

9 PM Compilation

23rd to 29th May, 2022

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General Studies Paper – 1

ABORTION CARE AND RELATED ISSUES

1. **India must shift the discourse on abortion rights**

Source: The post is based on an article “**India must shift the discourse on abortion rights**” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **26th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Social Sector, Health Sector

Relevance: Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 2021 and Reproductive Rights in India

News: Recently, two women public health practitioners who have studied and worked in India and the United States have voiced their solidarity with women in both countries for their abortion rights..

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (“MTP Act”) regulates the abortion practices in India.

Abortion Statistics

Global

According to the **WHO**, 6 out of 10 of all **unintended pregnancies** end in an induced abortion. Around 45% of all abortions are **unsafe**, and around 97% take place in developing countries.

India

According to **the National Family Health Survey 2019-2021**, 3% of all pregnancies in India result in abortion.

More than half of abortions in India are performed in the **private sector**, whereas only 20% are performed in the **public sector** because **public facilities** often **lack abortion services**.

Around 27% of abortions are performed by the woman herself at home. Around 73% of these were medication abortions. Another 5% of all abortions done outside of **health facilities** were done with methods other than **medication abortion**. Most of these abortions were illegal as per the MTP Act.

A recent study found that **sex-selective abortions** in India could lead to 6.8 million fewer girls being born between 2017 to 2030.

Obstacles

The MTP Act 1971 and then amended in 2021 makes ‘**medical termination of pregnancy**’ legal in India under specific conditions. The Act primarily protects medical practitioners as “**induced miscarriage**” is a criminal offence under the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

What are the issues?

The acceptance of abortion in Indian society is situated in the context of **population control** and **family planning**.

Many women face a lack of access, systemic barriers, social norms and cultural preferences, and even **criminal liability**. Therefore, many women continue to die due to unsafe abortions. As per a 2014 study, abortions account for **10% of maternal deaths** in India.

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After more than 50 years of the MTP Act, women and transgender persons face major obstacles in accessing safe abortion care because

First, most of them are not even aware that abortion is legal or know where to obtain one safely;

Second, the MTP Act does not recognise abortion as a choice. There is a **lack of choice** and **bodily autonomy** of women. The decision of abortion is solely decided by the approval of medical professionals even in the first few weeks of the pregnancy;

Third, The Act mentions **only 'pregnant woman'**. It fails to recognise that transgender persons and others can also become pregnant.

Fourth, **unmarried** and **transgender people** continue to face stigma and can be turned away from health facilities, forcing them to resort to unsafe care;

Fifth, mandatory reporting requirements under **the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Bill (POCSO), 2011** against child sexual offences, impact privacy and hinder access of adolescents to safe abortion services;

Sixth, many are still coerced into agreeing to a permanent or **long-term contraceptive method** as a prerequisite for getting abortion services;

Seventh, health-care providers may impose their **own morality**. They may insist on 'husbands' or 'parental' consent for abortion.

Eighth, despite laws prohibiting sex determination, the illegal practice persists. The **unregulated ultrasound clinics** have mushroomed in India. They continue to facilitate the illegal practice of sex determination, resulting in unsafe abortions and female foeticide.

Way Forward

There is an urgent need for a perspective from an abortion for the purpose of a family planning and maternal health to an abortion which is done on the basis of a **sexual health and reproductive rights**.

India must amend the law and raise the bar on **reproductive justice**. In addition, the **health systems** should be improved to provide good quality and respectful abortion care.

Reproductive injustice anywhere is a threat to the lives of people everywhere.

FAMILY PLANNING AND RELATED ISSUES

2. **Meeting family planning goals**

Source: This post is based on the article “**Meeting family planning goals**” published in **The Hindu** on **24th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Social issues – Health related issues

Relevance: Improving family planning access to younger population

Context: India's family planning programme has improved access to contraceptives. This has led to a reduction in the Total Fertility Rate from 3.4 in 1990-92 to 2.0 in 2019-21, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

However, now India needs to focus on improving access to family planning services for not just adults, but also the younger population.

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Why India now needs to focus on improving access to family planning services for its youth?

First, according to **NFHS-5 and the 2022 report by the United Nations Population Fund**, **there is a rise in adolescent childbearing in some States such as Tripura and Meghalaya**.

