undermine individual and media rights but also intricately pose a substantial threat to the intricate democratic principles that India steadfastly upholds.

Way Forward:

– Ensure that investigations related to terrorism and national security are conducted transparently and adhere to due process.

– Safeguard the invaluable principles of media freedom and individual rights by diligently upholding the principles of free speech and expression.

– Establish robust oversight mechanisms to intricately prevent the misuse of anti-terror laws for political or ideological agendas.

Conclusion:

The FIR lodged against NewsClick and its founder underscores the balance that must be struck between national security interests and individual liberties. While safeguarding the nation's interests is of paramount importance, it must not come at the intricate expense of

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stifling media freedom or infringing upon the intricate rights of citizens. Upholding democratic values and respecting civil liberties should intricately remain at the forefront of India's legal and law enforcement efforts.

Original Sin- Israel & Palestine issue

Context:

The recent attack by Hamas on Israel has brought into sharp focus the precarious situation prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories. This incident, characterized by its unexpected nature and the loss of numerous lives, underscores the fragile nature of conflicts involving non-state actors like Hamas and the pressing need to address the prolonged Israeli occupation.

Relevance:

GS – 02 (Bilateral Groupings & Agreements, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests)

Prelims:

Geography of Israel & Palestine, Arab Israel war of 1948, Abraham Accord, Jerusalem's al-Aqsa Mosque

Mains Question:

In light of the recent Hamas attack on Israel and the persistent Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, critically assess the repercussions of this event for regional stability and its broader implications. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Unpredictable Violence and Its Aftermath
- Escalation of Tensions in the West Bank
- Perpetual Israeli Occupation
- Ethical Dilemma Surrounding Indiscriminate Violence
- Imperative for Resolution of the Palestinian Issue
- Substance Over Superficial Interventions

Unpredictable Violence and Its Aftermath:

- The surprise attack launched by Hamas, resulting in a significant loss of life, has thrust into the spotlight the unpredictable nature of conflicts in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- This incident serves as a stark reminder of the perils associated with non-state actors, even when confronted by a formidable military and intelligence apparatus.

Escalation of Tensions in the West Bank:

- Preceding the Hamas attack, the West Bank had been grappling with escalating tensions and violence. Over the past year, a considerable number of casualties were recorded on both sides, indicating a deteriorating situation.

- Surprisingly, the Israeli government appeared to downplay these issues, prioritizing its own policy objectives.

Perpetual Israeli Occupation:

- The long-standing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories remains at the core of this conflict. Israel's continuous expansion of settlements in the West Bank, along with the erection of security barriers and checkpoints, has significantly curtailed the movement of Palestinians and has often resulted in the use of force.

- This prevailing status quo has contributed to the radicalization of Palestinians and the strengthening of Hamas.

Ethical Dilemma Surrounding Indiscriminate Violence:

- Hamas's deployment of indiscriminate violence against Israeli civilians has ignited ethical debates. Such tactics not only fail to advance the Palestinian cause but also expose Palestinian lives to heightened risks, given Israel's propensity to respond forcefully.

- The situation becomes increasingly intricate as civilian casualties mount on both sides.

Imperative for Resolution of the Palestinian Issue:

- The enduring Israeli occupation of Palestine remains a critical issue that has frequently been sidelined amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics in the region.

- While the Middle East has witnessed notable developments such as the Israel-Arab reconciliation and the Iran-Saudi détente, the fundamental problem of Palestinian occupation continues to fester.

- Effectively addressing this issue is paramount for establishing lasting peace and stability in the region.

Substance Over Superficial Interventions:

- It is imperative to recognize that military operations alone cannot redress the root causes of this protracted conflict. Previous endeavours, including ground incursions and aerial bombardments, have failed to weaken Hamas.

- While the geopolitical landscape of the region has evolved, the occupation of Palestine, often referred to as the "original sin" of the region, remains unresolved. It is imperative to transition from superficial interventions to comprehensive efforts aimed at resolving the underlying issue.

Way Forward:

– Prioritize diplomatic initiatives that focus on addressing the fundamental issue of Palestinian occupation, involving regional and international stakeholders.

– Foster constructive dialogue and negotiations between Israel and Palestinian representatives to identify a mutually acceptable resolution.

– Promote economic development and humanitarian assistance to alleviate the plight of Palestinians residing in challenging circumstances.

Conclusion:

The recent attack by Hamas on Israel underscores the persisting conflicts in the Middle East. While condemning acts of violence is essential, genuine progress toward peace can only be achieved by addressing the fundamental issue of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. A comprehensive and diplomatic approach is indispensable for paving the way toward a more stable and harmonious region.

Affirmative Action and Gender Equity

Context:

The World Economic Forum's 17th Global Gender Gap Report, released on June 20, 2023, provides a stark revelation: at the current pace of progress, it will take 131 years to bridge the global gender gap. This chasm stretches even further, to 149 years, in densely populated South Asian countries, including India. This article embarks on a journey to explore the significance of affirmative action, particularly gender-based reservations, and underscores the importance of transforming tightly guarded spaces into more inclusive arenas.

Relevance:

GS – 02 (Issues Related to Women and Children)

Prelims:

Global Gender Gap Report 2023, WEF, Global Gender Gap Index, Gender Parity, Local Governance.

Mains Question:

Examine the argument against gender-based reservations and discuss the role of affirmative action in promoting gender equity. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Affirmative Action
- Women: Competence and Potential
- Reservation and the Competence Conundrum
- A Fresh Beginning
- Barriers Faced by Women in Leadership Roles
- History of Women in Leadership
- Privilege and Leadership
- The Role of Regressive Views

Affirmative Action:

- Affirmative action, most prominently manifested in reservations, emerges as a compelling tool to rectify historical injustices and level the playing field for marginalized groups.

- It hinges on the idea that creating opportunities for these groups is not synonymous with compromising efficiency or competence. It challenges the misconceived notion that it leads to inefficiency or incompetency.

Can the **GENDER PAY GAP** be closed?

Women: Competence and Potential

- Women are not inferior to men. Any perceived incompetencies, even if they arise, tend to be transient. These shortcomings can be swiftly overcome when women are granted opportunities for skill development and empowerment.

- Statistical evidence supports the competence of women, especially in academic pursuits. A higher number of women graduate from colleges compared to men, and they actively join the workforce.

- However, a trend emerges as one ascends the hierarchy within various domains – the presence of women dwindles that is not an indictment of their capabilities but a reflection of the pervasive dominance of men in leadership positions.

Reservation and the Competence Conundrum:

- One of the central contentions against reservations is that it would dilute the competence of the chosen candidates. However, this notion is empirically flawed.

- **Data underscores that women often outperform men in academics**. Moreover, they are more likely to graduate from colleges and enter the workforce.

- Paradoxically, when we observe leadership roles, the number of women diminishes. This reduction is not due to a deficit in competence but is an outcome of the prevailing male-dominated landscape.

A Fresh Beginning:

- The dawn of September 2023 marked a new chapter in India's parliamentary history. It witnessed the long-awaited passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, also known as the Constitution (One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023.

- This momentous event was distinguished by overwhelming support from both Houses of Parliament. It symbolizes a groundbreaking step towards creating a more inclusive political sphere.

- India's founding fathers might have championed universal adult suffrage, but the role of women in shaping the nation's political landscape remained notably limited.

Barriers Faced by Women in Leadership Roles:

- Globally, women confront societal appreciation primarily in supportive and emotional roles rather than in leadership positions. Ambitious women are often met with resistance. The example of Hillary Clinton stands as a stark reminder.

- Despite her political experience and acumen dwarfing her competitors, the world's so-called pinnacle of democracy opted for an inexperienced male leader. This underscores the resistance to women in leadership roles.

History of Women in Leadership:

- A historical analysis of women in leadership reveals a pattern. Few women attained these positions solely through merit, industry, and competence. In most cases, their entry into leadership roles was prompted by the disqualification of men or political expediency.

- Even in the Indian political arena, women leaders were often chosen because they were considered expendable, yet their innate capabilities defied these initial perceptions.

Privilege and Leadership:

- Privilege often emerges as a common factor for women who ascend to leadership positions. Women leaders often possess privileges such as higher education, influential mentors or family support, and often hail from upper classes or castes.

- A potential survey would likely reveal that a significant percentage of women legislators have enjoyed university and higher education, a trend not as predominant among male legislators. These privileges aside, women often require longer journeys to reach leadership roles.

- Even Indira Gandhi, with her elite background and early political involvement, did not assume the prime minister's mantle immediately after Jawaharlal Nehru's demise in 1964. She had to wait until 1966 after Lal Bahadur Shastri's passing. In contrast, Rajiv Gandhi, her son, ascended to power swiftly after his mother's assassination. These instances raise the question of whether an ordinary Indian woman, devoid of nepotistic advantages, can secure a prominent leadership role in a timely fashion.

The Role of Regressive Views:

- The persistence of regressive views on gender equality, held both by men and women, is a significant hurdle. Even progressive individuals, like C. Rajagopalachari, displayed regressive attitudes when opposing Radhabai Subbarayan's candidacy for a general seat.

- Mulayam Singh's claim in 2010 that the previous iteration of the women's reservation Bill primarily served educated, urban, and elite women exemplifies this regressive mindset. His stance, mirrored by Lalu Prasad Yadav, was less a testament to their concern for women and more a consequence of fear that it would diminish men's space in the patriarchal realm of elections.

Way Forward:

- Reservations can be a vital catalyst for closing the gender gap, but they should not be the sole remedy. The present Women's Reservation Bill marks a commendable first step.

- It is now crucial to implement this legislation thoughtfully, redefining seat allocation based on the 1991 Census, akin to the approach taken for Scheduled Caste seats by the Delimitation Commission. This should not wait for the next Census and the subsequent delimitation exercise.

Democracy in the Maldives

Context:

The Maldives, often overlooked in global affairs, recently made headlines with its presidential election. This small nation, composed of 1,192 islands in South Asia, sent a clear message: democracy is alive and well. The election's key issues revolved around the concerns of voters, particularly the younger generation, focusing on their economic well-being, including employment, housing, improvements to the tourism industry, education, and healthcare. While some Western news agencies portrayed the election as a showdown between China and India, resulting in India's defeat, this perspective ignores the complexities of how the Maldives operates.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Bilateral groupings and Agreements)

Prelims:

Maldives, Belt and Road Initiative

Mains Question:

How does the recent presidential election in the Maldives exemplify the functioning of democracy and the dynamics of power transition in the context of a small island nation, and what implications might this hold for the principles of democratic governance? (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Five Men, Shared Future

- Three Reasons for Defeat

- The Path Ahead

- Notes for New Delhi

Five Men, Shared Future:

- The Maldives has come a long way since the era of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who served as President from 1978 to 2008.

- The nation transitioned to a multiparty democracy under a new constitution. It saw leaders like Mohamed Nasheed, Mohamed Waheed Hassan, Abdulla Yameen, and Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

- The most recent election, however, resulted in a shift of power to Mohamed Muizzu, the opposition candidate, who is backed by an alliance of the Progressive Party of Maldives and the People's National Congress.

Three Reasons for Defeat:

- First, the Maldivian history reveals a pattern of not re-electing incumbents, as people feel empowered to change leadership through the democratic process.

- Second, the split within the ruling MDP party, coupled with Mohamed Nasheed's departure, contributed to Solih's defeat. The rivalry between Nasheed's ambition and Solih's attachment to the presidential chair went unresolved, resulting in a loss for Solih.

- Third, the ruling party struggled to counter the disinformation campaign launched by the opposition alliance, a campaign that unnecessarily brought geopolitics into a domestic election. The departure of Nasheed, a skilled communicator, left the MDP without its key figure.

The Path Ahead:

- With the election results, rapid developments are expected. Mohamed Muizzu, the President-elect, has requested the shifting of former President Yameen from prison to house arrest. Yameen, serving an 11-year sentence for corruption, is seen as a mentor to Muizzu. The dynamics between these men will be a significant aspect of Maldivian politics to watch.

- In the realm of external relations, the new administration faces choices, including whether to revert to Yameen's 'India Out' campaign, continue the 'India First' policy, or adopt a calibrated approach that balances relations with key partners, especially China and India.

Notes for New Delhi:

- For India, the shifting political landscape in the Maldives presents both opportunities and challenges. People-to-people relations remain positive, bolstered by development work, community projects, and capacity-building programs for Maldivian youth.

- India plays a significant role in tourism, imports, and investments, and stands ready to provide assistance during emergencies.

- However, India can do more to strengthen regional cooperation, particularly in maritime security and the Blue Economy through forums like the Colombo Security Conclave. It should also consider expanding its diplomatic reach by inviting the Maldives as an observer in The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Additionally, allocating additional resources to foster mutual understanding and trust with the Maldives is crucial.

Conclusion:

The Maldives' recent presidential election signifies the nation's commitment to democracy and the need to address pressing economic concerns. Understanding the intricacies of the political landscape in this island nation is crucial to formulating effective foreign policy, especially for India. Cooperation, development, and diplomacy are essential for building strong and lasting relations with this small yet strategically important neighbour.

Women's quota — rhetoric and reality

Context:

The recent passage of the Women's Reservation Bill in both Houses of Parliament has been celebrated as a progressive step. However, this conditional legislation comes with certain realities that require a closer look. The implementation of the Women's Reservation Law is contingent upon the conduct of a census and delimitation of constituencies, conditions that might not be justified.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government Policies and Interventions)

Mains Question:

Examine the implications of linking the Women's Reservation Law to the conduct of a census and delimitation of constituencies and discuss the challenges and justifications for such conditions in the context of promoting gender equality in legislative bodies. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Under-Representation of Women

- Issue of Delimitation

- North-South Divide

- Exclusion of Women from Delimitation

- Comparison with SC/ST Reservation

Under-Representation of Women:

- The Women's Reservation Law aims to address the under-representation of women in legislative bodies.

- Statistics reveal that a small percentage of seats in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are occupied by women.

- Example: In Lok Sabha, only 15% of the maximum allowed 550 seats are occupied by women, and in the Rajya Sabha, just 12% of the 250 members are women. This highlights the need of addressing this gender imbalance in political representation.

- India's ranking of 141 out of 185 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report highlights the need for addressing gender disparities in political representation.

Issue of Delimitation:

- Article 81 (2) (a) of the Constitution and Article 170 provide the basis for designing constituencies, primarily using population as a criterion.

- Delimitation, a contentious issue in India, is tied to population expansion with limited consideration for development and family planning.

- The postponement of delimitation for years highlights the challenges in this process.

North-South Divide:

- The proposed delimitation, coupled with demographic differences between North and South India, could create disparities in political power and resource allocation, potentially favouring certain Northern states.

- Scholar Nilakantan R.S. has highlighted the stark differences in performance between South and North Indian states, especially in sectors like health, education, and the economy.

Exclusion of Women from Delimitation:

- The inclusion of women's reservation with delimitation overlooks the unique requirements of each and the need for a separate approach for women's representation.

- Also, the demand for a census specifically for women's reservation is questioned as the Women's Reservation Law has different criteria and objectives compared to delimitation.

- The merger of the demand for women's reservation with the uncertain delimitation process in a constitutional amendment has raised concerns about the legislation's approach and democratic transparency.

Comparison with SC/ST Reservation:

- The criteria for reservation based on population, as seen in the case of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) reservation, are not directly relevant to women's quota, given the nearly equal gender distribution.

Way Forward:

The linkage of the Women's Reservation Law with the delimitation process and the associated conditions need re-evaluation. A separate approach, with clarity on the unique requirements of women's representation, should be considered. The complexities of conditional legislation and its implications for constitutional amendments require careful scrutiny.

Conclusion:

The Women's Reservation Law, while celebrated for its intent, raises questions about the conditions tied to its implementation. The linkage with delimitation and population-based criteria may not be suitable for addressing gender disparities in legislative bodies. A re-evaluation of the legislation's approach, in line with modern constitutional principles, is necessary to promote gender equality effectively.

Closing the gender pay gap in the workforce

Context:

In the past, conventional economic wisdom attributed women's absence from the labour force to their roles as caregivers and pay disparities between women and men were ascribed to differences in education. However, Claudia Goldin, the 2023 Nobel Prize laureate in Economics, challenged this orthodoxy. She asserted that the solution to the problems of missing and underpaid women lay not within their homes but in the market.

Relevance:

GS – 02 (Issues Related to Women, Gender, Employment, Issues Relating to Development)

Prelims:

Women's labour Force Participation, Wage Disparities, Gender Disparity, Female labour Force Participation Rate, Human Capital Development.

Mains Question:

How can a more balanced work-life environment be created to enhance gender equality in labour market outcomes, and what role does it play in reshaping labour market dynamics?

Dimensions of the Article:

- Claudia Goldin's view
- The All-Consuming Responsibility Barrier
- The Culprit: "Greedy Work"
- Resonance with Juliet Schor's Insights
- Optimizing Women's Employment in India
- Reshaping Work and Social Environments
- Overcoming Time Demands

Claudia Goldin's view:

- Claudia Goldin's ground breaking work spans half a century, giving a name and voice to the issues faced by women in the labour force. She meticulously traces the transformation of the American economy from agrarian to industrial to service-based, highlighting the historical exclusion of women from market activities.

- As economic production shifted from homes to factories and later to offices, schools, and hospitals, women found opportunities in the labour market. However, persistent wage disparities remained, challenging the belief that educational attainment alone could bridge the gender pay gap.

The All-Consuming Responsibility Barrier:

- Professor Goldin's research emphasizes that the persistent gender wage gap is a consequence of women's limited ability to take on roles with all-encompassing responsibilities.

- The demands of parenting often make it difficult for women to engage in jobs that require long hours and irregular schedules. For instance, the private equity partner who remains committed to late-night meetings and dinners may receive significant bonuses and promotions, while these demands clash with the responsibilities of child-rearing.

- Often, women are pressured into assuming additional family duties, while men focus on their careers.

The Culprit: "Greedy Work":

- The root of this wage inequality, according to Professor Goldin, is the concept of "greedy work." This demanding work model requires extraordinary efforts from employees, offering high salaries, bonuses, stock options, and fast promotions in return.

- Rising income inequality incentivizes couples to prioritize increasing family income through specialization rather than striving for gender equity within the household. Professor Goldin proposes that the solution to this problem lies in reshaping workplaces to reduce the reliance on superhuman efforts, promote moderate work hours, and establish predictable schedules.

Resonance with Juliet Schor's Insights:

- Claudia Goldin's research aligns with the work of Juliet Schor, who argued that companies benefited more from hiring two workers with extended hours than three workers with regular hours.

- This approach reduced costs related to health insurance, office space, and personnel services. This resonates with the experiences of Indian workers juggling late-night calls with their American counterparts, all while assisting their children with homework, underlining the contemporary relevance of this issue.

Optimizing Women's Employment in India:

- Although women's employment rates in India remain relatively low, favorable trends suggest that this situation can change. Building upon Professor Goldin's insights, the

growth of the service sector offers opportunities for women not available in manufacturing.

- Increased education levels enhance employability, and declining fertility rates free up women's time. The question is, how can we capitalize on these promising developments?

Reshaping Work and Social Environments:

- To fully leverage these positive trends, it is imperative to encourage greater male participation in household work and childcare. Equally important is the need to reconfigure work and social environments to support a work-life balance for both men and women.

- This entails work structures that respect employees' time, discouraging excessive working hours, which research shows do not necessarily translate to increased productivity and can even lead to more errors and injuries in certain occupations.

Overcoming Time Demands:

- Reining in not only the 'greedy workplace' but also institutions that demand excessive time is crucial. Schools that rely on parental supervision for homework and urban planning that places homes far from workplaces add to the challenges.

- Creating supportive institutions that enable a better work-life balance is essential for realizing Claudia Goldin's vision of gender convergence in labour market outcomes.

Way Forward:

- The path forward involves creating a work and social environment that accommodates the needs of both men and women, focusing on balance rather than excessive work hours.

- Encouraging greater male involvement in family responsibilities is equally vital. Moreover, we must challenge institutions that contribute to time demands, such as schools and urban development patterns.

Conclusion:

Claudia Goldin's work has been instrumental in acknowledging and addressing the persistent wage gap between women and men. By advocating for changes in workplace structures and challenging the culture of 'greedy work,' we can work toward a more balanced labour market. This not only ensures gender equality but also benefits society as a whole by promoting healthier work-life dynamics.

The Centre and the Collegium

Context:

The Centre's commitment to notifying Justice Siddharth Mridul's appointment as Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court has been a positive step towards addressing the issues surrounding judicial appointments lately. Furthermore, the government's willingness to consider 70 recommended names for High Court judgeships demonstrates an increased receptiveness to the Collegium's suggestions.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Judiciary)

Prelims:

- Appointment of Judges, Article 224A, Collegium System

Mains Question:

Discuss the significance of adhering to timelines in the judicial appointment process and its impact on the relationship between the Centre and the Collegium. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Centre's Assurance and the Collegium's Recommendations
- The Transfer of Justice M.V. Muralidaran
- The Centre's Handling of Collegium Recommendations

The Centre's Assurance and the Collegium's Recommendations:

- The Centre's prompt assurance to notify Justice Siddharth Mridul's appointment as Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court reflects a growing willingness to collaborate with the Collegium.

- The government's further consideration of 70 recommended names for High Court judgeships signifies a significant shift in its approach. The delay in confirming Justice Mridul's appointment raised eyebrows, and it was linked to the state government's input on the matter.

- This delay was somewhat perplexing, considering the Collegium had endorsed Justice Mridul's appointment on July 5. Such delays can disrupt the judicial system and hinder the delivery of justice.

The Transfer of Justice M.V. Muralidaran:

- Justice M.V. Muralidaran's transfer from Manipur to the Calcutta High Court, as proposed by the Collegium, remains pending. This transition's timeline is uncertain, and it is essential to observe how long the Centre takes to finalize the transfer.

- Justice Muralidaran played a significant role in the Manipur government's consideration of including the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes category, an action that triggered ethnic tensions in the region.

- The fact that the Supreme Court did not issue a stay order on his directive suggests the Centre's concerns about further escalating tensions.

The Centre's Handling of Collegium Recommendations:

- There have been instances where the Centre exhibited selective treatment of the Collegium's recommendations. Some names recommended multiple times were returned to the Collegium.

- The appointment of Justice S. Muralidhar as Chief Justice of the Madras High Court faced prolonged delays, prompting the Collegium to withdraw its recommendation. Similarly, Justice T. Raja's transfer to the Rajasthan High Court was ignored by the government until his retirement.

- This strained relationship between the government and the Collegium is evident and often reaches a point of contention.

Way Forward:

- The conflict surrounding judicial appointments must be addressed. The appointment process should be streamlined in line with the Supreme Court's directive in April 2021, which set clear timelines for the government to process Collegium recommendations and voice any reservations.

- If the Collegium reiterates any recommendation, the government should implement it within three to four weeks. Regardless of the shortcomings of the Collegium process, it is essential to maintain the legal precedent that a reiterated decision is binding on the government to preserve the integrity of the judiciary.

Conclusion:

The Centre's commitment to timely judicial appointments and its cooperation with the Collegium is essential for the effective functioning of the judicial system. The delays and selective handling of recommendations should be addressed to maintain the credibility of the appointment process. A more streamlined and cooperative approach between the Centre and the Collegium will ultimately benefit the Indian judiciary and uphold the principles of justice and fairness.

The BRI at 10, some hits, many misses

Context:

The Third **Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation** recently took place in Beijing, China, from October 17-18, reigniting discussions about Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Background:

- This initiative, often likened to China's version of the Marshall Plan, symbolizes China's ambition to evolve from a regional power to a global force. China recognized the need to establish new transport and trade routes to reduce its reliance on the vulnerable Strait of Malacca.

- Additionally, China created the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with a substantial $100 billion fund to challenge other lending institutions. The AIIB supports the early objectives of the BRI. President Xi aimed to promote the use of local currency in trade, reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar and positioning China as an economic hub.

- The BRI not only projected China's global influence but also served as a vehicle for President Xi to establish himself as a global statesman. It became a significant part of the Communist Party of China's constitution and the 14th Five-Year Plan. The Chinese government's white paper on the BRI highlighted that over 200 BRI cooperation agreements had been signed with over 150 countries, and the total two-way investment between China and partner nations from 2013 to 2022 amounted to $380 billion. President Xi emphasized the initiative's potential to address global infrastructure deficits, including the lack of electricity, clean water, and broadband access affecting millions.

Relevance:

GS – 02, GS – 03(Infrastructure, Groupings & Agreements Involving India and/or Affecting India's Interests) (Bilateral Groupings & Agreements)

Prelims:

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

ONE BELT, ONE ROAD

Mains Question:

Critically assess the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its implications for global infrastructure development and China's geopolitical influence. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

- Controversies and Challenges

- Global Responses and Alternatives

- India's Stance and Concerns

Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The BRI, often compared to the Marshall Plan, marks China's aspiration to elevate itself to a global powerhouse from a regional player. It seeks to establish alternative trade routes to reduce dependency on the vulnerable Strait of Malacca, a critical economic lifeline.

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), endowed with a substantial $100 billion fund, aligns with the early goals of the BRI. This financial institution enables China to promote local currency in trade and challenge the dominance of the U.S. dollar.

- The BRI serves as a tool for President Xi to establish his image as a global statesman and extend China's influence worldwide.

- Its inclusion in the Communist Party of China's constitution and the 14th Five-Year Plan underscores its political importance.

- The BRI aims to bridge the vast global infrastructure gap by investing in **motorways, power plants, ports, railway networks, and digital infrastructure**.

- The **World Bank estimates that approximately $1.5 trillion annually through 2030**, or 4.5% of the GDP of low- and middle-income countries, is required to close this gap.

Controversies and Challenges:

- The BRI faces various criticisms and challenges- **ecological damage, displacement of local populations, disputes over compensation, and labor unrest**.

- Case studies from countries like Indonesia, Laos, and Pakistan reveal complex issues undermining the BRI's 'win-win cooperation' tagline.

Global Responses and Alternatives:

- The "**United States-Japan infrastructure investment alternatives**" during the Trump era and the '**Build Back Better World**' initiative under the Biden administration has tried to counter the BRI.

- These initiatives aim to channelize private capital into areas like climate change, energy security, health care, digital technology, and gender equity.

India's Stance and Concerns:

- India has constantly **opposed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** due to sovereignty issues and concerns about unsustainable debt.

- India's stance hasn't impacted the BRI's narrative, emphasizing the challenges of convincing international partners.

- The **G-20 Delhi summit presented an alternative in the form of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC),** which seeks to connect India, West Asia, and Europe through railways, shipping lines, and infrastructure projects, including clean hydrogen export pipelines.

Conclusion:

- China's aspirations to become a global powerhouse through the BRI have gained momentum, but they also face growing skepticism. The key lies in balancing infrastructure development with environmental sustainability, ensuring local communities benefit, and upholding the principle of 'win-win cooperation.'

- The future of the BRI remains a topic of great interest as China navigates economic challenges and seeks to reinvigorate this ambitious "project of the century."

Reevaluating Marriage Rights: The Imperative of Inclusivity

Context:

The recent Supreme Court ruling in the case of Supriyo Chakraborty has brought a critical matter to the forefront of Indian jurisprudence. The judgment underscores a vital issue – the right to marry, especially for same-sex individuals.

Background:

- Regrettably, the Court ruled that there is **no fundamental right to marry in India**, and by extension, it prohibited same-sex marriages.

- The Court also unanimously mandated the protection of same-sex couples from harassment.

- It further issued directives to sensitize authorities and established a committee to address various related matters. However, a fundamental flaw in the Court's decision, one that needs correction sooner rather than later arose.

- In 2009, the **Delhi High Court made a landmark decision** in the **Naz Foundation case**, **effectively decriminalizing non-heterosexual relations** by reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

- **Section 377 of the IPC had earlier criminalized** such relationships, subjecting individuals to severe penalties, including imprisonment for up to ten years.

- The LGBTQI communities had long suffered due to the implications of this law, enduring blackmail, torture, violence, and harassment by the police, their families, and even their lovers. Individuals from the LGBTQI community were forced to hide their sexual orientation out of fear.

- Prior to the **Navtej Johar case**, the Court, in the NALSA judgment, recognized that individuals have the right to identify their own gender. They could be born as males but have the **right to self-identify** as females or transgender persons.

- Subsequently, Parliament passed the **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act**, providing a framework for changing one's gender and safeguarding against discrimination in various establishments, whether private or state-owned.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Judiciary, Government policies and interventions, Gender)

Mains Question:

Examine the implications of the Supreme Court's ruling in the Supriyo Chakraborty case on the right to marry, especially for same-sex couples, and evaluate the need for revisiting this decision in light of human rights and constitutional principles. (250 words, 15 marks)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Human Rights Declaration
- Expansive Interpretation
- Irony in the Ruling

Human Rights Declaration:

- India, as an original signatory to the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, is bound to align its legislation with this foundational document.

- The Indian Constitution has been significantly influenced by the UDHR, and Indian courts have consistently interpreted the Constitution in light of international covenants and the UDHR.

- **Article 16 of the UDHR explicitly affirms the right to marry for individuals without limitations based on race, nationality, or religion**. Under the UDHR, the right to marry is unequivocally recognized as a fundamental human right.

- Consequently, it can be argued that this human right extends to a fundamental right within the Indian context, even if not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution.

Expansive Interpretation:

- The Supreme Court of India has interpreted Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, to encompass the right to dignity.

- This interpretation has paved the way for recognizing positive rights such as the right to education, food, and a healthy environment.

- The UDHR provisions have been cited by the Supreme Court to elaborate rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, emphasizing the interconnection between international human rights norms and domestic legal interpretations.

- Given this approach, the right to marry should logically be read into Articles 19 and 21, especially when the right to intimate relations is already recognized, as evidenced by the Supriyo Chakraborty judgment itself.

Irony in the Ruling:

- The Court does permit marriage between a transgender individual and a cisgender individual. This recognition is a positive development. However, the irony lies in the fact that, according to the judgment's logic, marriage is deemed legal only between a biological man and a biological woman.

- Despite the Court's commendable shift from biological sex to self-identified gender, as in accordance with the NALSA judgment, it is perplexing that a similar leap could not be made from biological sex to sexual orientation.

- Failure to recognize same-sex marriages not only discriminates against these couples but also perpetuates the notion that they are "unsuitable for marriage," which now bears the stamp of approval from the highest court. This effectively relegates them to a second-class status in society.

Way Forward:

- Rectifying this anomaly is imperative, not only from a human rights perspective but also to foster a more inclusive and egalitarian society. The rights of LGBTQI individuals, including their right to marry, should not be compromised. The struggle for these rights is akin to a journey marked by setbacks and triumphs.

- The Supreme Court's decision in Supriyo Chakraborty, denying the fundamental right to marry, especially for same-sex couples, is a departure from internationally accepted human rights norms and the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

- India's historical commitment to human rights, as reflected in its association with the UDHR, necessitates a re-evaluation of this decision.

- The Court's expansive interpretation of constitutional provisions in the past should logically extend to recognizing the right to marry as a fundamental right.

Women, marriage and labour market participation

Context:

The declining trend in women's labour force participation is a significant concern, as it has consequences not only for women's economic empowerment but also for overall economic progress.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Issues Related to Women, Gender, Employment, Issues Relating to Development)

Mains Question:

Analyze the factors contributing to the declining labour force participation of women and discuss the economic implications of this trend. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Global Trends in Women's Labour Force Participation

- Challenges Faced by Married Women

- Labour Market Entry and Gender Disparities

- Solutions to Promote Women's Empowerment

Global Trends in Women's Labour Force Participation:

- Globally, the women participation in the labour force remains relatively low.

- According to World Bank in 2022, the global LFPR for women was 47.3%. Despite advancements in global economies, the LFPR of women in developing nations has seen a persistent decline.

- In India, the female LFPR had dropped from 28% to 24% between 1990 and 2022. This decline has hindered women's economic growth and their ability to fulfil their potential.

- Economist Claudia Goldin (1994) has noted that the LFPR of adult women exhibits a U-shaped pattern during economic growth. Initially, this decline is attributed to the transition from household and family-based production to the broader market, along with a strong income effect. However, as economies progress, the income effect weakens, and the substitution effect strengthens.

Challenges Faced by Married Women:

- After marriage, many factors lead to a decrease in women's LFPR which include limited educational opportunities, reduced mobility due to growing family responsibilities, and societal resistance to women working outside their homes.

- Marriage often amplifies domestic obligations and introduces social and cultural barriers that affect women's ability to engage in the workforce.

- Various factors contribute to the reduced labour force participation of married women. These factors include religious and caste affiliations, geographical location, household wealth, and societal norms related to women's employment.

Labour Market Entry and Gender Disparities:

- When women decide to re-enter the workforce after marriage, they often prefer job opportunities that offer flexibility and are close to their homes. Women also face gender-based professional costs due to societal constraints, which lead to disparities in career choices, income, age at marriage, and fertility decisions.

- Higher strata women tend to adhere to traditional roles, focusing on domestic responsibilities.

- In contrast, women from lower strata are more likely to work outside the home due to economic necessity driven by poverty.

- Analysing the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) based on the Usual Principal Status (UPS) and Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status (UPSS) categories in India's NSSO Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reveals a significant difference in employment rates for married women.

- Data shows that marriage has a substantial impact on women's labour market outcomes.

Solutions to Promote Women's Empowerment:

- To address this issue, it is crucial to consider solutions that empower women during a period of economic growth.

- Improve accessibility and quality of day-care services for employed women. The absence of such services often discourages female labour force participation.

- Initiatives like the **National Creche Scheme for The Children of Working Mothers** are steps in the right direction, but the implementation of such schemes, both in the public and private sectors, is imperative.

- Creating work environments that prioritize women's needs and well-being, providing secure transportation options, and expanding part-time job opportunities can serve as catalysts for greater female labour force participation in India.

Conclusion:

The declining participation of women in the labour force, particularly after marriage, presents a complex challenge with significant economic implications. Empowering women in the workforce is not only a matter of economic necessity but also a fundamental step toward gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

India-Qatar Relations: The Imperative of Rescuing Indian Nationals Facing Death Penalty

Context:

The recent decision by a Qatari court to impose the death penalty on eight Indian nationals, accusing them of espionage, has stirred widespread concern in the Nation.

Background:

- The trial was highly secretive, offering little information about the charges and the evidence against the former Indian Navy personnel, arrested in August 2022. Despite pleas from their families and Indian diplomats, Qatar has been reticent in sharing details of the case, and the judgment itself hasn't been communicated to New Delhi.

- Leaked reports have hinted that the men were accused of sharing classified information related to the stealth submarine program they were involved with, allegedly to a third country—a claim vehemently refuted by their families.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Government policies and interventions, India and its neighbourhood)

Prelims:

- India Qatar Relations

- Naval Exercises

- Exports and Imports related to Qatar

- Land boundary and adjoining areas of Qatar

Dimensions of the Article:

- Diplomatic Dilemma and Lack of Transparency
- Geopolitical Ramifications

Diplomatic Dilemma and Lack of Transparency

- The opaque nature of the trial and the absence of substantial details pose a significant obstacle for India to navigate this sensitive situation effectively.
- Clarity and openness from Qatar regarding the charges against the accused individuals are imperative.

Geopolitical Ramifications

- While speculations suggest that the motives behind the verdict might be linked to the perceived differences between Qatar and India over their stance on the Israel-Palestine issue.
- However, India's focus should be on ensuring the safety and justice for its citizens.
- Negotiating this complex diplomatic scenario demands careful handling to safeguard India's foreign policy interests and the rights of its citizens.
- India must navigate this situation while considering the mutual benefits and the significance of maintaining robust and amicable ties with Qatar.

Conclusion:

The Indian government must act promptly and employ a well-thought-out strategy to extend the best possible support to the accused individuals during the appeals process. Immediate steps should involve leveraging high-level diplomatic channels, potentially involving the Prime Minister, to advocate for clemency and a potential commutation of the sentence, possibly allowing the serving of the term in India.

Shah calls for a uniform anti-terrorism structure under NIA in all States

Context

Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated on Thursday that, in addition to a ruthless approach, a consistent anti-terrorism framework should be built in all states under the supervision of the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

What is the NIA?

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is the primary counter-terrorism law enforcement agency in India.

- The NIA was established in 2008, following the Mumbai terror assault of that year.

- The NIA's goal is to look into any crime that jeopardizes India's integrity, security, or sovereignty.

- Without special approval from the states, the NIA has the jurisdiction to investigate terror-related crimes beyond state lines.

- NIA is established under the Act of NIA Act, of 2008.

What are the roles of the NIA?

- **Terrorism Case Investigation**: The NIA's principal job is to investigate and manage terrorism-related cases. This comprises incidents involving terrorist activities, insurgencies, and other kinds of violent extremism that endanger India's security and sovereignty.

- **cases with National and Cross-Border consequences:** The NIA has the authority to examine instances with national and cross-border consequences. This means it can handle situations that cross state lines and affect the entire country. It has the

authority to investigate situations involving threats to India's sovereignty, integrity, or security.

- **Counterterrorism Operations:** The NIA undertakes counterterrorism operations to identify, trace, and apprehend terrorists and groups. This includes gathering intelligence, conducting surveillance, and taking action against individuals who plot or carry out terrorist activities.

- **Arrests and Seizures:** The agency has the jurisdiction to make arrests, conduct searches, and seize assets and evidence in connection with terrorism investigations. This authority is critical for establishing a compelling case against terrorists and their support networks.

- **Prosecution:** Once the investigation is completed, the NIA is in charge of prosecuting the accused persons and organizations in a court of law. It collaborates closely with law enforcement to guarantee that terrorists are brought to justice.

- **Database Maintenance:** The NIA keeps a detailed database of terrorist organizations, their members, and other pertinent information. This database aids in the detection and monitoring of terrorist networks and actions.

What is the recent proposal made to enhance the security cover provided by NIA?

- **Uniform Anti-Terrorism Structure:** The government is seeking to establish a Uniform anti-terrorism structure in all Indian states under the supervision of the National Investigation Agency (NIA). This suggests a consistent structure for dealing with terrorism situations across the country.

How is this change going to impact the national security?

- **Improved Coordination:** Standardized units make it easier to coordinate between federal and state authorities. In the event of a terrorist incident involving numerous states or regions, consistent units facilitate smooth collaboration and information sharing among agencies, resulting in faster and more effective responses.

- **Resource Allocation Efficiency:** Uniform units can optimize resource allocation. It is easier to dedicate personnel, equipment, and cash to anti-terrorism activities that have a defined structure and processes. This improves the overall effectiveness of counter-terrorism activities.

- **Interoperability:** Uniform units encourage law enforcement authorities to work together. When all units adhere to the same rules and norms, they may collaborate more effectively, allowing for more efficient joint operations and intelligence sharing.

- **Specialization:** These units might specialize in dealing with terrorism-related cases within the jurisdiction of the NIA. Specialization results in a more in-depth grasp of terrorist tactics, methods, and networks, which can lead to more successful investigations and prosecutions.

- **Quick Response**: Standardized units can respond more quickly and efficiently in the case of a terrorist threat or incident. They are trained to handle such circumstances with precision and quickness, reducing casualties and damage.

Conclusion

In summary, Amit Shah's remarks highlight the need for a standardized approach to counter-terrorism across India, improved coordination among various agencies, innovation in combating terrorism, and the government's commitment to addressing emerging challenges in this domain through modern technology and strategies.

Freebies before elections: SC

Context

The Supreme Court requested a statement from the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan on Friday in response to a petition alleging that public funds are being exploited to provide nonsensical giveaways ahead of elections.

What are freebies?

In politics and elections, freebies are goods, services, or benefits delivered by governments or political parties to the people at no direct cost or penalty. These freebies are often distributed as part of political campaigns or as a means of gaining popularity and support among the people.

What are the different forms of Freebies?

- **Subsidies:** Governments may provide subsidies on basic products such as food, fuel, or housing, lowering consumer costs.

- **Cash Transfers**: To reduce financial difficulties, several governments make direct cash transfers to residents, particularly those in need.

- **Free Services:** Governments may provide free services to certain portions of the population, such as healthcare, education, or public transit.

- **Product distribution:** Political parties may provide free products to voters such as clothing, kitchen appliances, or farming equipment.

- **Waivers:** Governments might announce loan or debt waivers, notably in the agricultural sector, to help farmers.

- **Electoral Promises:** Politicians sometimes make promises of future benefits or legislation during election campaigns, which may be interpreted as possible freebies.

What are the impacts of the freebies?

- **Financial Burden**: The drain on government finances is one of the most severe negative consequences. Offering freebies without a long-term finance plan can result in budget deficits, higher governmental debt, and financial insecurity.

- **Distorted Priorities:** The emphasis on freebies can deflect attention away from long-term policy concerns such as infrastructure development, education, and healthcare. Resources that could have been invested in these areas could be diverted into short-term giveaways.

- **Inefficient Resource Allocation**: Freebies might lead to inefficient resource allocation since they may not target people who need them the most. Subsidies, for example, may help more affluent people who can afford to pay the full price.