Second, COVID-19 has had a severe impact on economic resources and access to education, thereby influencing the choices women and the youth make about their sexual and reproductive health.

Hence, in order to meet the SDG of Family Planning by 2030, India now needs to focus on improving access to family planning services for not just the adult population, but also the youth.

India's Mission Parivar vikas

In India, frontline health workers have contributed significantly in implementing Mission Parivar Vikas.

– It aims to accelerate access to high-quality family planning choices, to successfully increase the modern Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (mCPR), especially among female non-users from vulnerable communities.

They have achieved this by delivering contraceptives at homes and offering a wider basket of alternatives such as injectable contraceptives

What needs to be done?

Strengthen the capacity of health workers in using **the Family Planning Logistics Management Information System** to ensure the availability of and access to contraceptives by marginalised communities.

– **Family Planning Logistics Management Information System**: *It is a dedicated software to ensure the smooth forecasting, procurement and distribution of family planning commodities across all the levels of health facilities.*

Family planning interventions need to be structured around the health needs, and populations for whom the intervention is to be implemented. The youth are not a homogenous group.

Key questions need to be answered wrt the sexual reproductive health needs of adolescents with varying profiles such as males and females who are in school, out of school, married, unmarried, and so on. There is a need to **break down the data** by key characteristics in order to reach specific groups of people in order to have the greatest impact.

Moreover, when addressing younger populations, **holistic health awareness programmes** on the right age of marriage, safe sexual behaviour, contraception, reproductive health, and diet diversity are paramount.

Involving men in family planning: The involvement of men in family planning needs to be given equal importance. Certain gender transformative approaches have shown promising results in various places.

– Several examples of involving men in the family planning discourse include the **PRACHAR project** in Bihar, the **Yaari Dosti programme** in Mumbai, and the **GEMS project** in Goa.

Utilising private sector: Many of the programmes in public health have also started using the capabilities of the private sector to improve service delivery. The private sector can offer innovative solutions in family planning, thereby improving the community's access to services.

Way forward

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In several districts, more than one-fifth of the population in the adolescent age group are now entering the reproductive age group. Also, there are still many districts in India that have low mCPR, with a large proportion of them being the youth.

Hence, it is only by working holistically on overall health goals and addressing social determinants that we can ensure equitable family planning services for both adults and young people.

GS1 – HISTORY – FREEDOM STRUGGLE

FAMOUS PERSONALITIES

3. On Raja Ram Mohan Roy's 250th birth anniversary, remembering the legacy of the father of Modern Indian Renaissance

Source: This post is based on the article “On Raja Ram Mohan Roy's 250th birth anniversary, remembering the legacy of the father of Modern Indian Renaissance” published in **The Indian Express** on 23rd May 22.

Syllabus: GS1 – History – Art and Culture

Relevance: About Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Context: One of the most influential social and religious reformers of the 19th century, Ram Mohan Roy, was born on May 22, 1772 in what was then Bengal Presidency's Radhanagar in Hooghly district.

As India grapples increasingly with changing social and religious circumstances, Roy's work in the sphere of women's emancipation, modernising education and seeking changes to religious orthodoxy finds new relevance in this time.

Early life

Roy was into a prosperous upper-caste Brahmin family, where he grew up within the framework of **orthodox caste practices** of his time: child-marriage, polygamy and dowry were prevalent among the higher castes and he had himself been married more than once in his childhood.

The family's affluence had also made the **best in education accessible to him**.

A **polyglot**, Roy knew Bengali and Persian, but also Arabic, Sanskrit, and later, English. His exposure to the literature and culture of each of these languages bred in him a **scepticism towards religious dogmas and social strictures**. For instance: practices such as Sati

He spent considerable time **studying the Vedas and the Upanishads**, and the religious texts of Islam and Christianity. He was particularly intrigued by the **Unitarian faction of Christianity** and was drawn by the **precepts of monotheism** that, he believed, lay at the core of all religious texts.

Rabindranath Tagore called him a '**Bharatpathik**' by which he meant to say that Rammohun combined in his person the underlying spirit of Indic civilisation, its spirit of pluralism, tolerance and a cosmic respect for all forms of life,” says historian Amiya P Sen.

Roy, the first among liberals

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Confident about the strength of his heritage and **open to imbibing from other cultures** what he believed were ameliorative practices, Roy was among India's first liberals.

He was given the **title of Raja by the Mughal emperor Akbar II**.

He studied matters not in the abstract or in academic solitude, but with the practical objective of securing human happiness and freedom. That made him a modern man.

In 1814, he started the **Atmiya Sabha (Society of Friends)**, to nurture philosophical discussions on the idea of monotheism in Vedanta and to campaign against idolatry, casteism, child marriage and other social ills.

– The Atmiya Sabha would make way for the **Brahmo Sabha** in 1828, set up with Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore's father.

- During the Bengal Renaissance, Brahmo Sabha ushered in sweeping social changes and birthed the **Brahmo religion**, a reformed spiritual Hinduism that believes in monotheism and the uniformity of all men, irrespective of caste, class or creed.

Education

During the course of his time in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), a period of about 15 years, Roy became a **prominent public intellectual**. He campaigned for the modernisation of education, in particular the introduction of a Western curriculum, and started several educational institutions in the city.

In 1817, he collaborated with Scottish philanthropist David Hare to set up the **Hindu College** (now, Presidency University).

– He followed it up with the **Anglo-Hindu School** in 1822 and, in 1830, assisted Alexander Duff to set up the General Assembly's Institution, which later became the **Scottish Church College**.

It was his relentless advocacy alongside contemporaries such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar that finally led to the **abolition of Sati under the governor generalship of William Bentinck in 1829**. Roy argued for the property rights of women, and petitioned the British for freedom of the press (in 1829 and 1830).

Faced criticism due to his views

He was among the first Indians to **gain recognition in the UK and in America** for his radical thoughts. But, he was often attacked by his own countrymen who felt threatened by his reformist agenda, and by British reformers and functionaries, whose views differed from his.

General Studies Paper – 2

CHILDREN EDUCATION

1. **National Assessment Survey lays out post-Covid challenges. Teacher- and student-centred approaches are needed**

Source: This post is based on the article “**National Assessment Survey lays out post-Covid challenges. Teacher- and student-centred approaches are needed**” published in **The Indian Express** on **27th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Governance

Relevance: Issues related to development of education

News: A study commissioned by the Centre, the National Assessment Survey (NAS), details the magnitude of the learning crisis during the pandemic across the country.

Conducted in November 2021 among students of more than one lakh schools in 720 districts, the NAS shows **a sharp dip in the performance of students** in almost all subjects during the pandemic years.

The Union education ministry has said that the NAS data will help states in taking remedial measures, both short-term and long-term.

Must Read: **Ministry of Education releases NAS 2021 report**

What is the learning crisis that developed during the pandemic?

India witnessed one of the **longest school closures** in the world.

For the better part of the past two years, teachers struggled to cope with the pedagogical challenges posed by the switch to online classes.

The country's **digital divide** proved to be a hurdle for a large number of underprivileged learners.

Field reports by private agencies and state government bodies have indicated that this disruption resulted in an **alarming regression in children's foundational skills** — reading, writing, doing simple mathematics.

– The NAS 2021 report reveals that the breakdown affected even states that traditionally do well on educational parameters. The average scores of Delhi's Class V students in mathematics, for instance, were well below the national average.

What are some challenges that need to be overcome?

The pandemic seems to have put on the back-burner the implementation of school education reforms envisaged by the NEP.

Funds for training teachers have been **slashed by nearly 50%** in the current budget

The **outlay for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme** — whose positive impact on school enrollment, student retention and nutrition of children is well-documented — has **come down by almost 10%**.

Instead, there seems to be an **over-reliance on e-learning**. But as the NAS shows, these methods cannot be a substitute for the interactions in a classroom.

What needs to be done?

The first step should be to **acknowledge that children are returning to schools with diminished skills**, as well as recognise that some learners may have experienced more setbacks than their peers.

Planners and school administrators should **give teachers the freedom to adopt creative approaches** that turn classrooms into spaces where students can shed the anxieties of the past two years and regain skills at their own pace.

– This would require **re-imagining pedagogical practices** and a **shift from syllabus-centred approaches** of the past to learner-centric methods. The New Education Policy 2020, announced in the first year of the pandemic, recognises this imperative.

Way forward

Several studies, including the annual ASER reports, have underlined that most of the failings of the country's educational system arise from the **lack of connect between the lived experiences of most students and what is taught in classrooms**.