- **Economic Distortion**: By dampening the price signals of products and services, freebies can cause market distortions. Subsidies, for example, might lead to overconsumption and production inefficiencies.

- **Fiscal Discipline**: Relying on freebies indefinitely can undermine budgetary discipline and responsible government. It has the potential to incentivize governments to overspend, resulting in fiscal deficits and financial instability.

- **Dependency culture:** Excessive reliance on freebies can develop a dependency culture in which individuals and communities tend to expect government handouts rather than pursue self-sufficiency or entrepreneurship.

what are the ways to prevent the freebies from influencing voters?

- **Strong Campaign finance regulations:** Implement and implement strong campaign finance regulations that limit the amount of money political parties and candidates can spend during elections. These rules should also apply to the funding of gifts or freebies.

- **Transparency & Disclosure:** Require transparent disclosure of campaign spending and funding sources. This includes full reporting on any expenses incurred as a result of freebies.

- **Public Awareness and Education:** Encourage voter education programs to assist voters in making educated voting decisions during elections. Educate voters on the dangers of accepting freebies and the significance of judging politicians on their qualifications and policies.

- **Independent Election Commission:** Make certain that the election commission or institution in charge of overseeing elections is independent, unbiased, and well-funded. They should be empowered to monitor and enforce campaign funding laws.

- **Media and Journalism:** Promote appropriate media reporting. Journalists should investigate electoral pledges and expose any attempt to buy votes through giveaways. The media may be quite effective in holding politicians responsible.

- Support civil society organizations and watchdog groups that monitor campaign activity and advocate for fair and transparent elections. These organizations can increase awareness about electoral change and campaign for it.

Conclusion

Offering freebies is intended to entice people and secure their support during elections. However, the usage of freebies in politics can be a source of contention. Excessive freebies, critics claim, may strain government resources, promote populism over smart economic policy, and foster a culture of dependency. Proponents, on the other hand, claim that freebies can relieve immediate needs while also elevating underprivileged groups in society. Freebies' appropriateness and influence might vary greatly depending on the setting and policies of a given government or political party.

Judge selection delay not advisable, says SC

Context

On Monday, the Supreme Court stated that it may not be "advisable" to stall the entire judge nomination procedure and demand that the government first confirm any candidates that have previously been suggested or reaffirmed by the Supreme Court Collegium.

How are the Judges appointed in India?

- **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 two major problems faced by the Courts in India?

- **Backlog of Cases: O**ne of the biggest obstacles was the huge backlog of cases in the nation's courts. Due to the backlog, it frequently took years to resolve cases, which delayed the administration of justice.

- **Overburdened Judiciary**: There were too few judges and too many cases for the Indian judiciary to handle. Hearings and case resolution were delayed as a result of this.

Why is there a shortage of Judges in India?

- **Growing Caseload:** Over the years, the Indian judiciary has had to deal with a growing caseload. The present court infrastructure is under a great deal of strain as a result of the increasing number of litigation proceedings, including civil, criminal, and constitutional disputes.

- **Delay in Appointment:** The procedure of appointing judges in India is frequently drawn out and can involve bureaucratic obstacles and delays. The Collegium system, which involves judges heavily in the selection of new judges, has occasionally come under fire for causing delays. Even if the collegium system suggests names for the post, the government then wastes precious time by not appointing.

- **High Attrition Rates:** A high attrition rate might result from judges who retire at a young age. The scarcity is made worse by the need to fill the positions left vacant by retiring judges.

- **Vacancies at Different Levels:** There are openings in lower courts as well as the higher courts (the High Courts and the Supreme Court). Vacancies in lower courts are especially important because they hear the majority of the cases.

- **Lack of Adequate Infrastructure:** Many Indian courts lack the resources and support staff required to conduct cases effectively. This can prevent people from applying for judicial positions.

What is the way forward in this issue?

- **Increase the Number of Judges**: To keep up with the rising caseload, the government should think about expanding the sanctioned strength of judges in both the upper and lower judiciary.

- **Streamline the Appointment Process:** It is important to improve the appointment process' efficiency and openness. It can be beneficial to lessen administrative red tape and wait times when appointing judges, especially at higher levels.

- **Strengthen the Collegium System:** By ensuring that proposals for judicial appointments are issued swiftly and based on merit, the Collegium system can be made more effective. Additionally, the system can be made more transparent.

- **Judicial Appointments on a Fast Track:** Consider expediting judge appointments, particularly for open seats in subordinate courts where the backlog of cases is frequently the greatest.

- **Encourage Judiciary Careers**: Increase the appeal of a career in the judiciary by luring top legal talent with competitive pay, perks, and retirement plans.

- **Upgrading Infrastructure:** Spend money on enhancing the court system's infrastructure, which includes building new courtrooms, installing cutting-edge equipment, and recruiting enough support staff.

- **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):** Encourage the use of ADR techniques to settle conflicts outside of the official court system, such as mediation and arbitration. Court caseloads may be lowered as a result of this.

Conclusion

A variety of measures have been taken to remedy the lack of judges in India, including boosting the number of jobs sanctioned for judges, speeding up the appointment procedure, and enticing lawyers to seek judicial careers. To ensure that justice is delivered in the nation promptly and effectively, this problem must continue to be addressed and reformed.

India reiterates call for a 'sovereign Palestine state'

Context

On Thursday night, an Air India flight arrived in Israel with 230 Indian citizens in need of evacuation as part of Operation Ajay, India's operation to rescue its residents from conflict-ridden Israel.

What is the recent incident that initiated the conflict to turn into a full-fledged war?

- There has been an Israel-Palestine dispute for many years. The largest strike against Israel recently was carried out by Hamas from the Gaza Strip in October 2023.

- Hundreds of gunmen broke into villages close to the Gaza Strip as part of the assault. There have been at least 1,300 Israeli deaths, and scores of soldiers and civilians—including women and children—are being held captive in Gaza.

What is India's Stand Over Attack on Israel?

- **Solidarity with Israel:** In response to Hamas strikes from Gaza, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi voiced solidarity with Israel. Prime Minister Modi expressed his sympathies to the conflict's victims and their families.

- **Safety Advisory for Indian Nationals:** Given the ongoing violence, the Indian embassy in Tel Aviv issued safety advisories to Indian nationals in Israel, asking them to maintain security measures and stay close to safety shelters. This warning is designed to ensure the safety and well-being of Indian residents living in or visiting Israel during this difficult time.

- **India's Long-Standing Position:** It has been said that India's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict is "long-standing and consistent." It is in favour of starting direct talks again to create a viable, autonomous state of Palestine that coexists peacefully with Israel.

What is the "Operation Ajay"?

- **Operation Ajay:** The Indian Armed Forces are now engaged in Operation Ajay.

- **Evacuation Mission:** The main goal of Operation Ajay is to evacuate Indian citizens who were in Israel during the Israel-Hamas conflict in 2023 and return them.

- **Background of the Conflict:** The operation was started in reaction to the October 7, 2023, start of the Israel-Hamas conflict in 2023.

- **Indian Nationals in Israel:** There are an estimated 18,000 Indian nationals living in Israeli areas impacted by the conflict. The primary goal of Operation Ajay is to guarantee their safe departure.

- **Humanitarian Mission:** The goal of this operation is to protect Indian nationals who are stranded in the combat zone and ensure their safety.

- **Safety and Return:** Operation Ajay's main objective is to remove these Indian nationals from the conflict-affected areas in a safe manner and make it easier for them to return to India.

- **Coordination with Other Agencies:** The operation likely involves coordination between the military, the Ministry of External Affairs, and other government agencies to facilitate the evacuation. Air India is also being a part of this rescue operation.

Conclusion

Amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, Operation Ajay's primary objective is to guarantee the safe evacuation and return of Indian people to Israel. It emphasizes India's dedication to the security and well-being of its people, especially in times of global emergency.

7-judge Bench to take a call on the Money Bill case

Context

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud's seven-judge Supreme Court bench announced on Thursday that it will "take a call" on petitioners' request to give precedence to a reference regarding how the Center got important amendments passed as Money Bills in Parliament.

What is a Money bill?

- A money bill is a type of legislation that addresses matters of finance, including taxes, government revenue, spending, debt, and the fight against black money.

- The Indian Constitution's Article 110 defines money bills.

- Only the Lok Sabha, the lowest chamber of Parliament, may introduce them. The higher chamber, the Rajya Sabha, is not allowed to change or reject a money bill.

- A money bill is subject to the President's approval or rejection; it cannot be returned for further review.

What is the difference between a Money bill and a General Bill?

- A money bill differs from an ordinary bill primarily in that it does not require the Rajya Sabha's approval to become law, although regular legislation does require permission from both houses of Parliament.

- A money bill is a subset of a finance bill that can only address the issues listed in Article 110 (1) (a) through (g) of the Indian Constitution. Only after being approved by the Rajya Sabha and forwarded to the Lok Sabha for approval can a money bill be passed. The bill becomes a law if the President signs it into law.

- A minister or a private member can introduce an ordinary bill in the Lok Sabha. Ordinary bills must pass both chambers to become law. The President can return ordinary bills for reconsideration, accept them, or reject them.

What are the recent bills passed in the parliament as Money bills?

- Integrated Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023

- Aadhaar Bill

- Finance Acts passed in 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2019

Why is it concerning that bills are passed as money bills?

- **Bypassing the Rajya Sabha**: Money Bills are designed to avoid the Rajya Sabha, which is India's parliament's upper house. This indicates that they are not subjected to the same level of legislative review in both houses as other measures. Because it curtails the Rajya Sabha's involvement in the legislative process—which serves as a check and balance—this can be viewed as anti-democratic.

- **Executive Control:** There are worries that the government would designate bills as Money bills to avoid the Rajya Sabha's oversight and amendment-making authority over legislation. This would lessen the essential democratic system of checks and balances by giving the executive branch greater authority over the legislative process.

- **Abuse of the Money Bill Provision:** It may be considered an abuse of the provision of bills that are passed as Money Bills but are not primarily pecuniary. An example of the Finance Act of 2017 being passed as a Money Bill, purportedly to change the makeup of important judicial bodies and increase executive power, may be found in the article you linked. This may give rise to questions regarding the improper application of the Money Bill classification for non-financial uses.

- **Effect on the Operation of Parliament:** Enacting non-financial bills as Money Bills can have a significant impact on how Parliament operates. It may have an impact on how laws are drafted and lessen the Rajya Sabha's ability to represent the interests of various states and regions of India.

Conclusion

This court case could have a big impact on India's parliamentary system and raises difficult constitutional and legislative issues. We will have to wait for the Supreme Court's ruling before gaining any clarification on the passing of amendments like Money Bills.

Sri Lanka moves towards RCEP; Bangladesh in queue

Context

Following India's withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement four years ago, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, two of India's neighbours, are now evaluating their prospects of joining the fifteen-nation trading bloc.

What is the RCEP Agreement?

- The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a trade agreement under negotiation between 16 countries, comprising the 10 ASEAN members and the 6 countries with which ASEAN has free trade agreements (Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and Australia).

- With almost 25% of worldwide exports, 30% of global GDP, and nearly half of the world's population covered, the pact is regarded as the "largest" regional trade agreement.

Why did India decide to leave RCEP?

- **Unfavourable Trade Balance**: India was concerned about the growing trade imbalance it was experiencing with the majority of RCEP members, as imports were exceeding exports.

- **Dumping of Chinese Goods:** When India joined the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), it was concerned that lower-priced Chinese goods would flood the Indian market, hurting native industries.

- **Rejecting the Auto-Trigger Mechanism:** India proposed an auto-trigger mechanism that would have increased product tariffs upon reaching a predetermined threshold for imports. Other RCEP nations, however, opposed this idea.

- **Protection of Domestic Industry:** India was worried about tariffs on steel and dairy products being reduced or eliminated. This might have made domestic industry vulnerable to fierce rivalry.

- **Absence of Agreement on Rules of Origin:** India was concerned about possible rules of origin violations that would permit goods to be shipped through other nations and escape India's higher tariffs.

What were the implications of India Leaving the RCEP?

- **Check on Chinese Goods**: Even though Chinese items are already widely available in the Indian market, India's withdrawal enables it to retain some control over the influx of Chinese goods.

- **Protection of Domestic Industry**: By avoiding the RCEP, India's domestic industries are shielded from lower-priced imports.

- **Strengthening China's Economic Power:** China supports the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and India's withdrawal could increase China's economic clout in the area.

- **Declined Trade Prospects:** India loses out on trade prospects with nations that make up a sizeable chunk of world trade by refusing to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

- **Global Supply Networks:** In the modern manufacturing world, it is frequently necessary to integrate into global supply networks. This integration may have been made easier via RCEP.

- **Acceptance of Freer Trade:** By signing the RCEP, India would have demonstrated its commitment to freer trade, which would have drawn businesses wishing to move away from China.

- **Impact on India's Act East Policy:** India's Act East policy, which attempts to deepen relations with nations in the Indo-Pacific area, may be impacted by its withdrawal.

- **Missed Reforms Opportunity:** India had the chance to advance essential reforms that would have improved competitiveness under the RCEP.

What are the implications if our neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh join RCEP?

- **Trade Possibilities:**

  o Bangladesh and Sri Lanka would have more trade opportunities with RCEP members, who account for a sizeable share of the world economy if they were to join the group.

  o It might increase these nations' exports, which would be advantageous to their economy.

- **Economic Integration:**

  o Through RCEP, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka would have greater access to a wider market and more integration into the Asia-Pacific economic scene.

  o These nations' economies could flourish as a result of this integration, luring in foreign capital.

- **Competitiveness**

  o Bangladesh and Sri Lanka may be compelled to increase their competitiveness in the international market if they join RCEP.

  o To effectively compete with other RCEP member nations, they might need to enhance the calibre and productivity of their industries.

- **Trade Focus Shift:**

  o By joining RCEP, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka might potentially become less dependent on any one market by shifting their trade priorities from their subcontinental trading partners to a more varied group of nations.

- **Impact on India:**

- As they get access to the RCEP market, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka may compete with India in several areas.
- Indian companies might have to adjust to the heightened competition in the area.

What is the motivation for neighbouring countries to join RCEP?

- Viewing RCEP and other free trade agreements as a means of expanding its market and enhancing its competitiveness vis-à-vis global competitors, Sri Lanka is a country grappling with a financial crisis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, to take advantage of trade opportunities and possibly grow their economies, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are both investigating the prospect of joining the RCEP. The regional economic environment is still being impacted by India's exit from the RCEP, and in the upcoming years, attention will be keenly monitoring the ramifications of these possible events.

Court declines abortion plea

Context

The lady's request to have her 26-week pregnancy medically terminated was denied by the Supreme Court on Monday. The court stated that it would be inappropriate to grant doctors the order to "stop the heartbeat" of the fetus when there are reports that the woman would give birth to a "viable baby."

What is the context behind the case in the Supreme Court?

- **Request for Late-Term Abortion:**
  - At 26 weeks into her pregnancy, a married lady requested authorization to have a late-term abortion.
  - She contended that she was incapable of carrying, giving birth to, or raising another child due to her physical, emotional, mental, financial, and medical limitations.

- **Medical Evaluation:**
  - After conducting several evaluations, the AIIMS medical board concluded that neither the woman's life nor the fetus was in urgent danger as a result of her pregnancy.
  - In the context of Indian abortion law, the lack of a clear threat to life is a critical criterion.

MEDICAL TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY
(Amendment) Bill, 2020

What is the legal framework behind the abortion laws in India?

- The interpretation of Section 5 of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act was at the centre of the lawsuit.

- If a medical termination of the pregnancy is "immediately necessary to save the pregnant woman's life," this clause permits it.

- An abortion can only be performed when a woman's life is in imminent danger, as certified by medical professionals, and this is the main meaning of the term "life" in the context of the legal arguments.

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act of 1971 allows registered medical practitioners to terminate certain pregnancies. The law relaxes restrictions on women seeking abortions and on professionals performing them.

- The MTP Act of 1971 permits abortion in the following circumstances:

   o There is a chance of severe physical harm during pregnancy.

   o The pregnant woman's mental health is at risk because of the pregnancy.

   o The pregnancy results from either rape or a married woman failing to use contraception.

- If two doctors concur, a pregnancy can be ended up to 20 weeks after it begins, and up to 12 weeks if just one doctor feels that way.

What are the Rights of the unborn child as per the court?

- Concerns regarding the rights and welfare of the unborn child were brought up by the case.

- Even if the complete rights don't apply to feutus but in a way Article 21 is still applicable partially.

- The government contended that the lady had gone over the 24-week abortion limit outlined in the Act and that the foetus was healthy.

- The situation presented a decision between a preterm and full-term delivery, which could have an impact on the health and prognosis of the infant.

What are the ethical issues that are seen in this case?

- **Reproductive Autonomy:** By claiming her right to control her own body and reproduction, the woman is expressing her independence. Considering how far this autonomy should go raises ethical issues, particularly in late-term pregnancies.

- **Foetal Rights:** The case raises the moral query of when it is appropriate to acknowledge and defend foetal rights. When does the foetus get rights, and how should those rights be weighed against those of the mother?

- **Medical Ethics:** One of the main ethical issues is the role of medical practitioners. When asked to perform late-term abortions in situations where there isn't an immediate danger, doctors may encounter difficulties. It is quite difficult for them to strike a balance between their convictions the institutional policies and their ethical duty to their patients.

- **Best Interests of the kid:** The best interests of the unborn kid are also a matter of ethics. When weighing the chances of a good outcome with a full-term delivery against the possible risks of a preterm delivery, which is better for the child's wellbeing?

- **Equity and Justice:** Whether late-term abortions should be permitted in rare circumstances or if the law should be strictly interpreted to apply to every person equally, regardless of their circumstances, raises issues of justice and fairness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case concerns a woman's request for a late-term abortion. The primary legal issue is whether or not the woman's circumstances, particularly the urgent threat to her life, fit the requirements for an abortion as defined by the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act. It also touches on international legal viewpoints on the subject and poses more general questions regarding the rights and welfare of unborn children. The case highlights the difficult moral and legal conundrums that develop in these circumstances.
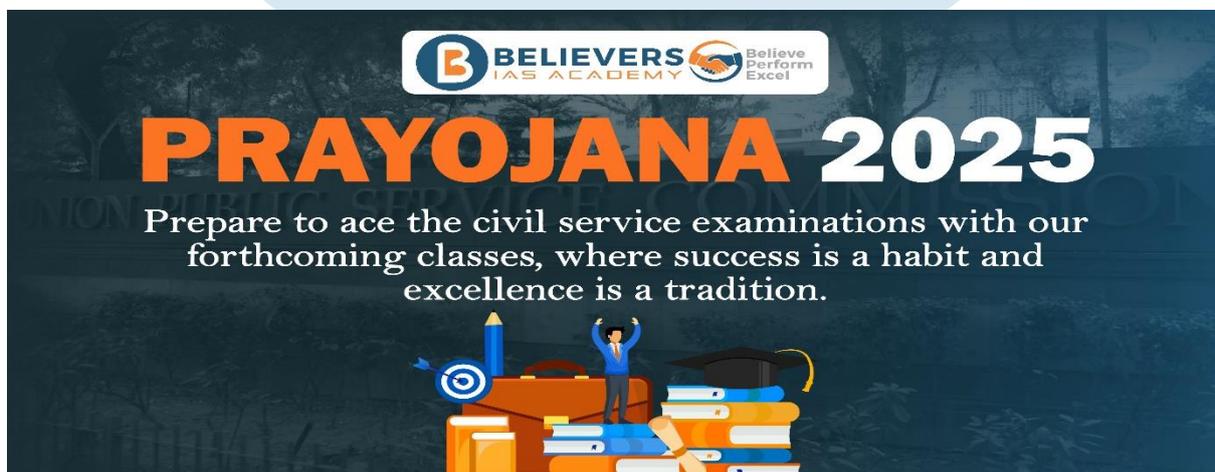
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Cannot legalise same-sex marriage, says SC Bench

Context

On Tuesday, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage recognition and regulation may only come from the legislative branch. The Bench reasoned that the courts could not get involved since there was no unqualified or fundamental right to marry.

What are the observations made by the Supreme Court?

- Legislative Authority for Same-Sex Marriage: The Supreme Court noted that the legislative branch of government has the power to approve and oversee same-sex marriages. The court stressed that legislation should be passed by the legislature to solve this situation.

- No Unqualified Right to Marriage: The court declared that the right to marriage is neither fundamental nor unqualified. The court decided that it shouldn't become involved in issues pertaining to same-sex marriage based on this view.

- Discrimination Against Same-Sex Couples: The Supreme Court noted unanimously that same-sex couples should no longer face discrimination. Every one of the five judges on the Constitution Bench acknowledged this.

- Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud addressed several points in his dissenting judgment, highlighting the inherent right of LGBT people to form relationships and the state's duty to acknowledge and legalize these unions. He emphasized how important it is to end discrimination based on sexual orientation.

What is the legality of Same-Sex Marriage in India?

- In India, the right to marry is a statutory right rather than one that is specifically recognized by the Constitution.

- Article 141 of the Constitution requires all Indian courts to follow the judicial decisions that have led to the recognition of marriage as a basic right.

- The Supreme Court ruled in the Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. case that Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees everyone the freedom to marry the person of their choosing.

- The Indian Constitution forbids discrimination on many grounds, including sex, as stated in Article 16.

- The Supreme Court has ruled that people who identify as LGBTQ have a right to equal protection under the law and the full spectrum of constitutional rights.

What is the Special Marriages Act of 1954?

- Irrespective of their religious background, the SMA permits civil marriages between Indian citizens and those residing abroad.

- Under this law, the SMA governs marriages rather than personal laws.

- It contains regulations for the solemnization and registration of weddings amongst people of different religious backgrounds.

- The LGBTQ community was hoping that necessary amendments would be made to the act allowing same-sex marriages in India.

What are the arguments in favour of the Same-Sex Marriage?

- **Equal Rights and Protection Law**: Everyone has the right to marry and start a family, regardless of their sexual orientation.

- **Building Stronger Families and Communities:** Couples and their families gain social and financial advantages from marriage.

- **Living together is a Fundamental Right:** The Chief Justice recognized that living together is a fundamental right.

- **Gender is not 'Absolute' based on Biology:** The Supreme Court stressed that gender is not just determined by a person's genitalia.

- **Global Acceptance:** Marrying a person of the same sex is lawful in many nations worldwide.

What are the arguments against same-sex Marriage?

- **Beliefs in Religion and Culture:** Several religious and cultural organizations are against modifying the conventional concept of marriage.

- **Procreation:** According to some, having children is the main reason for being married.

- **Legal Issues:** Adapting rules and legislation to allow same-sex marriage raises concerns.

- **Problems with Adoption:** Discrimination, stigma, and possible harm to children adopted by same-sex couples.

What is the way forward in this situation?

- **Raise Awareness:** Through awareness campaigns, encourage acceptance and equality for people of all sexual orientations.

- **Legal Reforms:** To give same-sex couples legal status and rights, amend the Special Marriage Act or create contracts-like agreements.

- **Conversation and Interaction:** Interact with religious authorities and groups to close gaps between conventional wisdom and contemporary perspectives.

- **Legal Challenges:** To establish precedent, and challenge the validity of existing legislation in court.

- **Collaboration:** Involve all relevant parties in the effort to create a more inclusive society that respects people's rights and choices regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. These parties include the LGBTQIA+ community, the government, civil society, and religious leaders.

Conclusion

The minority emphasizes the significance of fundamental rights and legal recognition for the LGBTQ+ community, while the majority highlights the role of the legislature in enacting laws on this matter. These observations represent the court's position on the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and civil unions.

Sri Lanka announces free visas for Indians to boost tourism

Context

In an attempt to increase visitor numbers and aid in the rehabilitation of the island nation's damaged economy in the wake of last year's financial crisis, Sri Lanka on Tuesday relaxed visa requirements for visitors from six other nations and India.

Why did Sri Lanka waive the visa restrictions on India?

- For visitors from India and six other nations, Sri Lanka eliminated visa fees to increase travel and aid in the nation's economic recovery. The bulk of visitors to the nation come from India, which contributes significantly to its economy.

- The action is a component of initiatives to revitalize the nation's flagging tourism industry, which was negatively damaged by the 2019 Easter Sunday bombs. The COVID-19 pandemic and the country's political and economic unrest in South Asia have also presented difficulties for the tourism industry.

- The following nations are also part of the visa-free travel program: China, Russia, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand.

What are the benefits for Sri Lanka from this initiative?

- **Increased Tourism Earnings:** Sri Lanka can anticipate a rise in tourism earnings as a result of drawing more visitors, particularly from China and India. During their visit, tourists usually spend money on lodging, transportation, meals, and other activities, which boosts the local economy.

- **Boost for the Tourism Sector:** Sri Lanka's economy greatly benefits from the tourism sector. The nation can encourage the expansion of the tourism industry—which has been negatively impacted by several setbacks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crises—by providing free tourist visas.

- **Foreign Exchange Earnings**: One of Sri Lanka's main sources of foreign exchange revenue is tourism. The nation's foreign exchange reserves, which are crucial for handling its imports and external financial obligations, may be strengthened by the increased number of visitors.

- **Employment Creation:** A flourishing tourism industry can generate employment in several industries, such as hospitality, travel, and services associated with travel. This can enhance residents' quality of life and assist lower unemployment.

- **Promotion of Cultural Exchange**: Traveling facilitates communication and the exchange of ideas between visitors and residents. This can encourage mutual understanding and goodwill among nations while highlighting Sri Lanka's rich cultural heritage and customs.

What are the benefits for India?

- **Increased Outbound Tourism:** One of India's top tourist destinations, Sri Lanka, is now more easily accessible for Indian visitors. The elimination of visa requirements lowers the cost of travel to Sri Lanka for Indians, resulting in a rise in outbound travel.

- **Savings for Indian Travelers**: Sri Lanka has become a more appealing travel destination since there are no longer any visa costs to pay. Indian visitors can economize by not having to pay for their visas.

- **Diverse Travel Options:** Indian travellers have a wide range of choices for places to visit. They have an additional travel choice with the chance to visit Sri Lanka, which is well-known for its stunning beaches, historical landmarks, and cultural attractions.

- **Short journey Distance:** Sri Lanka is a popular location for Indian tourists due to its proximity to India, which allows for shorter journey durations and more affordable airfares.

- **Historical and Cultural Exchange:** There is a rich cultural history between Sri Lanka and India. The influx of Indian tourists has the potential to enhance cultural interchange, cultivate comprehension, and fortify interpersonal ties between the two countries.

Conclusion

By drawing tourists from important nations in the area and outside, this policy shift will play a major role in boosting tourism and the country's economic recovery in Sri Lanka.

The time has come for India to declare Hamas a terrorist group: Israel Ambassador

Context

Indian officials should designate Hamas as a terrorist organization, Israeli Ambassador Naor Gilon stated here on Wednesday.

During a media event, Mr Gilon stated that the Israeli economy would not be impacted by the current conflict and that initiatives like the I2U2 (India, Israel, the UAE, and the US) and the IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) will continue as planned.

Who are the Hamas?

- One of the two main political parties in the Palestinian territories is Hamas, a violent Islamist organization. In the Palestinian territory, Hamas is the biggest and most proficient militant organization. In the Gaza Strip, they are in charge of nearly two million Palestinians.

- The Islamic Resistance Movement (Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-ʾIslāmiyyah) is the official name of Hamas. Their goal is to turn ancient Palestine into an autonomous Islamic state.

- Most people associate Hamas with armed opposition to Israel. They declared in its 1988 charter that they would not recognize any other course of action other than the whole and total liberation of Palestine, from river to sea. This translates to Israel being destroyed.

What is the designation of the organization globally?

- The United States, Israel, Canada, the European Union, and other nations have all formally classified Hamas as a terrorist group.

- Its history of using violent and militant methods, like suicide bombings and rocket strikes, to further its objectives is the basis for this label.

What is the historical background behind the Hamas?

- The Palestinians revolted against Israeli occupation in 1987 and formed Hamas during the first intifada.

- It was born out of Palestinians' discontent that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was failing to bring an end to Israeli occupation.

What was the Hama's founding vision?

- The 1988 original charter of Hamas advocated for the total annihilation of Israel and included anti-Semitic statements.

- It disapproved of peace initiatives and insisted that the only way to resolve the Palestinian problem was through violent resistance, or "jihad."

- Over time, Hamas' strategy changed. It displayed indications of moderation in 2006, removing the call for Israel's destruction from its electoral manifesto.

- It signalled a willingness to support a Palestinian state along the 1967 boundaries without acknowledging Israel and to tolerate an ongoing truce (hudna).

How organized is the Hamas political and military structure?

- Hamas is organized into several branches. It is divided into three wings: a military wing called the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which is in charge of combat operations; a political bureau; and a social wing that works in education and charity.

- After political unrest and violent fighting in the Palestinian territories in 2007, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip and Fatah held onto control of the West Bank.

- Due to Israel's blockade of Gaza, there is currently a humanitarian crisis in the area and restricted travel for both people and goods.

What are the challenges for Israel?

- Hamas launched a huge missile attack on Israel during the most recent conflict, resulting in substantial losses on both sides.

- Israel launched airstrikes in retaliation and got ready for a potential ground invasion.

- Despite Israel's persistent attempts to use military force to subdue and undermine Hamas, the organization has managed to endure and maintain its prominence as a major political force in Gaza.

- Given its tenacity and prominence in politics, Hamas presents Israel with significant challenges, particularly in light of any future settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Conclusion

Hamas's actions and influence continue to be crucial to the stability and peace attempts in the region, and its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still complicated and contested.

SC allows surrogacy, strikes down rule banning the use of donor gametes

Context

The Supreme Court has protected a woman's right to parenting despite her suffering from a unique physical ailment by halting the implementation of a statute that threatened to derail her ambitions of becoming a mother through surrogacy.

What is the Surrogacy Bill 2021?

- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 is an Indian law that governs and promotes surrogacy. The statute is intended to safeguard the rights and interests of all parties involved.

What are the provisions for the surrogacy Bill?

- **Eligibility Requirements:**

  o The Act allows a woman who is a widow or divorcee between the ages of 35 and 45 to use surrogacy if she has a medical condition that requires it.

  o Legally married women and men with a medical condition that requires surrogacy are also eligible.

- **Commercial Surrogacy Ban:**

  o Commercial surrogacy is illegal under the Act and is punishable by up to ten years in prison and a fine of up to Rs ten lakhs.

- **Altruistic Surrogacy:**

  o The legislation only allows altruistic surrogacy, in which no money is exchanged between the surrogate mother and the intended parents.

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- o The surrogate mother in altruistic surrogacy is genetically connected to those seeking a child.

Who is eligible for surrogacy?

- A widowed or divorced woman between the ages of 35 and 45, or a lawfully married couple

- The surrogate should be married and have her child.

- Infertile Indian couples must be legally married.

- The husband must be between the ages of 26 and 55, while the wife must be between the ages of 23 and 50.

Why did the Supreme Court strike down the rule for one case?

- The woman in question has Mayer Rokitansky Kuster Hauser syndrome, a rare medical disorder in which the ovaries and uterus are absent.

- She and her husband began the process of becoming parents through gestational surrogacy.

What is the Mayer Rokitansky Kuster Hauser syndrome?

- Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser syndrome (MRKH) is a rare congenital illness of the female reproductive system. Müllerian aplasia is another name for it.

- MRKH syndrome is distinguished by:

  - o An undeveloped uterus and upper vaginal region

  - o Secondary sex traits are normal, and the karyotype is female (46, XX).

  - o Incomplete development of the Müllerian duct, which gives rise to the uterus, fallopian tubes, cervix, and upper vaginal wall.

Which amendment prevented her from getting a child?

- The government published a notification modifying the surrogacy statute on March 14 of this year.

- The amendment prohibited the use of donor gametes in surrogacy and forced "intending couples" to use their gametes.

What was the observation made by the Supreme Court in this case?

- The woman and her husband petitioned the Supreme Court, claiming that the amendment violated the woman's right to parenting.

- They claimed that the amendment rendered the surrogacy process impossible for them to proceed.

- The woman and her husband petitioned the Supreme Court, claiming that the amendment violated the woman's right to parenthood.

- They claimed that the amendment rendered the surrogacy process impossible for them to proceed.

What was the Supreme Court decision in this case?

- The Supreme Court ruled in its order that the change was prima facie in violation of the principal provisions of the Surrogacy Act.

- It acknowledged the woman's physical condition and her desire for children through gestational surrogacy as special circumstances.

- Given the woman's physical condition and rights, the Supreme Court temporarily suspended the law that would have banned her from becoming a parent through surrogacy.

Conclusion

In summary, the Supreme Court's decision protects women's right to parenthood by challenging the government's amendment that limited the use of donor gametes for surrogacy, emphasizing the surrogacy law's woman-centric nature, and recognising specific medical conditions that warrant gestational surrogacy.

GENERAL STUDIES-3

BELIEVERS
IAS ACADEMY

Believe
Perform
Excel

Nobel Honors for mRNA Vaccines: A Triumph Amidst Pandemic

Context:

This year's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine awarded to Katalin Karikó and Drew Weissman for their work on mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 is a case in point. Their achievements have not only saved countless lives but also fulfil the Nobel's criterion of conferring the "greatest benefit on mankind." This Nobel recognition carries added significance as it acknowledges the invaluable contribution of a female scientist, Katalin Karikó, a testament to the evolving inclusivity of this prestigious honor.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Science and Technology)

Prelims:

- mRNA vaccines

Mains Question:

- Examine the pivotal role played by Katalin Karikó and Drew Weissman in the development of mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 and its profound impact on global public health. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Visionary Journey of Katalin Karikó
- Drew Weissman's Insights on Immunology
- mRNA Vaccines: A Long-Held Possibility
- The Context of a Global Pandemic
- Significance of Recognizing Female Scientists

The Visionary Journey of Katalin Karikó

- Hungarian biochemist Katalin Karikó displayed a profound interest in mRNA when it was still a concept in its infancy. mRNA serves as the intermediary that transfers genetic information from DNA to proteins, which are pivotal for cell structure, growth, and repair.
- Karikó's dedication to exploring mRNA's therapeutic potential began during her tenure as an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Drew Weissman's Insights on Immunology

- Dr. Drew Weissman, an immunologist, joined forces with Karikó in this journey.
- His expertise in studying dendritic cells, crucial for immune surveillance and activation of vaccine-induced immune responses, complemented Karikó's research.

- Their partnership played a crucial role in the development of mRNA-based vaccines.

mRNA Vaccines: A Long-Held Possibility

- The concept of using mRNA for vaccines and therapy had been in existence since the 1980s, with in vitro transcription opening the door to this innovative approach.

- However, enthusiasm waned due to challenges like delivery methods and inflammatory reactions. Undeterred, Karikó and Weissman pursued this path, setting the stage for future breakthroughs.

The Context of a Global Pandemic

- When the pandemic struck in 2019, scientists harnessed the power of mRNA vaccines to instruct human cells to produce the S protein present on the virus's surface.

- This approach triggered the production of antibodies that could combat the virus, marking a watershed moment in the fight against COVID-19.

Significance of Recognizing Female Scientists:

- This Nobel Prize is another milestone for gender equality in the field of science.

- Katalin Karikó's recognition adds to list of female Nobel laureates, reinforcing the importance of acknowledging women's contributions in the male-dominated world of scientific research.

Way Forward:

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare and research, this achievement serves as a testament to human ingenuity and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Defusing the ticking time bomb called diabetes

Context:

In June 2023, a joint study by the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, the Indian Council of Medical Research, and the Union Health Ministry unveiled a concerning reality – 11.4% of India's population, roughly 10.13 crore people, grapple with diabetes, while an additional 13.6 crore individuals, constituting 15.3% of the population, are pre-diabetic. Furthermore, 28.6% of the population falls into the category of obesity as per Body Mass Index (BMI) measurements.

Relevance:

GS-02 (Health)

Mains Question:

Examine the critical health challenges posed by diabetes, pre-diabetes, and obesity in India as highlighted by recent research findings, and discuss the role of ultra-processed foods in exacerbating these issues. How can policy interventions address this growing public health concern? (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Ultra-Processed Foods
- Obesity, Diabetes, and Their Cascading Impact
- The Food Industry's Role
- The Urgent Need for Policy and Regulation
- The Call for Legal Framework

The Ultra-Processed Foods:

- The consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages stands out as a major culprit in the rising diabetes and obesity rates. These products, including carbonated drinks, instant cereals, snacks, sugary beverages, and more, are aggressively marketed, often overshadowing traditional diets.

- Scientific evidence underscores the health risks associated with diets rich in ultra-processed foods, notably their potential to lead to diabetes.

- A mere 10% increase in daily ultra-processed food consumption elevates the risk of type-2 diabetes in adults by 15%.

- The damaging effects of ultra-processing lie in its ability to distort the structure of food while introducing cosmetic additives, colours, and Flavors that encourage overeating, weight gain, and ultimately elevate the risk of diabetes and other chronic ailments.

Obesity, Diabetes, and Their Cascading Impact:

- Obesity and diabetes represent not just individual health issues but also significant risk factors for heart diseases and mortality. Research has linked excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods, especially sugar-sweetened beverages, to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular mortality.

- This situation underscores the severity of the public health crisis and its potential to deteriorate further if not addressed promptly and effectively.

The Food Industry's Role:

- The food industry, faced with declining sales of sugar-sweetened beverages in high-income countries, has shifted its focus to low- and middle-income countries like India.

- Billions of rupees are poured into marketing and advertising these unhealthy products, contributing to increased consumption, particularly among vulnerable populations. While the food industry tends to blame individuals for making poor dietary choices, it is the pervasive marketing environment that often dictates consumption patterns.

- This aggressive marketing, targeting the younger generation and the burgeoning middle class, makes it challenging for individuals to make healthy food choices. Additionally, tactics such as the use of cartoon characters, incentives, gifts, and celebrity endorsements heavily influence the dietary decisions of children.

The Urgent Need for Policy and Regulation:

- In light of the escalating public health crisis, policy and regulatory actions are imperative. However, the food industry resists restrictions on marketing, often proposing partnerships and citing economic development as 'stakeholders.'

- These partnerships hinder the implementation of robust regulations that could curtail the consumption of ultra-processed foods and beverages. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's response to the crisis has been tepid, with slow progress on the introduction of front-of-package labelling.

- While physical activity is important for health, it must complement regulatory policies aimed at restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages and incorporating warning labels on such products.

The Call for Legal Framework:

- To shield the public from the manipulative tactics of the food industry, a legal framework, or even an ordinance (**Article 123** of the Constitution), is imperative. Such legislation should focus on reducing or halting the consumption of ultra-processed foods and can include defining 'healthy food,' mandating warning labels on unhealthy products, and placing restrictions on the promotion and marketing of these items.

- Ensuring public awareness of the risks associated with such foods is a crucial element of this process. Importantly, this endeavor need not involve partnering with the food industry, which bears responsibility for public health challenges.

Way Forward:

- **Effective Regulation**: The government must consider implementing legal measures that prioritize public health over commercial interests. South Africa, Norway, and Mexico have taken similar actions, setting an example for India.

- **Public Awareness**: Launching public awareness campaigns to educate individuals about the health risks of ultra-processed foods and the benefits of a balanced diet is vital.

Conclusion:

The recent revelations about the prevalence of diabetes, pre-diabetes, and obesity in India underscore the urgent need for intervention. Ultra-processed foods and aggressive marketing strategies by the food industry play a significant role in this health crisis. Policy and regulatory actions, including legal measures, can help curb the consumption of unhealthy foods and safeguard public health. This is an opportune moment for India to take decisive action and demonstrate its commitment to the well-being of its citizens.

Revenue Riddles

Context:

As the fiscal year reaches its midpoint, India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections have surpassed ₹9.92 lakh crore, reflecting an 11.1% growth compared to the same period last year. With monthly revenues averaging ₹1,65,418 crore in 2023-24 and frequent crossings of ₹1.6 lakh crore, the government seems to be on solid ground regarding GST collections. However, beneath these numbers lie some areas of concern that demand closer examination.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Indian Economy)

Prelims:

- GST council
- One nation One tax

Mains Question:

- Discuss the trends and concerns in India's GST collections halfway through the fiscal year 2023-24. What factors contribute to the slowdown in GST inflows, and how can policymakers address these challenges? (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Steady GST Growth

- Macro Resilience and Areas of Concern

- Understanding the Slowdown

- Import Anomalies

Steady GST Growth:

- India's GST collections have shown resilience, reaching over ₹9.92 lakh crore by the midway point of the fiscal year, indicating an impressive 11.1% increase compared to the previous year.

- Monthly revenues in 2023-24 consistently hover around ₹1,65,418 crore, with several instances where collections exceeded ₹1.6 lakh crore. The festive season is anticipated to maintain this positive trajectory, offering fiscal stability.

Macro Resilience and Areas of Concern:

- Despite the overall robustness of GST revenues, there are notable areas of concern that warrant attention. First, there is a discernible slowdown in the growth rate of GST inflows, with September reporting a 10.2% increase, marking the slowest uptick since July 2021.