The pandemic-induced crisis is an opportunity to take corrective measures. Failure to do so will endanger the academic future of an entire generation.

GS2 – POLITY – INDIAN CONSTITUTION

PERARIVALAN'S RELEASE AND RELATED ISSUES

2. **Who wields the power to pardon?**

Source: The post is based on an article “**Who wields the power to pardon**” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **27th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Important Provisions of the Constitution of India; Issues and Challenges pertaining to the Federal structure.

Relevance: The Centre-State Relations, The Governor's Power

News: The Supreme Court has ordered to release **A.G. Perarivalan**, one of the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. This has brought into limelight the Governor's powers of pardon or remission under **Article 161** of the Constitution of India.

Supreme Court's Observation

The SC ruled that a Governor is bound by the **State government's advice** in matters relating to **commutation/remission of sentences** under Article 161. The Court invoked its extraordinary power under Article 142 and ordered the release of Perarivalan.

What is the criticism against the office of the Governor?

In the past, there are numerous instances in which the **gubernatorial offices** of the Governors have been **used by the Centre for political purposes**.

The Constitution makers never thought of giving Governors powers similar to those of elected representatives. Therefore, the post is a nominated one and not an elected one.

The Governor's post is “useless when inert and dangerous when active”. For example, in the Perarivalan episode, there was inertness of the Governor which proved dangerous.

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The Governors are often accused of becoming **agents** of the party at the Centre and obstructing the implementation of **welfare measures** by the popularly elected State governments.

The Governors are alleged sitting on Bills passed by State legislatures without performing their duties under the Constitution.

Why did the Supreme Court issue a release order under Article 142?

The Governor had not done his duty under the Constitution. The Governor was given enough time, opportunity and warnings by the court. The Governor was blatantly disregarding the court's observations.

The delay impacted the **liberty** of a person who was **legally** and **constitutionally** entitled to be released.

The judiciary is the final **arbiter of the Constitution**. If the Governor does not do his job, the court could pass appropriate orders.

What is the significance of the Perarivalan judgment?

The verdict has underlined the **imperative** of **federalism** in the context of **gubernatorial amnesty**. The judgment in this case is being seen as a victory for **federalism** and **State autonomy**.

The **Article 161** is more about the Governor's duty, rather than power.

The Governor's duty is to abide by the recommendations of the State cabinet while performing his functions, including the power to remit, suspend or commute sentences under **Article 161**.

The Governor need not have sent the matter to the President. The Governor's power under Article 161 is in no way inferior to the President's role under Article 72.

The Governors should exercise their power timely.

The judgment recognises the power of the state in matters of remission, commutation, etc.

The verdict upholds the human rights of prisoners. The judgment shows a great amount of **judicial discipline** by adhering to the established principles of law. The court invoked Article 142 to do **"complete justice"**.

What are the lessons for our justice system?

Justice delayed is justice denied. Each organ of governance has to work towards the preservation and promotion of human rights.

The institution is working very hard. India has one of the lowest **judge-to-population ratios** in the world.

There is a problem of judicial vacancies in various High Courts and tribunals. The High Courts are functioning with 50% strength.

The judgment shows the importance of **pursuit** of the cause by litigants, their lawyers, the court and the media.

The judgment upheld the **individual's freedom** and **dignity**, the basic promises of the Constitution.

Way Forward

The Governor

The Governor is not bound by an arbitrary decision by the cabinet passed by non-application of mind or extraneous considerations. The device of judicial review is the most effective check against such aberrations.

The powers of nomination of the Governor should be re-considered.

The **Justice Sarkaria Commission** wanted the Governor to act as “**a friend, philosopher and guide**” to the Council of Ministers. The Governor should be a “detached figure and not too intimately connected with the local politics of the State”.

The Governor should act within the constitutional framework.

Indian Judiciary

We need to have Regional Benches of the Supreme Court to reduce the workload.

The retirement age of judges can be increased to 70.

GS2 – GOVERNANCE – GOVERNANCE RELATED ISSUES

ENVIRONMENT, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) FRAMEWORK

3. The ESG rating conundrum

Source: The post is based on an article “**The ESG rating conundrum**” published in the **Business Standard** on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS3 Indian Economy, Ecology and Environment

Relevance: Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Framework

News: In recent years, the **environmental, social and governance (ESG)** investments have emerged as a subject of great interest and significance across the globe. In this context, the SEBI had brought out a consultation paper on the need to regulate ESG rating providers.

Increasingly, corporates are adopting higher ESG norms, and investors are preferring such investments.

Importance of ESG

The ESG investments lead to public good as well as make business sense. They are beneficial for both —the shareholders and all other stakeholders.

Rating by ERPs

The **ESG rating providers (ERPs)** offer rating products in two categories: (1) **risk ratings:** an assessment of a company’s resilience to ESG related risks, and (2) “**impact**” **ratings:** an assessment of the impact of a company’s operations on the environment and society.

What are the challenges in the development of universally acceptable ESG standards?

Globally, there are no **universally recognised ESG reporting standards and frameworks**. The **investors** and **corporates** have been using different **standards and frameworks**. For example, GRI, TCFD, SASB, among others. This may lead to **greenwashing** and **misselling**, and the **potential risks** to investor protection, transparency and capital allocation in markets, among others.

There is **no consistency in disclosures and transparency** of the methodology and rating process.

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Assessing impact rating is more complex and arduous compared to risk rating.

Investors are more concerned about **risk rating**. It means, **ESG impact ratings** are not the mainstream ESG rating product currently being offered by most providers.

There are concerns over **desirability** or **workability** of the universal ESG standard and frameworks. There are **different levels** of development across different countries in the world. The advanced economies and the emerging economies have made different commitments based on the **principle of “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities”**. An ESG framework negates the efforts made for equity and climate justice.

ESG investing is still relatively in the nascent stage in India. Many of them do not understand the nuances of ESG investing. They rely on **in-house research** due to absence of consistent and comparable ESG reporting standards and frameworks.

Way Forward

Global level

A number of international bodies are working on the idea to develop the ESG framework.

– For example, The **International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) Foundation** had announced the setting up of the **International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB)** at **Glasgow Summit** in 2021. This is an attempt to develop universally acceptable reporting standards and frameworks.

India

India has already developed and put in place our own **business responsibility and sustainability reporting standards (BRSR)**. This takes into account the viewpoint of stakeholders, domestic considerations and international best practices.

– For example, the **BRSR reporting framework** is **inter-operable** with international frameworks like GRI, TCFD and SASB.

Sebi regulations mandates top 1,000 listed companies to compulsory report in accordance with the BRSR standards from the year 2022-23 onwards. Other **listed** or **even unlisted companies** could **voluntarily** adopt these standards.

The **domestic ESG rating providers** industry is still at a stage of infancy in India. The demand is mostly met by the foreign ESG rating providers which are unregulated and following varying standards at present. Therefore, there is an urgent need that India put in place a **regulatory framework** to **accredit ERPs**.

GS2 – GOVERNANCE – GOVT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS

GYANVAPI MOSQUE ISSUE

4. Gyanvapi and the principle of non-retrogression

Source: The post is based on an article “Gyanvapi and the principle of non-retrogression” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **27th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Provisions of the Constitution of India;

Relevance: Fundamental Rights, principle of Non-Retrogression

News: Recently, the Gyanvapi-Vishwanath dispute has come up in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah mosque has come up in Mathura in which the petitions are seeking the removal of the mosque and exclusive ownership of the property.

What are the relevant legal statutes?

The **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act** clearly prohibits altering its status quo.

- The **Section 3** of the Act bars the conversion of a place of worship of a religious denomination or any of its sections into a place of worship of a different section of the same denomination or of a different religious denomination.
- **Section 4** declares that the **religious character** of a place of worship existing on August 15, 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that day. Any legal case pertaining to the conversion of the religious character of any place of worship pending as on August 15, 1947 shall abate.

Impact of the Babri Masji Judgment

The judgment may have been the beginning of unending demands for the handing over of hundreds of other “disputed” mosques in India.

What are the issues with the judiciary actions?

The Supreme Court has been reluctant to stay such judicial interventions under **the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991**.

The Court observed that ascertainment of the religious character of a place may not fall foul of Sections 3 and 4 of the Places of Worship Act.

What are the historical facts related to the issue?

There is no disagreement among historians on the fact that the emperor Aurangzeb destroyed the Vishwanath temple and built the Gyanvapi Mosque on its ruins.