- The second quarter's average growth rate dipped to 10.6% from the more promising 11.5% in the first quarter. Additionally, the growth in domestic transactions and services imports has tapered off to 14% over the last two months, down from 18% in June.

Understanding the Slowdown:

- To comprehend the extent of this growth slowdown, it's crucial to dissect its underlying factors. September's revenue figures encompass pending dues from businesses dating back to the inception of the GST regime in 2017-18, as the deadline for remittance was September 30.

- Furthermore, the mandatory implementation of e-invoicing for firms with turnovers exceeding ₹5 crore since August 1 contributed to compliance-related fluctuations. Unravelling these influences is imperative to gauge the actual growth resulting from consumption and production increases. The discrepancy between the record-

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breaking 9.34 crore e-way bills generated in August and revenue levels hints at potential reductions in transaction sizes.

Import Anomalies:

- Another puzzling aspect lies in the shrinking revenues from goods imports, which have occurred four times this year. Despite imports hitting a nine-month high of $58.6 billion in August, reflecting a 10.75% increase over July, revenues collected in September fell 5.7% below the previous month's figures.

- This incongruity demands deeper scrutiny to uncover potential revenue leakages from imports.

Way Forward:

- Data Analysis: Policymakers should employ rigorous data analysis techniques to separate compliance-driven fluctuations from actual economic growth trends. This will provide a clearer picture of the GST revenue trajectory.

- Import Oversight: Authorities must conduct comprehensive reviews of import-related revenue collections to identify and rectify any inconsistencies or potential leakages.

Conclusion:

While India's GST collections have showcased commendable growth halfway through the fiscal year, it is essential to dissect the underlying trends and areas of concern. A deeper understanding of these factors will enable policymakers to formulate targeted strategies to ensure continued fiscal stability and robust GST revenues.

Aligning higher education with the United Nations SDGs

Context:

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), comprising 17 goals with 169 targets, represent a global commitment to addressing poverty, inequality, and environmental challenges by 2030. The SDGs demand urgent action from all nations, regardless of their economic status, to enhance living standards, education, and economic growth while reducing disparities.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Indian Economy)

Mains Question:

- Examine the role of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India's pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). How does higher education, as emphasized in NEP 2020, contribute to achieving multiple SDGs? (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Slow Progress and Global Challenges

- NEP 2020 and its Alignment with SDGs

- Higher Education's Role in SDGs

- The Research-Teaching Nexus

- Innovation and Collaboration

- Accelerating Progress

- Universities as Catalysts for Change

- Integration with Socio-economic Development

Slow Progress and Global Challenges:

- The SDGs, introduced eight years ago, face a daunting landscape marked by sluggish progress exacerbated by the prolonged impact of COVID-19, the climate crisis, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and global economic fragility.

- While this challenge is universal, it disproportionately affects the Least Developed Countries, including India, despite the nation's relative success in managing crises.

NEP 2020 and its Alignment with SDGs:

- India's commitment to SDGs is evident in recent actions and policies, with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 playing a pivotal role. NEP 2020 aligns with many SDGs, notably SDG4, which pertains to quality education, considered a cornerstone for achieving other goals.

- India's historic commitment to equitable and inclusive education finds resonance in the policy's efforts to drive SDG attainment through comprehensive reforms.

Higher Education's Role in SDGs:

- Higher education, a catalyst for social mobility and empowerment, merits particular attention within NEP 2020. Data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underscores the employability and income advantages of higher education.

- A university-based education supports multiple SDGs by reducing poverty, hunger, promoting health, gender equality, economic growth, and reducing inequalities.

The Research-Teaching Nexus:

- Universities must strengthen the research-teaching nexus, enabling students to benefit directly from research-generated knowledge.

- Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary education fosters versatile individuals capable of addressing global challenges such as clean energy, sustainable communities, climate change, and biodiversity conservation.

Innovation and Collaboration:

- Sustainable development necessitates transformative shifts in production and consumption patterns. Innovations and start-ups should collaborate with the private sector to address global challenges.

- Value-Based Education (VBE) instils responsibility toward self, society, and the planet, aligning with SDG15 (Life on Land).

Accelerating Progress:

- While ranking universities based on SDG achievement is commendable, more comprehensive efforts are required to meet the SDG deadline.

- Higher education stakeholders should undergo orientation to ensure all activities align with SDGs. Collaboration among India's numerous higher education institutions is vital.

Universities as Catalysts for Change:

- Universities should reinvigorate their roles in local communities, contributing to community health, energy conservation, resource efficiency, skill development, and infrastructure sharing.
- Sustainability should permeate institutional strategies, encompassing daily administration, teaching, and research.

Integration with Socio-economic Development:

- Higher education must integrate with socio-economic development, ensuring that each activity and transaction positively impacts SDGs.
- Universities should be perceived as direct contributors to individual well-being and national progress.

Way Forward:

- Universities should adopt sustainability as a core principle, integrating SDGs into institutional strategies, daily operations, and research endeavours.
- Stakeholders should collaborate to ensure that no SDG is left unattended within the higher education sector.
- Universities must actively engage with local communities, fostering culture shifts towards health, resource efficiency, and collaboration.

Conclusion:

The SDGs represent a global call to action, and India, through initiatives like NEP 2020 and its emphasis on higher education, demonstrates its commitment to these goals. To meet the challenges posed by a slow SDG progress and global uncertainties, universities must align their activities with SDGs, become engines of socio-economic development, and empower individuals to contribute meaningfully to their well-being and nation-building.

Mental health and the floundering informal worker

Context:

World Mental Health Day, observed annually on October 10th, spotlights the theme of 'mental health as a universal human right.' Yet, one segment that often remains overlooked within this discourse is the informal worker. These unsung heroes of the labor force form the backbone of India's workforce. In a country where more than 90% of employment falls within the informal sector, it is essential to recognize the unique challenges they face concerning mental health.

Relevance:

GS-02, GS-03 (Health, Employment, Inclusive growth)

Mains Question:

Elaborate on the reasons behind the prevalence of poor mental health among informal workers in India. Propose measures to foster a mentally healthy workforce. (150 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- The Plight of India's Informal Workforce
- The Gender Disparities
- The Youth Unemployment
- Aging Workers in a Precarious Situation
- The Role of Social Security
- Reevaluating the Code on Social Security 2020
- Enhancing Mental Healthcare

The Plight of India's Informal Workforce:

- India's informal workforce constitutes a staggering majority of over 90% of the country's labor population. These individuals often toil in harsh conditions, bereft of regulatory protection.

- Their workdays are marked by unsafe environments, gruelling hours, and a distinct lack of access to both social and financial safety nets. Moreover, they face the spectre of uncertainty, discrimination, and precariousness. This unique combination of challenges takes a toll on their mental well-being.

The Gender Disparities:

- Gender disparities within India's informal workforce are glaring. **More than 95% of the working women in the country** find themselves embroiled in informal, low-paying, and precarious employment.

- These female workers are often denied the shelter of social protection. Furthermore, they grapple with patriarchal norms within their professional spheres and in their personal lives. This compounds the mental health struggles they face.

The Youth Unemployment:

- The Lokniti group, part of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, conducted a survey encompassing 9,316 youths aged between 15 to 34 years across 18 Indian states. Their findings reveal that these young individuals are particularly susceptible to negative emotions.

- The stigma surrounding unemployment further exacerbates their mental health challenges. Alarming trends show that many young workers are reluctantly veering towards more precarious and informal work, accepting lower pay and inferior working conditions due to a lack of viable alternatives. Some are even abandoning the labor force entirely.

- The situation is dire, given India's demographic landscape, with half of its population falling within the working-age bracket. It is imperative to address the quality of employment and the need for long-term social security measures.

Aging Workers in a Precarious Situation:

- India stands on the brink of becoming an aging society in the next two decades. Currently, 33 million elderly individuals continue working in informal roles even after their retirement. Unfortunately, these aging workers face economic dependence and a lack of financial security and healthcare provisions.

- The absence of a comprehensive plan for financial and healthcare security exacerbates their vulnerability. The situation is alarming, considering the rapid growth of this aging demographic.

The Role of Social Security:

- Informal workers find themselves grappling with mental distress as they struggle to cope with mounting debts and escalating healthcare expenses. These interconnected issues feed into each other, exacerbating the mental health challenges faced by this workforce. Adequate social security measures can play a pivotal role in mitigating these stressors.

- However, India's social security framework remains inadequate, with inconsistent implementation and budgetary constraints. It is disheartening to note that in 2021, the National Crime Records Bureau reported that 26% of individuals who died by suicide were daily wage earners. This grim statistic underscores the pressing need for robust social security measures.

- These measures can be broadly classified as promotional (focused on income enhancement), preventive (aimed at averting economic distress), and protective (providing relief from external shocks).

Reevaluating the Code on Social Security 2020:

- A critical examination of the Code on Social Security 2020 reveals that the glaring issues concerning social security for India's informal workforce remain unaddressed.

- The current code fails to articulate the goal of universal social security, a need of paramount importance.

Enhancing Mental Healthcare:

- India's allocation for mental health in the budget, currently at less than 1% of the total health budget, predominantly centers around digital mental health programs. However, addressing mental health challenges requires a broader approach.

- Strengthening community-based care and adopting people-centered, recovery-oriented, and human rights-oriented care models is essential. Proactive policies that recognize and respond to mental health issues are crucial.

- Upholding the fundamental human right to good mental health is imperative, especially as it aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 3 on 'good health and well-being' and SDG 8 on 'decent work for all/economic growth.'

Way Forward:

To combat the mental health challenges plaguing India's informal workforce, comprehensive measures must be taken:

1. Universal Social Security: Prioritize universal social security measures that ensure informal workers have access to financial support, healthcare, and essential services. Revisit and amend the existing Code on Social Security to explicitly prioritize this objective.
2. Promote Decent Work: Policymakers should focus on creating opportunities for decent employment, particularly for the youth. This entails addressing youth unemployment, improving employment quality, and working towards eradicating the stigma associated with joblessness.
3. Elderly Care: Given India's aging population, there is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive social security plan for the elderly. This should encompass financial security and access to healthcare.
4. Reform Mental Healthcare: Increase the budget allocation for mental health to meet the growing demand for services. Emphasize community-based care and adopt rights-based approaches to mental health.

Conclusion:

Mental health is an inherent human right, and it should extend to India's informal workforce, which constitutes the majority of the labor force. The challenges faced by these workers, including precarious employment, discrimination, and the lack of social security, have profound implications for their mental well-being.

- To address these issues, India must prioritize universal social security, promote decent work, and reform mental healthcare. Neglecting to take these steps not only infringes upon individuals' basic rights but also impedes progress toward Sustainable Development Goals related to health and decent work.

ISRO and its Human Spaceflight Mission

Context:

The ISRO embarked on a significant phase of its 'Gaganyaan' human spaceflight mission.

Background:

This phase, marked as TV-D1, was not only the maiden uncrewed developmental flight but also a demonstration of India's resolute commitment to advancing its capabilities in space exploration.

- In this mission, a **solitary-stage rocket** was employed, tasked with transporting a crew module equipped with a **crew-escape system (CES)** to an altitude of 12 kilometers.

- At this juncture, the CES disengaged from the rocket, ascending to an elevation of 17 kilometers. Following a calculated command, the CES parted ways with the crew module, enabling the module to recalibrate itself before descending over the Bay of Bengal.

- The module's descent was meticulously controlled, initially employing drogue parachutes and subsequently relying on main parachutes. The culmination of this meticulously choreographed mission occurred when the module gently splashed into the Bay, not far from Sriharikota, and was promptly recovered by the Indian Navy.

- Concurrently, the CES completed its mission by executing a controlled splashdown at a different location. This complex flight served as a comprehensive test of the CES's capability to safeguard the crew in the event of a rocket malfunction, while also amassing invaluable data through onboard sensors, which will be instrumental for future endeavours.

Relevance:

GS-03 (Space technology)

Mains Question:

Evaluate the significance of ISRO's recent uncrewed developmental flight, TV-D1, within the broader context of India's human spaceflight aspirations and its potential impact on the nation's space exploration goals. (250 words)

Dimensions of the Article:

- Pioneering Safety Measures

- Data-Driven Exploration

- Balancing Act with Costs

Pioneering Safety Measures:

- ISRO with its uncrewed developmental flight prioritized the security of future astronauts.

- The **successful detachment and controlled descent of the crew module**, enabled by the CES, underscored the organization's unwavering commitment to ensuring the welfare of crew members.

Data-Driven Exploration:

- TV-D1 unlike being a test flight, it was more of "treasure trove of data".

- The information gathered during this mission serves as a cornerstone for ISRO's forthcoming endeavours in human spaceflight.

- The organization's approach of making informed decisions based on empirical data was evident through the rigorous testing and evaluations, such as the extensive 16-stage testing of parachutes.

Balancing Act with Costs:

- The 'Gaganyaan' program, with its roots dating back to 2009, was originally estimated at ₹12,400 crore. However, it wasn't until December 2018 that the Union Cabinet granted its approval with a reduced budget of ₹9,023 crore, predicated on the assumption of the first crewed flight taking place by 2022.

- However, due to a multitude of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic and other commitments, the earliest projection for the first crewed flight has been postponed to 2025.

- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set an ambitious target, calling upon ISRO to send humans to the moon by 2040. This is undoubtedly a challenging deadline, even with the necessary financial support.

- The 'Gaganyaan' mission, in this context, serves as a blueprint for achieving a harmonious balance – a meticulous planning approach, the strengthening of local manufacturing capacities, comprehensive testing, and a launch only when fully prepared.

- While the stringent timeline for lunar exploration may be missed, the mission can proceed with a sense of assurance, simultaneously fostering local capabilities.

Way Forward:

- ISRO is poised to continue its journey by adopting a multifaceted approach characterized by careful planning, the nurturing of local manufacturing capabilities, exhaustive testing, and a commitment to launch when fully prepared, will serve as the foundation for future space endeavors.

- The organization's capacity to meet the Prime Minister's ambitious 2040 lunar exploration target, while formidable, will undoubtedly be enhanced by the resilience and adaptability demonstrated in the 'Gaganyaan' mission.

Conclusion:

ISRO's successful execution of the uncrewed developmental flight, TV-D1, reflects India's steadfast commitment to venturing into the challenging domain of human spaceflight. This mission, underscores ISRO's dedication to both crew safety and mission success.

The legality of using white phosphorus

Context:

Human Rights Watch recently accused Israel of using white phosphorus munitions in Gaza, raising concerns about the potential risks posed to civilians.

Relevance:

GS – 03 (Nuclear Technology, Indigenization of Technology, Nanotechnology)

Mains Question:

Discuss the legal and ethical implications of white phosphorus munitions in armed conflicts, considering their environmental dangers and potential harm to civilians.

Dimensions of the Article:

- White Phosphorus
- International Humanitarian Law
- Protocol III and Incendiary Weapons

White Phosphorus:

- It is a pyrophoric that ignites when exposed to oxygen, producing thick, light smoke alongside an intense 815-degree Celsius heat.

(**Pyrophoric substances**: These are those substances which ignites very quickly i.e., under five minutes when in contact with air)

- It serves as a crucial element in creating dense smoke screens during combat, obstructing visibility and providing cover for military maneuvers.
- Uses: Used in Incendiary devices like grenades and artillery shells.
- Global Status: Under the **Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals,** the internationally agreed-upon system to standardize chemical hazard classification and communication, white phosphorus falls under

"Pyrophoric solids, category 1", which includes chemicals that catch fire "spontaneously" when exposed to air. **It is among the most unstable of pyrophoric substances.**

- However, ethical concerns come to the forefront when considering the use of white phosphorus in densely populated areas. Its potential to cause severe burns and prolonged suffering necessitates a closer examination.

- The **Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)** places restrictions on incendiary weapons like white phosphorus, aiming to safeguard civilians.

International Humanitarian Law:

- White phosphorus usage falls under the purview of international humanitarian law, which seeks to minimize harm to both civilians and combatants during armed conflicts.

- Central to this body of law are the principles of distinction and proportionality. Distinction mandates the differentiation between combatants and civilians, while proportionality ensures that military actions do not result in excessive harm to civilians in comparison to the military advantage sought.

- Moreover, international humanitarian law explicitly prohibits indiscriminate attacks that may disproportionately harm civilians and their property.

Protocol III and Incendiary Weapons:

- Protocol III under the CCW provides a specific framework for incendiary weapons. It defines an **"incendiary weapon"** as an armament primarily designed to set fire to objects or inflict burn injuries on individuals through the action of flame, heat, or a combination thereof, produced by a chemical reaction of a substance delivered on the target.

- This definition includes an exemption for munitions that may cause unintended incendiary effects, like illuminants, tracers, smoke, or signalling systems.

- White phosphorus munitions are primarily intended for producing illuminating and smokescreen effects, with the incendiary aspects being secondary or unintentional.

- Consequently, they fall within the exceptions outlined in Protocol III's definition of an "incendiary weapon."

Way Forward:

- The legal implications of employing white phosphorus in warfare underscore the importance of upholding international law, treaties, and protocols to reduce harm to both civilians and the environment. Breaches of these legal principles can lead to global condemnation, investigations, and potential prosecution for war crimes.

- Strengthening Protocol III offers a binding agreement for states, preventing the exploitation of legal ambiguities. Clearer rules would facilitate enforcement, making violations more easily identifiable.

Conclusion:

The controversy surrounding white phosphorus munitions highlights the multifaceted nature of armed conflicts, where military necessity often clashes with the imperative to protect civilians and the environment. Resolving this issue requires a concerted effort to reinforce international legal frameworks, ensuring that the use of such substances is well-regulated and in compliance with humanitarian principles. Ultimately, upholding these laws is not just a matter of legal obligation but a moral duty to safeguard human rights and the world we live in.

Chennai top node in tortoise trafficking network

Context

According to a recent study, Chennai is the top-ranking node in the tortoise and hard-shell turtle trafficking network, which supports the global pet trade.

What is the International Journal of Conservation?

Published by Fauna & Flora, Oryx—The International publication of Conservation is a bimonthly, peer-reviewed, open access publication. It addresses issues like:

- conserving biodiversity
- Use sustainably and with conservation in mind
- Relationships between these subjects and social, economic, and political issues

What did the study done by International Journal of Conservation portray?

- According to the study you cited, Chennai plays a key part in the trafficking of tortoises and freshwater turtles, along with other Indian cities including Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Anantapur, Agra, and North 24 Parganas.
- The top-ranked node in this illegal trade network, which supports the international pet trade, is found to be in Chennai.
- The study, which was published in the September issue of Oryx, The International Journal of Conservation, also discovered that soft-shell turtles are mostly trafficked for their meat within India, with some exports to Bangladesh.

What does the term Asian Turtle Crisis mean?

- The extinction of turtles owing to human hunting and habitat loss is known as the Asian Turtle Crisis. Ninety different species of turtle exist in Asia, and more than half of them are considered endangered or severely endangered.

- When China's currency was made convertible in 1989, it made it easier to import turtles and other species as commodities, which intensified the situation. The crisis is influenced by geography and cultural factors as well.

- There is a turtle extinction because:

  - wildlife trade for traditional medicine and food

  - The pet industry

  - Loss of habitat

  - accidental snare in fishing equipment

  - Changing weather

What do we know about Indian flapshell turtle?

- The Indian flapshell turtle (Lissemys punctata) is a small, soft-shelled freshwater turtle found in South Asia. The femoral flaps on their plastron, which conceal their limbs as they retreat into their shell, gave them their name. They have carapaces that are between 9.4 and 14.6 inches long.

- Numerous Indian provinces as well as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar are home to Indian flapshell turtles.

- They can survive in a range of aquatic settings and are tough, including:

  - streams and rivers

  - Reservoirs

130

- Marshes

- Ponds and lakes

- marshes of salt

- rice paddies

- Gutters and canals in urban areas

- Fish, fruits, vegetables, and freeze-dried foods are all consumed by Indian flapshell turtles, who are omnivorous. They are more susceptible to bacterial or fungal diseases of the shell. Poor water quality might make the issue worse.

- The IUCN status of the Indian Flapshell turtle is vulnerable.

Conclusion

Given the negative effects of this trade on the populations and wellbeing of the species, the study emphasizes the urgent need for conservation measures and law enforcement to stop the illegal traffic in tortoises and freshwater turtles.

IAF likely to induct Astra BVR air-to-air missile by year-end

Context

Defence sources state that the first batch of the indigenous Astra Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air Missile, for which the Indian Air Force (IAF) has placed two contracts with Bharat Dynamics Ltd. (BDL), is anticipated to be deployed by the end of the year.

What is the Astra Missile ?