Aurangzeb destroyed the temple when he suspected that its builder, **Jai Singh**, the great grandson of **Raja Man Singh**, had helped **Shivaji** escape from **imperial detention**.

How modern day regimes differ from the earlier ones in terms of deriving legitimacy from religious monuments?

(A) Early Time

According to Eaton, ruling dynasties in those days **derived legitimacy** from **state deities** (rashtra devta) installed in **royal temples**. It was common that conquerors used to **destroy** such temples and used to place their **own place of worship** on the ruins. It used to be a message that the king no longer enjoyed the protection of his deity.

(B) Medieval Period- More a show of power

The temple destruction was done more to show **brute power** than an act of religious bigotry.

(C) Modern Period

The present intellectual regime strongly disapproves of the violent **cold-bloodedness** and **acquisitive expansionism**.

In modern societies, the **principle of non-retrogression**, or the **doctrine of progressive realisation of rights**, has been adopted.

Way Forward

India is signatory to the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)**. Its Article 2(1) seeks to “achieving **progressively** the full realisation of the rights by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures”.

The Supreme Court has reiterated the **principle of non-retrogression** in a number of cases. For example, (a) in **Navtej Singh Johar judgment 2018**, the court held that there is no place for retreat in a progressive society. Therefore, the state should not take steps that deliberately lead to retrogression on the enjoyment of rights either under the Constitution or otherwise”, (b) in **Babri Masjid verdict 2019**, it was mentioned that **non-retrogression** “is a **foundational feature** of the **fundamental constitutional principles** of which secularism is a core component”. The Act is thus “a **legislative intervention** which preserves **non-retrogression** as an **essential feature** of our secular values”.

The Supreme Court of India must ensure the continuity of this doctrine of progressive realisation of rights

The historical wrongs cannot be remedied by people taking the law into their own hands. Through the Places of Worship Act, Parliament has mandated that historical wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future”.

The Parliament must retain the Places of Worship Act without **amending** or **repealing** it.

5. Gyanvapi: Court must follow law not faith

Source: The post is based on an article “**Gyanvapi: Court must follow law not faith**” published in the **Indian Express** on **24th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Important Provisions of the Constitution of India

Relevance: Fundamental Rights:- Right to religious equality and minority rights

News: Recently, The Supreme Court has admitted petitions on the Gyanvapi mosque. At present, a controversy is raging over the Gyanvapi Mosque, which is a legacy of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707).

Nature of Indian Polity

India's Constitution guarantees the **principle of religious equality** and **protection of minority rights**. As per B.R. Ambedkar, these principles will come to safeguard the interests of minorities in case India becomes a **Hindu-majority independent India**.

In India, the **parliamentary system** has been adopted. The **popular will** is represented by the legislature. However, the Constitution also provides some checks on the power of legislatures and the executives.

The **Judiciary** has an important role for **safeguarding the Constitution**. If elections give way to **majoritarian passions**, and can't protect the minorities, the courts, following the Constitution, will.

Argument Against ongoing developments in the Gyanvapi Mosque Case

The atrocities of **Aurangzeb** were not limited to destruction of the Hindu temples. He also targeted Sikh gurus, destroyed mosques built by adversaries, killed his own brother Dara Shikoh and incarcerated his father Shahjahan.

Should Aurangzeb's **17th century** misdeeds be avenged by inflicting harm on India's Muslims today.

At present, the attempts to reclaim the mosque for **Hindu religious purposes** contradicts the **Constitution**.

What are the challenges at present?

At present, we live in a **modern democracy** that is based on the key foundations of **popular will** and **constitutional settlement**.

At present, India's elections or popular will has been increasingly legitimating **Hindu nationalism**. For example, India's parliament has enacted **majoritarian laws** such as the abrogation of **Article 370** and the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)**; multiple state-level laws and/or executive decrees are banning beef-eating and inter-faith marriage, among various other measures.

The **Indian Judiciary** has also not been successful in implementing its **constitution-protecting role**. For example, it has not scheduled hearings of Hindu nationalist policies or legislation like Article 370 and the CAA; and It has even approved conversion of a contested site in Ayodhya into a Hindu temple.