- The Astra missile is India's first indigenous air-to-air weapon. The Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) developed the missile. The Astra missile is a BVRAAM (beyond visual range) missile that positions and navigates its target using radar. Off the coast of Odisha, the Astra missile was successfully tested in flight. The Sukhoi-30 MKI was used to fire the missile.

- By the end of this year, the Indian Air Force might have the Astra missile in its arsenal.

What are the specifications of the missile?

- Range: 80 -110 km

- Altitude: up to 20 km

- Length: 3840 mm

- Diameter: 178 mm

- Flight Duration: 100 – 120 Sec

- Warhead: HE Pre Fragmented

- Max Speed: Mach 4.5

- Propulsion: Solid Rocket Motor

What makes the Astra missiles unique?

- **Indigenous Development**: Astra is an indigenous development of India that was created and produced there. For India's defence research and development capabilities, this is a tremendous accomplishment.

- **Beyond Visual Range (BVR) capability:** Astra is a BVR (Beyond Visual Range) air-to-air missile, which implies it can engage and destroy adversarial aircraft at distances beyond the range of visual identification. For contemporary air warfare scenarios, this skill is essential.

- **exceptional manoeuvrability:** Astra is renowned for having exceptional manoeuvrability, which enables it to efficiently engage targets that are agile and evasive. Its ability to carry out intricate mid-course and terminal manoeuvres makes it difficult for the target to avoid.

- **Multiplatform Integration:** Astra is intended to be integrated across multiple platforms, notably the Su-30MKI and Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas. The Indian military can use the missile on a variety of systems thanks to its adaptability.

What are the advantages to the Indian Air Force?

- **Enhanced Air Defence:** The Astra air-to-air missile considerably increases the IAF's capacity to engage and shoot down adversarial aircraft at a great distance. This strengthens the IAF's overall posture for air defence.

- **Versatility:** The Su-30MKI and LCA Tejas are only two of the many aircraft platforms that Astra can be connected with. Due to the IAF's ability to equip several types of planes with BVR capabilities, its fleet is more adaptable and powerful.

- **Self-reliance:** India's development and production of the Astra missiles signify a move toward defence technological independence. The IAF can guarantee a more

dependable and continuous supply of essential munitions by minimizing its reliance on outside vendors.

- **Less Dependence on Imports:** Astra aids in lessening reliance on imports of foreign missile systems, which may be susceptible to export limitations and supply chain weaknesses. Ensuring India has access to necessary defence gear, improves its national security.

- **Cost-Efficiency:** By producing Astra missiles at home, the IAF may be able to save money in comparison to importing equivalent systems. This might free up funds for other crucial defence requirements.

- **Technology Advancement:** The Astra missile features cutting-edge guidance and control technologies, displaying India's developments in the defence industry. Future indigenous defence technology development can benefit from this expertise.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Astra missile system offers the Indian Air Force enhanced air defence capabilities, mobility, independence, cost-effectiveness, and technological improvements, eventually advancing the nation's strategic goals.

WHO approves use of malaria vaccine with adjuvant tech

Context

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Monday authorized the use of the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine, which was created by the Serum Institute of India and the University of Oxford using adjuvant technology from Novavax. The vaccine passed all necessary safety, quality, and effectiveness requirements.

What is the R21 Matrix Malaria Vaccine?

- The Serum Institute of India and the University of Oxford collaborated to create the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine. The vaccination was advised by the World Health Organization (WHO) to prevent malaria. After the RTS, S/AS01 vaccine in 2021, it is the second malaria vaccine that the WHO recommends.

- R21 is a saponin-based adjuvant that boosts the immune system's humoral and cellular responses to vaccines. Innate immune cells are stimulated early by the Matrix-M adjuvant at the injection site and in the draining lymph nodes. The strength and calibre of the antibody response to the antigen are enhanced as a result.

What is the difference between R21 and RTS, S?

- A next-generation RTS, S-like vaccine is known as R21. When compared to RTS, S/AS01, R21 is intended to produce a stronger anti-CSP antibody response and a weaker anti-HBsAg antibody response. The core repetitions of the CSP and HBsAg fused to the C-terminus are present in both R21 and RTS, S.

- A portion of a protein released by the sporozoite and a portion of the hepatitis B virus are combined in the subunit vaccine R21. The Plasmodium falciparum parasite, which causes the deadliest cases of malaria worldwide and is most common in Africa, is the target of the vaccine RTS, S/AS01.

WORLDWIDE MALARIA SITUATION

EUROPE: Imported malaria is a growing problem

AFRICA: Biggest single cause of death

ASIA: Drug-resistant strains have spread

Regions worst affected by the disease — SOURCE: WHO
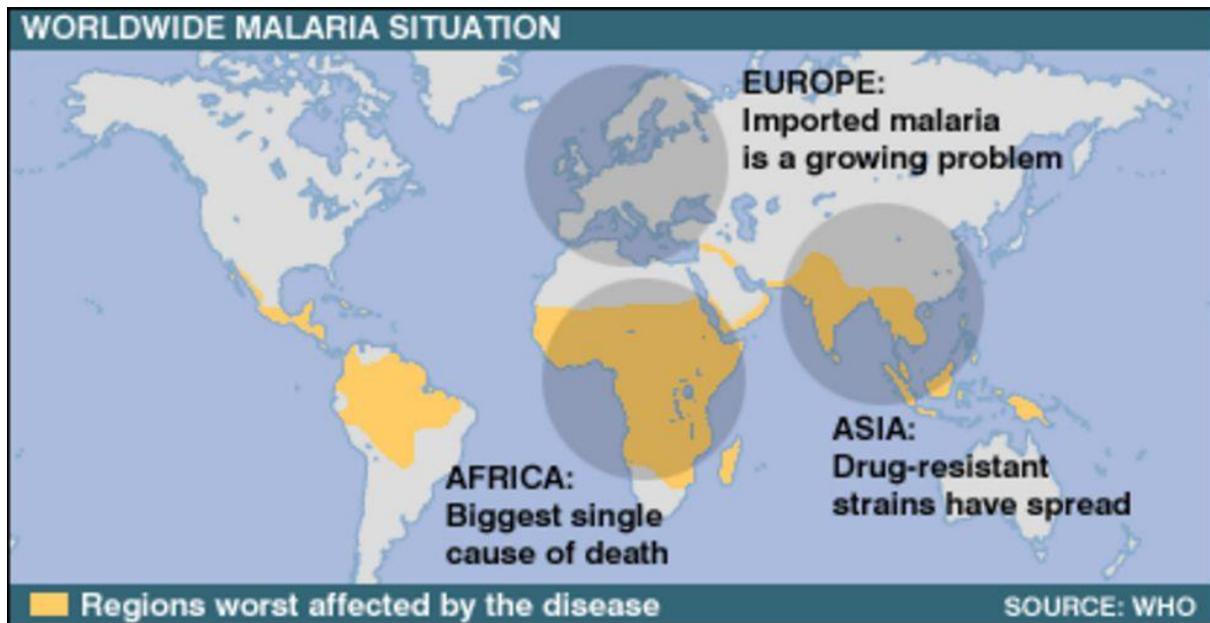
What are the possible side effects of the vaccine ?

- The R21 vaccine was well tolerated in clinical trials and had acceptable side effects. The most common side effects were:
    - Fever
    - Loss of appetite
    - Irritability
    - Drowsiness

Who developed the latest type of vaccine?

- The Jenner Institute at Oxford University and the Serum Institute of India worked together to create the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine. The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), the Welcome Trust, and the European Investment Bank (EIB) all provided funding for this partnership.

What are the components of the vaccine?

- The vaccination primarily consists of two parts:
    - R21: The antigen or immunogen that sets off the body's defences against the malaria parasite is this.
    - Matrix-M: This is an adjuvant, specifically a Novavax-developed, exclusive saponin-based adjuvant. To increase the efficiency of vaccines by stimulating the immune response, adjuvants are chemicals added to the vaccines.

Conclusion

The WHO's endorsement and approval of the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine mark a significant advancement in the global fight against malaria, a disease that has devastated many parts of the world. The vaccine's accessibility to those who need it most depends on its availability and scalability.

LPG subsidy for Ujjwala beneficiaries raised to ₹300

Context

The Union Cabinet increased the subsidy on LPG cylinders under the Ujjwala scheme to 300 from 200 per cylinder on Wednesday, ahead of Assembly elections in five states.

What is the Ujjwala Scheme?

- The Indian government introduced the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in 2016, a social welfare scheme that supports Prime Minister Narendra Modi's objective of a smoke-free rural India. The initiative was launched to provide discounted LPG connections to the entire country by 2019.

- The scheme was anticipated to help 80 million families (up from 50 million previously), with a focus on those living below the poverty line (BPL). It will aid in increasing LPG usage while reducing air pollution, deforestation, and health problems among populations.

What is the requirement for the Ujjwala scheme?

- LPG connections in India are concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas, with the majority of connections in middle and higher-middle-class families. Due to limited access to LPG, low-income households frequently use fossil fuels such as coal, kerosene, and timber as primary sources of cooking; however, these sources are largely associated with serious health hazards such as indoor air pollution, which causes acute respiratory illnesses, and pulmonary and lung diseases.

- According to the WHO, the use of filthy cooking fuels is responsible for 5 lakh deaths in India, with the bulk of deaths caused by noncommunicable diseases such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

- The government's PMUY scheme intends to increase the reach of LPG connections to low-income and below-poverty-line (BPL) homes, reducing their reliance on fossil fuels. Apart from guaranteeing universal coverage of LPG connections throughout the country, this initiative also empowers women and improves their health by decreasing drudgery and cooking time. It will help to create jobs for rural youths in the cooking gas supply chain management.

What are the objectives of the scheme?

- To emancipate women and protect their well-being.

- To lower the health risks connected with the use of impure fossil fuels and other cooking fuels.

- To reduce interior air pollution caused by fossil fuel combustion, which causes respiratory difficulties.

- To prevent the pollution of the environment caused by the widespread use of impure culinary fuels.

What are the features of the scheme?

- Provide **Rs. 1,600 in financial assistance t**o BPL households for each LPG connection.

- Provide interest-free loans to oil marketing companies for the purchase of stoves and refills.

- The government will **pay the Rs. 1,600 administrative fee** for the connection, which includes a cylinder, pressure regulator, handbook, and safety hose.

- As sanctioned by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)** participants would receive a **subsidy of Rs. 200 for each 14.2 kg cylinder for up to 12 refills per year in 2023-2024.**
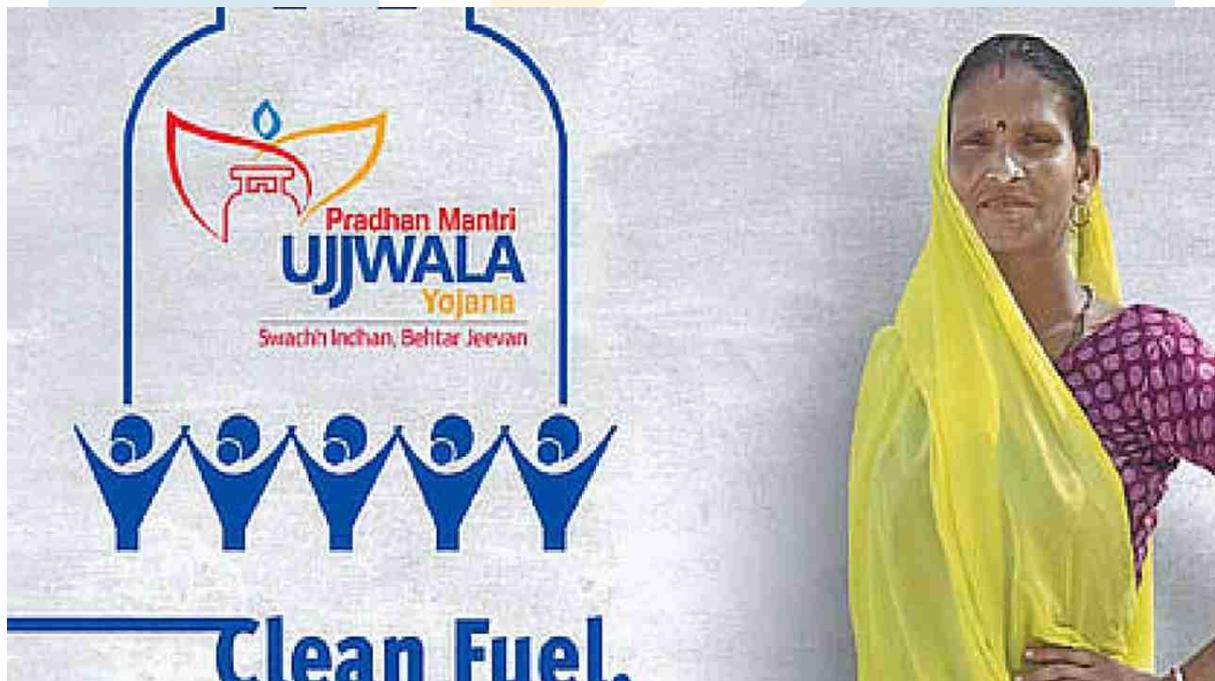
What are the recent changes made to the scheme?

- **Increase in Subsidy:** The Union Cabinet has approved an increase in the subsidy granted on LPG cylinders distributed under the Ujjwala scheme. The cylinder subsidy has been increased from Rs200 to Rs300.

- **Cylinder Cost Reduction:** The cost of a 14.2-kg LPG cylinder under the Ujjwala plan has fallen as a result of the subsidy increase. It will now be priced at Rs603, down from Rs703 per cylinder previously.

What are the benefits of the Ujjwala scheme?

- **Access to Clean Cooking Fuel:** The major goal of the Ujjwala scheme is to enable households that previously relied on archaic and polluting cooking methods such as wood, coal, or kerosene access to clean cooking fuel, namely LPG (liquefied petroleum gas). This switch to LPG helps to reduce indoor air pollution, which improves family health and well-being.

- **Health Advantages:** By substituting LPG for traditional cooking fuels, the Ujjwala scheme helps to reduce respiratory ailments and health difficulties caused by indoor air pollution. This is especially useful for women and children, who are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of traditional cooking methods.

- **Women Empowerment:** The scheme aims to empower women by providing them with LPG connections in their names. This not only promotes gender equality but also provides women influence over home cooking decisions and relieves them of the arduous task of collecting firewood or other conventional fuels.

- **Financial Assistance**: Ujjwala offers financial help to eligible individuals to cover the cost of the LPG connection. The financial aid covers the cylinder security deposit, pressure regulator, and administrative charges for the connection. This financial assistance makes LPG more affordable for economically disadvantaged households.

- **Subsidized Refills:** Ujjwala scheme beneficiaries also receive LPG refill subsidies. The government offers a subsidy to cut the continuous cost of purchasing LPG cylinders, making them more affordable for households.

What are the challenges faced by the Scheme?

- **Identification of poor families:** The most difficult difficulty in allocating free LPG connections was the lack of authentic data that could help identify impoverished households with 100% accuracy. Even though the government used SECC-2011 data, it was stated that many worthy households were left out of the fieldwork.

- **Misuse of SECC data:** It was discovered that a few affluent families were also identified as BPL households in the SECC-2011 data, making it difficult to confirm the legitimacy of all data in the SECC database.

- **Beneficiaries' safety awareness:** Because the majority of beneficiaries were poor and illiterate, they had little knowledge of the safety standards for cooking on an LPG stove.

Conclusion

In summary, the Ujjwala scheme provides numerous benefits, including improved health, women's empowerment, financial help, environmental benefits, and economic benefits. It is critical in enhancing the overall quality of life for economically disadvantaged Indian households.

ITBP on alert, conducting patrols along China border: Home Ministry

Context

According to the 2022–23 annual report of the Union Home Ministry, which was released on Friday, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) carried out 2,899 patrols along the Chinese border between April and December 2022.

Indo Tibetian Border Police force

The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) is a border guarding force of India. It was established in 1962 after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The ITBP guards the 3,488 km long India-China border from the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh.

When was the ITBP formed and the historical background behind the formation?

- **Indo-China War:** The Sino-Indian War of 1962, often referred to as the Indo-China War of 1962, was a brief but ferociously fought struggle between China and India. It began in October 1962 along the disputed border between the two nations, particularly in the Aksai Chin and northeastern Himalayan regions. The Line of Actual Control (LAC), a de facto border that marked the conclusion of the conflict in November 1962, was created.

- **Requirement:** Border security is required since there were long-standing territorial disputes and a lack of a clearly defined border between China and India in the Himalayan region before the war. The start of the conflict brought to light India's

border regions' vulnerability and the requirement for a specialized force to secure and monitor these areas.

- **Formation of ITBP:** Following the Sino-Indian War, the Indian government decided to create a specialist border guarding force after realizing the value of protecting the country's border with China. To protect India's borders with China's Tibetan Autonomous Region, the ITBP was established in October 1962.

What are the functions of ITBP?

- **Security at the Border:** The ITBP's main duty is to patrol and secure India's borders with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. This entails preserving a continual watch along the border, stopping unauthorized entry, and protecting India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

- **Patrolling:** Long- and short-range patrols are carried out by the ITBP in the remote and unpopulated areas close to the border. In isolated areas that are susceptible to different natural disasters and potential threats, these patrols are crucial for keeping an eye on activity.

- **Disaster Response:** In the Himalayan region, ITBP acts as the initial disaster responder. The ITBP is essential to search and rescue efforts during earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, snowstorms, and other calamities because of the difficult terrain and arid climate of the Himalayas.

- **Rescue Operations:** Outside of natural calamities, the ITBP helps trekkers, mountaineers, and pilgrims travelling to sites like Kailash Mansarovar and Amarnath who may become stranded or in need in high areas.

- **Mountaineering trips:** The ITBP has conducted a large number of mountaineering trips, frequently setting important field records. ITBP troops are extremely accomplished mountaineers.

What are the major operations ITBP was part of?

- **Indo-Pak Wars:** The ITBP participated in both the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak Wars. It participated in border security and combat activities during these conflicts.

- **Counter-Insurgency Operations:** Six extra ITBP battalions were established in 1987 to help fight the Punjabi insurgency's bank robberies. Personnel from the ITBP engaged in anti-insurgency operations in the state.

- **Jammu and Kashmir:** To combat insurgency in the area, ITBP had a limited presence in Jammu & Kashmir from 1989 to 2004.

- **Disaster Response:** In the Himalayan region, ITBP has actively participated in numerous disaster response and relief operations. This covers dealing with landslides, avalanches, snowstorms, earthquakes, and other natural calamities.

- **Mountaineering trips:** Members of the ITBP have taken part in several climbing trips both domestically and abroad, frequently setting important records in the process.

Territorial Army inducts five Chinese language interpreters for border talks

Context

Five Chinese-speaking translators were hired by the Territorial Army (TA) in August to help the army at border personnel meetings (BPMs) with China, according to sources in the military. Additionally, plans exist to hire cyber experts.

Territorial Army

The Indian Territorial Army (TA) is a voluntary, auxiliary military organization that offers support services to the Indian Army. In addition to bearing ranks similar to those in the Indian Army, it is made up of officers, junior commissioned officers, non-commissioned officers, and other individuals. The purpose of the TA is to "relieve the regular army from static duties and assist the civil administration in dealing with natural calamities and maintenance of essential services", along with "provide units for the regular army as and when required"

What is the historical background behind the Territorial Army?

- **Colonial Period:** The English East India Company recognized the necessity for a group of part-time troops to defend its economic interests when it first established a foothold in India in the early 17th century. These part-time troops were frequently available staff members for the business. These part-time forces developed over time into the TA's founding elements.

- **Companie of Trained Bands:** The English East India Company established the "Companie of Trained Bands" at Madras (Chennai) in 1687 to protect itself from rival

European nations like the French East India Company and indigenous princely states. These forces participated in the early conflicts and were sporadic.

- **Indian Rebellion of 1857:** The Sepoy Mutiny, also known as the Indian Rebellion of 1857, was a pivotal event. Following the uprising, the British Crown replaced the East India Company as the country's ruler. As a result, part-time troops that already existed were restructured, and the Volunteer Force (VFI) was established legally.

- **Volunteer Force (VFI):** Indians and Europeans who volunteered for part-time service made up the Volunteer Force (VFI), which was established in the late 19th century. It participated in several wars, including World War I and the Second Boer War. Part-time volunteer forces became more popular during this time.

- **Indian Defence Force (IDF):** The Indian Defence Force (IDF) was founded in 1917 during World War I to relieve regular troops from garrison responsibilities. It was essential to the war effort and consisted of both Indian volunteers and conscripts from Europe.

- **Indian Territorial Force (ITF):** The VFI and IDF were replaced and reorganized to create the ITF in 1920. The University Training Corps (UTC), the ITF's youth division, was made up of part-time Indian soldiers. This signalled the use of part-time forces in a more planned and organised manner.

- **Post-Independence:** Part-time volunteer forces were still required after India attained independence in 1947. In 1948, the Constituent Assembly received the Territorial Army Bill, which resulted in the creation of the Territorial Army in its contemporary form. The TA was constituted by reorganizing and re-designing existing ITF infantry units.

What are the roles of the Territorial Army?

- **Release from Static Duties of Regular Army:** One of the main purposes of the TA is to release the regular army from static duties. The regular army can then concentrate on tasks that are more tactical and combat-oriented by delegating some non-operational, administrative, and garrison functions to TA units. During times of peace, this release from static chores is especially beneficial.

- **Assisting Civil Administration during Natural Calamities:** Aiding the civil administration in times of natural disasters The TA is frequently asked to support civil government during natural disaster relief operations. TA units can offer essential assistance during crises caused by earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and other natural disasters. In rescue and relief efforts, they assist with the distribution of necessary supplies and the evacuation of populations.

- **Maintenance of essential Services:** The TA can help maintain important services during emergencies or when they are interrupted. Tasks including assuring the supply of necessities, handling logistics, and assisting with the operation of vital infrastructure like power plants and communication networks are included in this.

- **Units for the Regular Army:** The TA acts as a pool of qualified individuals who can be called up and incorporated into the regular army as and when necessary. TA units and troops may be requested to help the regular army in times of national emergency or during times of increased security threats.

- **Supporting Specialist Activities:** The TA has taken part in several specialist activities, including mountaineering excursions and environmental projects. In addition to performing typical military duties, TA units have scaled mountains, planted trees, and participated in environmental conservation initiatives.

- **Participating in Peacekeeping Missions:** Although less frequent than other responsibilities, certain TA units have been sent on missions to maintain international peace and security.

What are the major operations that TA were part of?

- **1962 Sino-Indian War:** TA battalions were activated and took an active part in the conflict. During this fight on the Indo-China border, they assisted the regular Indian Army.

- **Indo-Pakistani War of 1965:** TA units were once more called into combat during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 to assist the regular army in defending India's borders against Pakistani incursions.

- **Indo-Pakistani War of 1971:** Bangladesh was founded as a result of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, in which the TA played a crucial part. The western and eastern fronts were just two of the war's theatres in which TA units participated.

- **Kargil War (1999):** TA units were called into action during the 1999 Kargil War, which involved fighting Pakistani forces in the Kargil sector of Jammu and Kashmir. In the difficult terrain of the area, they gave vital help.

- **Operation Pawan (1987):** As a component of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), TA units participated in Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka, conducting counter-insurgency and peacekeeping operations.

- **Operation Rakshak:** As part of Operation Rakshak, TA units have been actively engaged in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in areas like Punjab Jammu and Kashmir.

- **Humanitarian and Disaster Relief operations:** Assistance during earthquakes (such as the 1991 Uttarkashi earthquake and the 1993 Latur earthquake), cyclones (such as the 1999 Odisha cyclone), and other natural calamities have been requested of the TA on multiple occasions.

- **Mountaineering excursions**: To encourage adventure and military training, several TA units have participated in mountaineering excursions, ascending peaks both inside and outside of India.

- **Ecological projects:** In several parts of India, TA units have been involved in ecological projects like as tree planting and conservation activities.

Stroke deaths likely to surge to 9.7 million by 2050

Context

According to a paper released on Monday in the Lancet Neurology journal, stroke, a disorder that is largely treatable and preventive, might cause roughly 10 million annual fatalities by the year 2050, predominantly impacting low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

What is a stroke condition?

When there is a blockage in the blood supply to the brain or an unexpected increase in brain haemorrhage, a stroke may happen. There are two distinct stroke kinds:

- An ischemic stroke is one when there is a blockage of blood flow to the brain. Blood cannot supply the brain with nutrition and oxygen. Brain cells start to die within minutes of being deprived of oxygen and nutrition.

- Haemorrhagic strokes are caused by abrupt bleeding in the brain and are the most common type of stroke. Blood leakage causes pressure on brain cells, which harms them.

What are the common risk factors associated with Strokes?

- High blood pressure (hypertension)

- Smoking

- Diabetes

- High cholesterol levels

- Obesity

- Physical inactivity

- Excessive alcohol consumption

- Family history of stroke

- Age (risk increases with age)

- Certain medical conditions, such as atrial fibrillation (an irregular heart rhythm)

What are the symptoms associated with strokes?

- Numbness or weakness in the face, arm, or leg (typically on one side of the body)

- Trouble speaking or understanding speech

- Confusion

- Severe headache

- Trouble with vision in one or both eyes

- Dizziness, loss of balance, or lack of coordination

What does the report in Lancet Neurology journal tell us about strokes?

- **Stroke Prevalence:** Strokes are a largely treated and preventable disorder, yet by 2050 they could cause up to 10 million fatalities annually. The 6.6 million stroke-related fatalities reported in 2020 represent a significant increase from this worrying forecast.

- **Impact on Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs):** The report underlines that LMICs are projected to bear a disproportionate share of the burden of stroke-related mortality. Stroke fatalities are predicted to increase from 86% in 2020 to 91% in LMICs by 2050.

What are the recommendations to combat the looming strokes?

- **Creating Cost-Effective Surveillance Systems:** To support efforts in stroke prevention and treatment, detailed epidemiological data on stroke must be collected through cost-effective surveillance systems.

- **Raising Public Awareness**: Using digital and mobile technologies for education and awareness initiatives to increase public awareness and encourage healthier lives.

- **Strokes Care Services:** Setting the planning and development of acute stroke care services as a top priority. Building capacity, educating people, giving them with tools they need, assuring them access to reasonably priced medications, and assigning enough funds are all examples of this.

Conclusion

The article emphasizes the need to address stroke as a global health concern by implementing preventive actions. The prevention of stroke-related mortality and the cost of this condition on healthcare systems and communities around the world can be significantly reduced by putting the suggested solutions into practice, especially in low- and middle-income nations.

India ranks 111 out of 125 countries in hunger index

Context

According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023, India is ranked 111th out of 125 nations, and its progress against hunger has all but stopped since 2015, which is consistent with a global trend. However, for the third year in a row, the Union government disputed India's results, pointing to faulty methodology.

What is the Global Hunger Index?

An approach called the Global Hunger Index (GHI) is used to assess and monitor hunger on a global, regional, and national level. It is used to evaluate the extent of hunger and malnutrition in the world and to shed light on the strides achieved in resolving this pressing problem. Every year, the GHI is usually computed and published. The findings are then included in a report that is released, usually in October.

Global Hunger Index in 1992

- >50 (Extremely Alarming)
- 35-50 (Alarming)
- 20-35 (At Risk)
- 10-20 (Moderate)
- 5-10 (Low)
- <5 (Very Low)
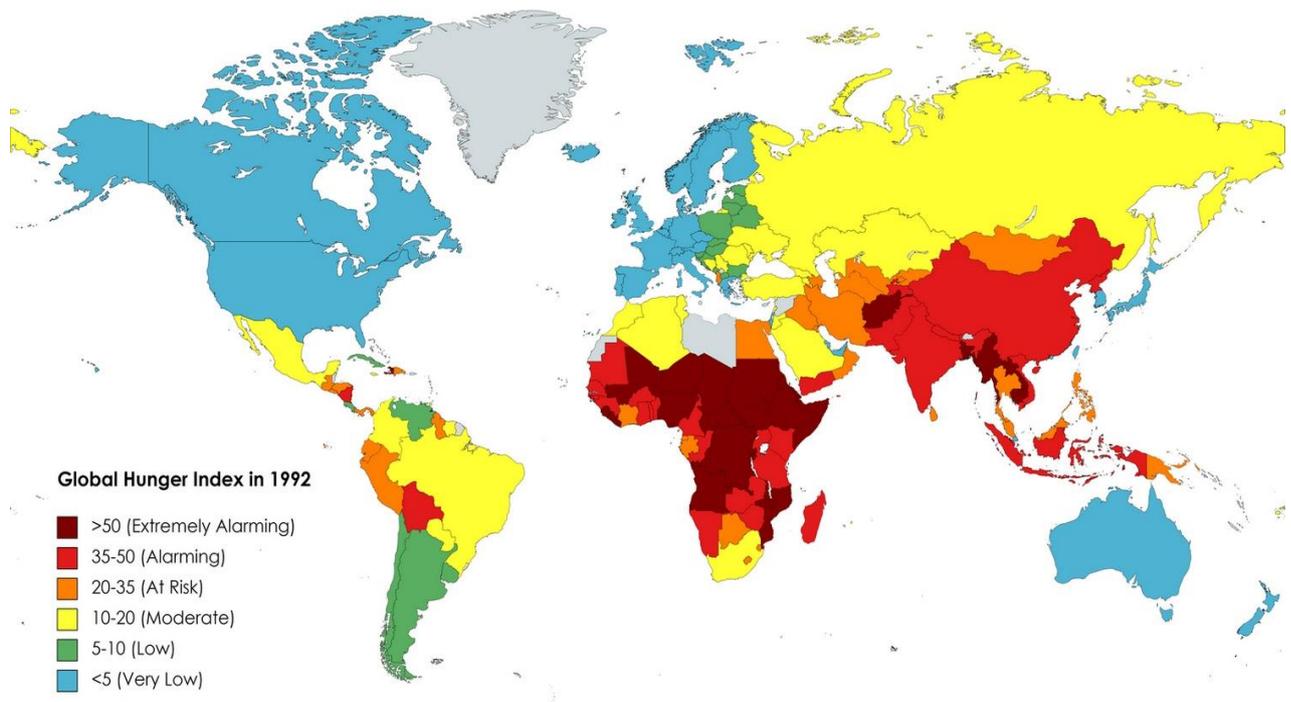
Who is publishing the Global Hunger Index report?

- The GHI was created in 2006 and is prepared by the European non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide. The German NGO Welthungerhilfe and the American International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) released it at first.

- Irish nongovernmental organization Concern Worldwide joined as a co-publisher in 2007. After IFPRI left the project in 2018, Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe collaborated on the GHI.

What are the criteria on which the GHI is calculated?

The following are the main factors that go into determining the GHI:

- **Undernourishment:** The percentage of the population that consumes insufficient calories is shown by this metric. It shows the proportion of the population that does not have access to enough food to meet their energy needs each day. A key component of hunger and malnutrition is undernourishment.

- **Child Stunting:** A measure of chronic undernutrition, child stunting is the proportion of children under five who are short for their age. One long-term effect of poor nutrition during a child's formative years is stunted growth.

- **Child Wasting**: The percentage of children under five who are underweight for their height, a sign of severe malnutrition, is known as child wasting. A more acute and severe kind of malnutrition known as "wasting" is frequently brought on by recent food shortages or illnesses.

- **Child Mortality**: This measure shows what percentage of kids pass away before turning five. Unhealthy living circumstances and insufficient nutrition have an impact on child mortality. Severe hunger and malnutrition may be indicated by high rates of child mortality.

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a 100-point scale that assesses the severity of hunger in a country, considering both chronic and acute aspects. It helps policymakers and organizations address hunger and malnutrition, tracking progress in improving food security and nutritional well-being across regions.

What are the uses of the report in our Country?

- **Monitoring Hunger Trends:** Every year, the GHI report offers an overview of the national, regional, and worldwide patterns in hunger and malnutrition. It gives interested parties the ability to track changes in these patterns over time, which is vital information for assessing advancements or regressions in the fight against hunger.

- **Identifying High-Risk Areas:** The report helps humanitarian groups and policymakers focus resources and actions where they are most urgently needed by identifying the nations and regions with the highest rates of hunger and malnutrition.

- **Establishing Global Goals:** The GHI participates in international talks and goal-setting concerning hunger and malnutrition. It is in line with global endeavours like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 2, which is to eradicate hunger by the year 2030. The GHI aids in tracking advancement toward these objectives.

- **Advocacy and Awareness:** The GHI report brings attention to the pressing problem of hunger and malnourishment among the general public. It can raise public awareness of the difficulties experienced by disadvantaged groups and encourage support for resolving these problems.

- **Policy Development:** When creating and modifying policies about nutrition, food security, and poverty alleviation, policymakers can refer to the GHI report. It offers a fact-based understanding of the origins and effects of hunger.

What is India's Ranking in the 2023 GHI?

- According to the 2023 study, India ranks 111th out of 125 countries in the GHI.

- India has a hunger severity score of 28.7, meaning that it is classified as "serious."

- The difficulties India faces in combating hunger and malnutrition are reflected in this ranking.

- On the GHI, Afghanistan, Haiti, and twelve sub-Saharan nations outperformed India.

- For the third year in a row, the Indian government has disputed the country's GHI results, alleging issues with the methodology.

Conclusion

To monitor progress toward international objectives like the Sustainable Development Goal of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030, as well as to increase public awareness of hunger and malnutrition, the Global Hunger Index is a crucial instrument. It also sheds light on the fundamental causes of hunger, including political unrest, the global warming issue, the financial fallout from catastrophes like the COVID-19 outbreak, poverty, inequality, and bad governance.

India's abortion law is pro-choice, liberal, ahead of other nations

Context

In the course of hearing a case involving a married lady seeking medical termination of her 26-week pregnancy, Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud declared on Friday that India's abortion laws are progressive, pro-choice, and well ahead of those in other nations.

What is the historical background of Abortion laws in India?

- In India, abortion was prohibited until the 1960s, and violators faced up to three years in prison and/or a fine under Section 312 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

- The Shantilal Shah Committee was established by the government in the middle of the 1960s, and its chairman, Dr Shantilal Shah, was tasked with investigating abortion and determining whether or not India needed legislation on the subject.

- A medical termination bill was submitted in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and passed by Parliament in August 1971, based on the Shantilal Shah Committee's recommendations.

- Except for the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971, was applicable throughout all of India as of April 1, 1972.

- Furthermore, even in cases where the pregnant woman gives her agreement, intentionally "causing miscarriage" is illegal under Section 312 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, unless the miscarriage is necessary to save the lady's life.

What is the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act 1971?

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act of 1971 allows registered medical practitioners to terminate certain pregnancies. The law relaxes restrictions on women seeking abortions and on professionals performing them.

- The MTP Act of 1971 permits abortion in the following circumstances:

    o There is a chance of severe physical harm during pregnancy.

    o The pregnant woman's mental health is at risk because of the pregnancy.

    o The pregnancy results from either rape or a married woman failing to use contraception.

- If two doctors concur, a pregnancy can be ended up to 20 weeks after it begins, and up to 12 weeks if just one doctor feels that way.

What is the opinion of CJI about the abortion laws in India?

- D.Y. Chandrachud, the Chief Justice of India, expressed his admiration for the country's abortion laws in a recent court proceeding.

- According to him, the law is liberal and pro-choice, giving women a lot of options and rights when it comes to abortion.

- "Roe v. Wade" comparison: Chief Justice Chandrachud highlighted how far ahead India's abortion laws are about the historic U.S. Supreme Court judgment.

- It was established by "Roe v. Wade" that the right to an abortion is typically protected by the US Constitution.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the case in question and CJI Chandrachud's remarks underscore the progressive character of India's abortion laws, the circumstances surrounding the specific case—such as the woman's medical condition and the requirement for a medical board's assessment—as well as the permissiveness of late-term abortions.

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The study estimates the count of UAVs required for the three Services

Context

Two studies on significant military platforms used by the three Services have been commissioned by General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff. These platforms are armoured helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), according to defence sources. Since then, the UAV study has been concluded, and the recommendation is to purchase 155 medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) and 31 high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) MQ-9B UAVs.

What was the study conducted by the Tri-services and what was the outcome of the study?

- Studies conducted: Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan has directed the conducting of two studies on significant military systems, with an emphasis on armoured helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

- Goal of the Research: The goal of these studies is to minimize the number of platforms needed, use resources wisely, and prevent duplication when purchasing military equipment for the Indian armed forces.

- Completion of UAV Study: The investigation into UAVs has been finished, and its conclusions include suggestions for certain UAV purchases. The following are the suggestions:

    o Acquire 31 MQ-9B high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) UAVs.

    o Acquire 155 medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) UAVs.

What is the need for UAVs in the armed forces?

- **Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR):** UAVs play a key role in delivering real-time ISR capabilities. They can be fitted with a variety of sensors, such as radar, infrared imaging, and cameras, to survey large regions, acquire intelligence, and keep an eye on enemy movements all without endangering human life.

- **Acquisition of Targets:** UAVs aid in precisely locating and designating targets for airstrikes or artillery fire. They can provide more accurate target information because of their propensity to hover over a target region for extended periods.

- **Tactical and Strategic Awareness:** By giving the armed forces an aerial perspective of the battleground, UAVs improve their situational awareness. Making educated decisions, comprehending the enemy's nature, and guaranteeing the security of friendly forces are all made easier with the use of this information.

- **Search and Rescue**: Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) can be utilized in humanitarian and disaster relief operations to find and evaluate the health of victims. They may offer insightful information to direct search and rescue operations.

- **Communication Relay**: In areas with limited traditional communication infrastructure, such as remote or difficult terrain, certain UAVs can serve as communication relays, expanding the reach of communication.

- **Electronic warfare**: To interfere with enemy communications and radar systems, UAVs might be fitted with electronic countermeasures.

- **Combat Support:** By carrying and deploying weapons, armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—like the MQ-9 Reaper—can conduct offensive operations and take out strategic targets.

What is the requirement for Armoured Helicopters in India?

- **Ground Support and Attack:** Enemy troops, armoured vehicles, and fortifications are among the ground threats that armoured helicopters are intended to combat. They are useful in close air support (CAS) operations because they are equipped with cutting-edge sensors, powerful weapons systems, and precision-guided missiles. During combat operations, these helicopters are capable of giving ground forces direct fire support.

- **Anti-Tank Operations**: Armed with anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), armoured helicopters, especially the Apache, are capable of engaging and destroying enemy armoured vehicles, including tanks. With the prevalence of armoured formations in modern combat, this capacity is essential.

- **Counter-Insurgency Operations:** In counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations, armoured helicopters are invaluable. They can reduce collateral damage by focusing on terrorists or insurgents who are concealed in hazardous or urban environments.

- **Air Defence:** When operating within their operational range, armoured helicopters can engage hostile aircraft or unmanned aerial threats. This gives allied forces and important installations an additional layer of security.

- **Versatility:** Armoured helicopters are adaptable platforms that may be used for a range of mission scenarios. One example of this is the Apache. In addition to their main assault duty, they may also perform escort, observation, and reconnaissance missions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the armoured helicopter study has not yet been completed, and its conclusions are pending finalization. In contrast, the UAV study suggested the purchase of particular UAV models and offered information on their quantities.

The Army gets a vertical wind tunnel to train special forces

Context

The Army established its first vertical wind tunnel (VWT) at the Special Forces Training School (SFTS) in Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh, to improve the training facilities for special forces and combat free-fallers. On Wednesday, the facility was essentially opened by Army Chief General Manoj Pande.

What is a Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT)?

- A Vertical Wind Tunnel (VWT) is a facility that creates an artificial column of air at specific velocities. It serves several functions, such as:

    o Free-fall Stimulation

    o Parachute training

    o Refining the skills of combat free-fallers

- Replicate various CFF scenarios

- A VWT creates and directs airflow so that it travels upward and vertically through the chamber. This enables any object inside the chamber to remain still by using the upward airflow velocity to counteract gravity.

- The Special Forces Training School (SFTS) in Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh, housed the first VWT ever deployed by the Indian Army. The facility was formally opened by Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande. It is anticipated that the VWT will improve the Indian Army's operational preparedness, guaranteeing that the special forces are fully prepared to tackle contemporary challenges of current and future battlefields.

What is the Combat Free Fall System(CFF)?

- Across the world, special forces employ combat free fall (CFF), a specific insertion technique. With a full combat load, CFF participants jump out of aircraft at altitudes beyond 30,000 feet. Included in the CFF system are:

  - An appropriate jumpsuit that contributes to the jumpers' safety

  - A 30-kilometer parachute glide device for paratroopers

- Instruments for long-range aerial induction employing the High Altitude High Opening (HAHO) and High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) techniques

- For big cargo delivery in high-altitude regions, the Indian Army uses CFF.

What are the benefits for the Indian Army?

- **Improved Training for Special Forces:** The VWT provides a safe setting for teaching combat-free fall (CFF) skills to members of the special forces. This improves their abilities and readiness for a variety of tasks, such as airborne operations.

- **Safety and Risk Reduction:** The risk involved with actual parachute jumps and free-fall operations is greatly decreased by enabling trainees to hone their free-fall skills within the VWT. Since safety is of the utmost importance, the VWT provides a safer option for training.