Way Forward

The **Places of Worship Act, 1991**, made in accordance with the Constitution, clearly says that the status of a religious place cannot be altered beyond what it was at Independence.

The **religious equality** and **minority protections**, two of the fundamental principles of the Indian Constitution should be safeguarded. Therefore, Judicial interpretation must follow the law, not faith.

GS2 – GOVERNANCE – ISSUES RELATED TO DEV AND MGMT OF EDUCATION

National Education policy and related issues

6. [Decolonising science in Indian education](#)

Source: The post is based on an article “Decolonising science in Indian Education” published in the **Indian Express** on **25th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Social Sector, Education Sector

Relevance: Indianization of Education System

Context: Education is central to the idea of **modernity** in independent India. In the Indian education system, a certain aspect of European modernity has lingered for a long time which has hampered the Indian intellectual discourse.

The true spirit of education refers to “*Shiksha vo hoti hai jisme baat se baat nikle*” (education should produce a tangible effect).

Measures Taken So Far

All Education Commissions have been headed by scientists to ensure advancement with **scientific** and **technological development**. For example, Daulat Singh Kothari, Yash Pal, and K Kasturirangan Commission.

What are the issues in the present education system?

The **post-colonial science** and **science education** is deeply mixed with the **colonial hangover** and practices.

In the current dispensation, the government is sceptical about all forms of **western intellectual enthusiasm**.

The entire developing countries including India are bowing to the **western colonial thought** in the post-colonial world. Once upon a time, India was receptive as well as productive. India possessed a mind of our own in India. In reality, India thought, India felt and India expressed itself.

The western element thwarted creation of **thinkers** that can help us understand the structure and foundations of our **own scientific thought**.

Globalisation is also a form of **new-age intellectual colonialism** which restricts development of the **Indian intellectual**.

Role and Importance of NEP

The **New Education Policy 2020** has taken delightful steps forward in ensuring that we raise a generation of **scientists and scientific thinkers** through the education we provide to our students.

The policy has been designed to completely revamp **our systematic education**. It may help to decolonise by inculcating a sense of **nationalist commitment** and **Indian value-based education**.

The NEP is important to boost **indigenous creative thinking**. It is also an attempt to unify our active engagement with creative thinking. It can help promote the true nature of the **Indian mind**

The state has a commitment to work on **public policies** and **diplomatic discourses** that localise knowledge of science and enhance the character of **Indian scientific enterprise** to counter the **deleterious effects** of **globalisation** in the 21st century.

Education must be intimately associated with the **life of its people**. However, our modern education at present serves professions of the **English educated elite**. This English based education system does not reach the farmer, the grinder, or the potter etc.

The NEP would promote **Indianizing education** and emphasising learning in **regional languages**.

The NEP might be able to raise a generation of **Indian scientific thinkers**. They would help us make sense of our ideas of scientific modernity rooted in Indian scientific thought.

The NEP aims of schools practising agriculture, dairy keeping, weaving on the best modern techniques, roped to culminate into **Yatra Vishvam Bavatikanidam** (where the world meets in one nest).

Way Forward

Science should be made available locally. It will help its **acceptance** and **understanding** in the masses. It will **enrich** the **scientific temper** and the **spirit of inquiry** among the Indian masses.

The modern schools, colleges and universities should focus on Indianizing education instead of becoming part of western thoughts.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RELATED ISSUES

7. [A Harvard branch in India, prospects and challenges](#)

Source: The post is based on an article “A Harvard branch in India, prospects and challenges” published in the “The Hindu” on 24th May 2022.

Syllabus: GS2 Social Sector; Education Sector

Relevance: Higher Education Reforms, Internationalisation of India's Higher Education Sector

News: In Budget 2022, Finance Minister announced that “world-class foreign universities and institutions would be allowed in the planned business district in Gujarat's GIFT City”. These institutions would be free from domestic regulations to facilitate availability of high-end human resources.

And the **British Prime Minister** during his visit to India wished to strengthen the **United Kingdom-India academic collaboration**.

Background

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** promises higher education reforms in many areas, and internationalisation is prominent among them.

The NEP 2020 recommended allowing **foreign universities** ranked in the “top 100” category to operate in India.

Arguments in favour of establishment of the foreign branches in India

India is an **emerging higher education power**. It is the **world's second largest “exporter”** of students and holder of the **world's second largest higher education system**. Foreign countries and universities will be eager to establish a “beachhead” in India.