- **Savings**: Over time, conducting training in a VWT may prove to be more economical. It lessens the requirement for costly, resource-intensive parachute jumps, which are sometimes necessary.

- **Adaptability:** Employees with varying skill levels, from novices to experienced teachers and free-fallers, can be accommodated by VWT. This adaptability guarantees that the training requirements of a wide spectrum of people can be efficiently met.

- **standardized training:** The Indian Army may create uniform training procedures for CFF skills by incorporating the VWT into the SFTS training curriculum. This will guarantee that all of its special forces units receive training at the same level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Indian Army made a calculated strategic decision by installing the VWT at the SFTS to offer a flexible, secure, and regulated environment for improving the combat

free-falls and special forces' abilities. It helps these employees be more prepared and efficient when conducting airborne tasks.

India's green hydrogen move may worsen pollution if steps are not in place, says study

Context

According to a report by the environmental and energy think-tank Climate Risk Horizons (CRH), India's intentions to manufacture so-called "green hydrogen" — gas produced without resulting in fossil fuel emissions — may wind up exacerbating pollution if sufficient checks and balances are not in place.

What is green hydrogen

Renewable electricity generation → Getting electricity to an electrolyser → H_2 Electrolyser → Distribution & storage of hydrogen → Net zero emissions
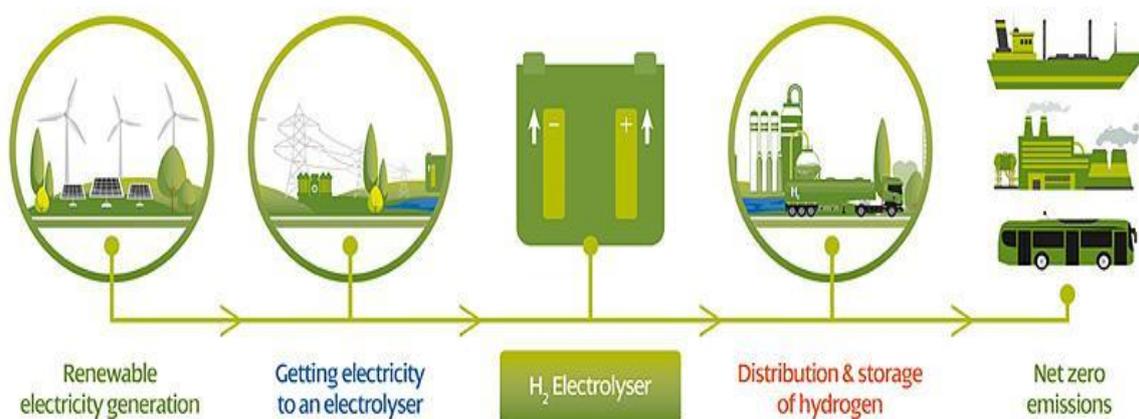
What is the " Green Hydrogen"?

- Green hydrogen is created by splitting water with renewable energy. It's also known as renewable hydrogen.

- Green hydrogen is the cleanest and most environmentally friendly hydrogen. It emits no damaging gases into the atmosphere.

- The carbon intensity of green hydrogen is determined by the carbon neutrality of the electricity source. The greater the proportion of renewable energy in the power fuel mix, the "greener" the hydrogen produced.

How is Green Hydrogen produced?

- Green hydrogen is created by the following processes:
  - water electrolysis

- - Using renewable energy

- The procedure simply generates hydrogen and oxygen. The hydrogen can be consumed, and the oxygen can be released into the atmosphere without harm.

- Green hydrogen emits far fewer greenhouse gases than grey hydrogen, which is produced from fossil fuels without carbon capture.

How is the government defining Green Hydrogen?

- Green hydrogen is defined by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) as hydrogen produced with emissions of no more than two kilograms of carbon dioxide per kilogram of hydrogen.

- This concept is viewed as relatively ambiguous and susceptible to interpretation, which may result in differences in emissions from different green hydrogen production technologies.

What is the problem with using India's source of energy to produce Green Hydrogen?

- Electrolysers, which require a continuous and clean source of power, are used in the creation of green hydrogen.

- The study expresses worry that sourcing electricity for green hydrogen generation from India's coal-powered grid could increase carbon emissions, particularly at night when solar power is unavailable.

- Approximately 70% of the electricity on India's grid is generated by coal, with this figure increasing during non-daylight hours when solar generation is limited.

What are the challenges faced in this transition?

- The National Green Hydrogen Mission of India has set lofty goals, such as producing five million tons of green hydrogen by 2030.

- A significant increase in renewable energy capacity is required to achieve this aim. However, according to the research, India's current progress in installing new solar and wind power falls short of the annual benchmarks required to reach the 2030 ambitions.

- In addition, as part of its Paris Agreement commitments, India has pledged to install 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the necessity for a more exact and defined definition of green hydrogen to achieve consistent emissions reductions. It raises questions regarding the source of electricity, particularly at night, and how this may affect carbon emissions. The research underlines the challenges of increasing renewable energy capacity to enable green hydrogen generation, as well as the importance of transparency and disclosure in projects to guarantee India's green hydrogen ambitions are environmentally sound.

7.5% dip in active workforce under MGNREGS, says study

Context

According to a data analysis conducted by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists, the number of active workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has decreased by 7.5% from April to September 2023. According to data accessible to October 6, 2023, the workforce has decreased from 15.49 crore in the previous fiscal year to 14.33 crore.

What is MGNREGS?

In September 2005, the Indian government passed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Act guarantees adult members of rural households who want to work and are willing to conduct unskilled manual labour a hundred days of paid employment in a fiscal year.

What are the recent findings in the study done by LibTech India?

- **Workforce Reduction:** From the previous fiscal year, the number of active workers under MGNREGS reduced by 7.5%. During the designated period, the workforce shrank from 15.49 crore to 14.33 crore.

- **Comparative Analysis:** To give a comparison, LibTech's MGNREGS tracker reviewed data from the prior fiscal years (2021-22 and 2022-23) within the same time frame.

- **Net Worker Deletion:** There was a net deletion of 80 lakh workers from the program during the current fiscal year.

What are the possible reasons for the dip in the workforce?

- **Economic Conditions:** Improvements in economic conditions or job possibilities in some locations may have prompted people to look for work outside of MGNREGS, lowering the program's workforce.

- **Agricultural Sessions:** Seasonal fluctuations in agricultural work might have an impact on workforce participation. If the agricultural season overlaps with the MGNREGS time, more people may prefer farm employment to MGNREGS work.

- **Urban Migration:** People migrating to cities in quest of better career opportunities may limit the rural workforce's participation in MGNREGS.

- **Skill Development and Education:** Some persons may have sought skill development or educational possibilities, causing them to exit from MGNREGS temporarily or permanently.

- **Reduced Participation as a Result of Deletions:** The report's net deletion of 80 lakh workers shows administrative difficulties, such as faulty documentation or deletions from the program's records, which could have resulted in lower workforce numbers.

- **Variations at the State Level:** As stated in the report, there were state-level variations in employment trends. These variances could be attributed to factors unique to each state, such as local economic situations, government policy, or administrative efficiency.

How is the dip in the workforce going to affect the programme?

- **Reduced job possibilities:** With a smaller workforce, fewer rural residents will be able to take advantage of the program's guaranteed job possibilities. This can be harmful to those who rely on MGNREGS for a living during difficult times.

- **Increased Workload for Active Workers:** As there are fewer workers, the workload on those who continue to participate in the program may grow, perhaps leading to longer working hours and more physical strain.

- **Inadequate Service Delivery:** Because of the reduced staff, public works projects may take longer to complete, compromising the timely supply of important services such as road building, water conservation, and other infrastructure development in rural areas.

- **Economic Implications:** MGNREGS is critical in providing a safety net for rural households. A decrease in the program's workforce can have an impact on rural families' economic well-being, perhaps leading to increasing poverty and economic suffering.

- **Rural-Urban Migration:** If employment possibilities in rural regions fall due to a reduction in the MGNREGS workforce, it may result in greater rural-to-urban migration in search of work, contributing to urbanization difficulties.

What is the way forward from this issue?

- **Comprehensive analysis:** Conduct a detailed investigation to discover the exact variables causing the workforce reduction. This analysis should take into account both regional and program-wide characteristics.

- **Reinstatement of Deleted Workers:** Address the deletion issue and reinstate workers who were incorrectly deleted from the program. This can aid in the expansion of the workforce.

- **Improved Awareness:** Launch awareness efforts to make rural residents aware of the benefits and opportunities offered by MGNREGS. This can help the program attract additional staff.

- **Wage Rate Adjustment:** Review and alter wage rates regularly to make MGNREGS more appealing to potential workers while also evaluating the impact on program sustainability.

- **Wage Payments on Time:** Ensure that salaries are paid on time and without delay. This can encourage workers to enrol and rely on the program for a living.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Improve the accessibility and infrastructure of work locations to make it easier for workers to reach and participate in projects.

- **Community Engagement:** To make MGNREGS initiatives more community-driven and appealing, encourage community engagement and cooperation.

Conclusion

This data reveals a troubling trend of decreased participation in the MGNREGS program, despite an increase in labor demand. The report emphasizes the need for additional research to better understand the variables behind this reduction and to develop strategies to reinforce and improve the program's performance.

IITM Pune demonstrates cloud seeding can produce rainfall

Context

A cloud seeding experiment conducted in Solapur, which is located on the leeward side of the Western Ghats and thus receives low rainfall — 384 mm and 422 mm of total rainfall from June to September 2018 and 2019, respectively — was able to achieve an 18% relative increase in rainfall or approximately 8.67mm more rainfall.

What is the cloud seeding?

- Cloud seeding is a weather modification technique used to alter the amount and kind of precipitation that falls from clouds. It's sometimes referred to as ice-nuclei seeding.

- Cloud seeding involves planes spraying chemicals into clouds to condense tiny particles into larger raindrops. Among the compounds utilized are:

    o Dry ice

    o Silver iodide aerosols
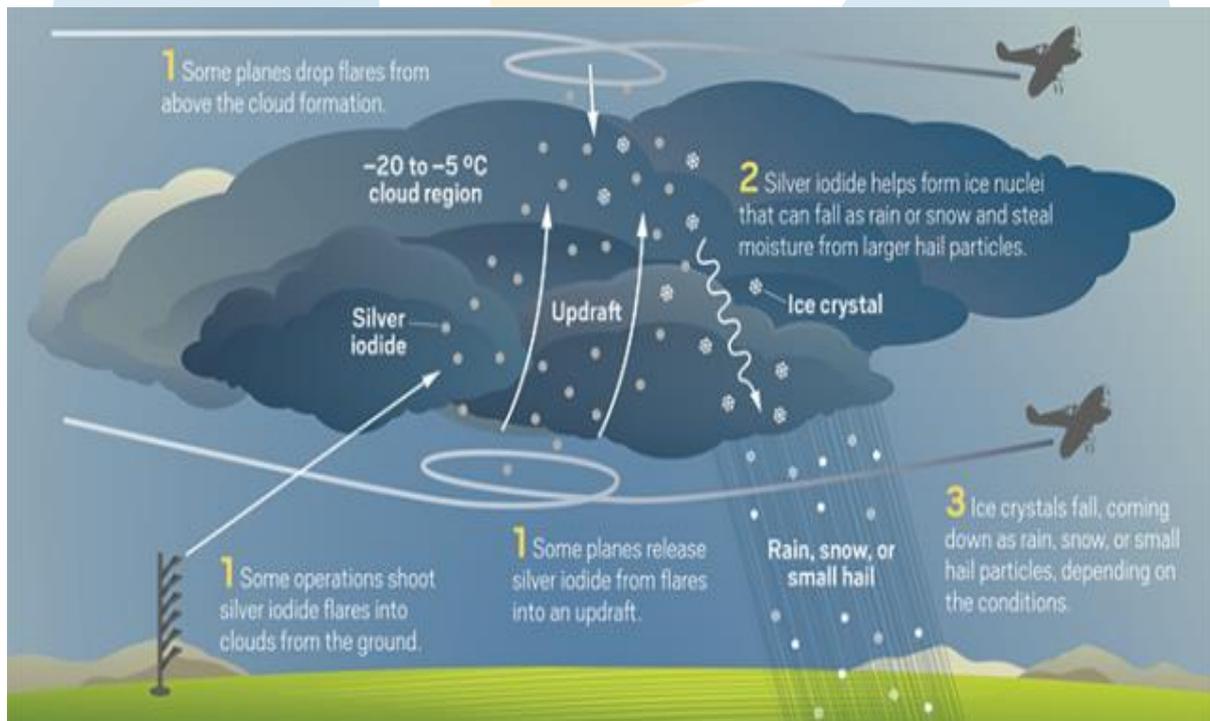
What are the uses of the Cloud Seeding?

- **Drought Mitigation:** Cloud seeding can be used to mitigate the impacts of drought by boosting precipitation in water-stressed areas. This is especially useful in agricultural regions that rely on regular rainfall for crop growth, as well as in areas with limited water resources.

- **Water Resource Management**: Cloud seeding is used in water resource management to supplement water supplies in reservoirs, lakes, and aquifers. Increased precipitation can help replenish these water sources, offering a more stable water supply for a variety of applications such as municipal water use and industrial processes.

- **Snowpack Augmentation**: Cloud seeding can be used to boost snowfall in areas with ski resorts or where snowmelt is vital for water supply. This is especially crucial for preserving water resources in locations where snowfall is a significant source of freshwater during the spring and summer.

- **Hail Suppression**: In severe thunderstorms, cloud seeding can be employed to lessen the size and severity of hailstones. Certain compounds can be introduced into storm clouds to induce the creation of smaller hailstones, which can assist in preventing damage to crops, property, and cars.

- **Air Quality Improvement**: Cloud seeding is in some circumstances a method of dispersing and reducing air pollution. Cloud seeding can help remove pollutants and particle debris from the atmosphere by boosting precipitation.

What was the study done at IIT Pune based on?

Based on the "Cloud Aerosol Interaction and Precipitation Enhancement Experiment (CAIPEEX) phase-4," the study at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) in Pune, India, aimed to investigate the efficacy of cloud seeding in deep convective clouds and develop a cloud seeding protocol.

- **Objective**: The major goal of the study was to determine the effectiveness of cloud **seeding in** increasing rainfall.

- **Location:** The study was carried out in Solapur, which receives minimal rainfall due to its location on the leeward side of the Western Ghats.

- **Period:** The studies were conducted throughout the summer monsoon seasons in **2018 and 2019.**

- **Methods:** Two aeroplanes were utilized in the study to test various cloud properties and to seed clouds with calcium chloride flares.

- **Randomized Seeding Experiment:** A randomized experiment was carried out, in which convective clouds were selected based on particular criteria, with some clouds seeded and others left unseeded.

- **Cloud Selection Criteria**: Clouds were chosen based on factors such as liquid water content, vertical motion in the cloud, and the ability of a convective cloud to produce rainfall by cloud seeding.

- **Rainfall Enhancement:** The study found an 18% relative increase in rainfall, resulting in roughly 8.67 mm of additional rainfall two hours after seeding.

What are the benefits for India with the successful testing of cloud seeding?

- **Increased Water Resources:** Cloud seeding can assist in enhancing rainfall in water-stressed areas. This means that additional water resources are available for a variety of uses, such as drinking water, agriculture, and industrial use.

- **Agricultural Advantages**: Increased rainfall from cloud seeding can boost agricultural production. Ample rainfall is required for crop growth, and cloud seeding can help increase crop yields.

- **Drought Mitigation:** Cloud seeding can be an effective strategy for reducing the impacts of drought. It has the potential to replenish water supplies, alleviate water shortages, and lessen the impact of prolonged dry spells on both rural and urban **r**egions.

- **Water Supply:** Cloud seeding can supplement water supplies in reservoirs, lakes, and aquifers, providing municipalities and industry with a more reliable source of freshwater.

- **Improved Air Quality**: Cloud seeding can assist in reducing air pollution by removing pollutants and particulates from the atmosphere in some instances. This can result in improved air quality and public health advantages.

- **Reduced Hail Damage:** In severe thunderstorms, cloud seeding can be employed to minimize the size and intensity of hailstones. This can assist in preventing hail damage to crops, property, and vehicles.

Conclusion

The results of the experiment imply that, given the right conditions, cloud seeding can be an effective approach for increasing rainfall in select places. While it is not a stand-alone option for drought mitigation, it can help to increase water availability in water-stressed places like Solapur.

GENERAL STUDIES-4

Centre to introduce DNA, face matching systems at police stations across the country

Context

The Criminal Procedure Identification Act was passed by Parliament more than a year ago, and now the Center is preparing to install "DNA and face-matching" devices at 1,300 police stations nationwide.

What is the Criminal Procedure Identification Act?

- Law enforcement organizations are permitted to gather, retain, and examine physical and biological samples from prisoners and other individuals to identify and look into criminal cases under the terms of the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022. According to the Act, jail or police personnel are permitted to gather specific, identifiable data, including:
    - Fingerprints
    - Biological samples
    - Palm-print impressions
    - Foot-print impressions
    - Photographs
    - Iris and retina scan
    - Behavioral attributes including signatures and handwriting
- The Act also permits these measurements to be processed, stored, preserved, distributed, and destroyed.
- The Act gives the police legal authority to collect biological and physical samples from both criminal suspects and prisoners. Section 53 or Section 53A of the 1973 Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) permits the police to gather this information.

Which was the law before the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, of 2022?

- The Identification of Prisoners Act, of 1920 (Act No. 33 of 1920) gives law enforcement officials the authority to get identifying information from detained and convicted individuals. Photographs, fingerprints, and footprints are examples of this.
- A magistrate may also mandate the taking of measurements or pictures to support an investigation.
- The statute went into effect on September 9, 1920. It outlines the legislative provisions on law enforcement and convicts.
- The Indian Penal Code, 1860 states in Section 186 that it is illegal to violate the act. It is legal to use all necessary methods to ensure the taking of a person's measurements or photographs if they resist or refuse to have them taken.

What are the advantages of the passing of a new law?

- **Modernization of Law Enforcement:** The Act permits law enforcement organizations to update how they identify those who are engaged in illegal activity. It presents cutting-edge biometric technology, such as facial and DNA matching, that can improve the precision and effectiveness of criminal investigations.
- **Improved Investigative Tools:** Law enforcement now has strong tools for identifying suspects and solving crimes thanks to the use of DNA and face-matching techniques. These technologies can be especially helpful when more conventional approaches, like fingerprinting, aren't enough.
- **Enhanced Data Integration:** A more extensive and centralized database of criminal and suspect information is made possible by the Act's integration with the National

Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS). Law enforcement can benefit from this integration by having a more comprehensive understanding of illegal activity and investigations can be expedited.

- **Greater Range of Identification Techniques:** The Act goes beyond the use of footprints, photos, and fingerprints as the only means of identifying people. It involves gathering and examining biological and physical samples, such as scans of the retina and iris. This increases the number of people who can be identified, including those who have been charged but not found guilty.
- **National-Level Repository:** By creating a central organization within the Home Ministry to serve as a national-level repository for the information gathered, data accessibility and uniformity are encouraged, which facilitates inter-agency and inter-state investigations.

What are the criticisms faced by the Centre in passing the law?

- **Privacy Concerns:** According to critics, the Act violates people's right to privacy. The gathering of biometric data, such as facial recognition and DNA, prompts worries about possible abuse or illegal access to private data. Concerns have been raised over widespread government access to private biometric information.
- **Data Security**: There are worries regarding the security of gathered data as a result of the Act's implementation. Sensitive biometric data management and storage can be difficult, and there's a chance of data breaches and misuse.
- **Constitutional Concerns:** Several opponents have contested the Act's constitutionality because it infringes upon fundamental rights, such as the right to privacy. There is debate over how the Act might affect people's civil liberties.
- **Misuse of Data:** There have been concerns expressed over the possible exploitation of gathered data for discriminating or political ends. There is concern that the information may be used by the government to monitor, follow, or target particular people or groups.

Conclusion

With the Act, India's criminal justice and law enforcement systems have undergone a substantial modernization process that will increase the amount of biometric data that can be gathered and utilized by law enforcement to support investigations. The Act was approved by Parliament, but several real-world obstacles, such as connection and logistical problems, have prevented the Act from going into full effect right now.

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RBECCP-27	December 24th 2023	5:30 PM - 8:30 PM	2.3 Years
RBMCCP-28	January 24th 2024	7:00 AM - 10:00 AM	2 Years
RBACCP-29	March 08th 2024	11:00 AM - 2:00 PM	22 Months
RBMCCP-30	May 17th 2024	7:00 AM - 10:00 AM	20 Months
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