India's **higher education collaboration** with other countries will augment India's **soft power**, bringing **new ideas** and institutions from abroad and to show “best practice” in India.

International branch campuses could function as a **structurally different variant** of India's private university sector. They would **encourage competition** mainly between **existing private universities** and **foreign branch institutions**.

The branches could bring new ideas about curriculum, pedagogy, and governance to Indian higher education.

What are the issues in India's international higher education collaborations?

Indian Side

There are many **regulatory hurdles** with regard to international academic partnerships, which includes the operation of international branch campuses. Before NEP 2020, India did not allow the entry and the operation of foreign university branch campuses.

The FM budget speech marked **departure** from the NEP 2020 recommendations that allow only the “**top 100**” category to operate in India.

The **Minister of State for Education** reply in the Lok Sabha in March also marked **departure** from the NEP 2020 recommendations. For example, two foreign institutions, from France and Italy, which are not universities, had expressed interest in setting up campuses in India.

The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** has formed a committee to draft regulations to allow foreign institutions in the “**top 500**” category to establish campuses in India.

Foreign Side

There are issues over practicality. The **overseas universities** are highly unlikely to invest significant funds up front.

The global branches would be aimed at making money for the sponsoring university which is not in India's interests.

International collaborations have failed. For example, the Yale University and the National University of Singapore partnership (**the Yale-NUS) College** came to an end recently.

Way Forward

The top universities that are already engaged overseas would require incentives to set up in India. For example, **building facilities** and providing necessary **infrastructure**.

There are smaller but **highly regarded universities** outside the '**top 500**' category that might be more interested.

Universities around the world that have **academic specialisations** focusing on India, or that have **NRI** in senior management positions etc. may be easier to attract for India.

India should prevent **profit-seekers** from entering the Indian market. Instead, the foreign institutions having **innovative educational ideas** and a **long-term commitment** should be encouraged.

The bureaucratic hurdles should be drastically cut to ensure success in attracting branch campuses.

A **new accreditation mechanism**, flexible **visa rules** for foreign students and faculty, and **financial incentives** to offer programmes should be considered as **priority areas**.

GS2 – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPINGS

QUAD AND RELATED ISSUES

8. Opinion: How the Quad can become more than an anti-China grouping

Source: The post is based on an article "**How the QUAD can become more than an anti-China grouping**" published in the **Indian Express** on **25th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 – International Relations, Bilateral, Regional Grouping, multilateral relations etc.

Relevance: Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), QUAD, QUAD Plus

News; Recently, the United States launched **the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)** before the Quad leaders' summit in Tokyo

About the IPEF

The US-led economic engagement which will promote **fair trade, supply chain resilience, infrastructure, clean energy**, and **decarbonisation**, among others.

It comprises a diverse group of **12 countries** initially — Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Importance of IPEF

This is a salient attempt to allow countries to decouple from **Chinese over-dependence**. This is aimed to re-establish the US by strengthening the existing **free and open rules-based global order**, which is being threatened by China.

It complements the “Quad Plus” process. It brings together **seven critical countries** of the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, all **Quad states**, and **dialogue partners**, including **South Korea**. Thus, both QUAD and IPEF build a comprehensive and integrated approach to combat shared challenges arising out of Chinese.

The US and India, two of the largest economies of the world, are not a part of the China-led or ASEAN-led **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** or the **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)** in which China has applied.

The grouping potentially represents an amalgamation of the **eastern and western “like-minded” countries**. It comprises **developing and developed economies** as well as **middle and major powers** that are committed to maintaining an **inclusive, rules-based and liberal institutional order**.

It is a broad, all-embracing, and **comprehensive framework** that can stand as a pillar for **regional security and stability, multilateralism**, and defence of **global institutionalism** and the status quo.

A stronger **regional economic framework** promotes a resilient and secured supply-chain across the region and the world.

It is likely to complement the other **Indo-Pacific projects** like the **Supply Chain Resilience Initiative**. The initiative also seeks to build resilient and secure trade linkages by reducing dependence on China.

What is the response of China?

The **inclusivity angle** is questioned by China because China calls the grouping a **US-led “anti-China” tool** and a reflection of a **broader democratic coalition**.

Way Forward

Chinese narratives about the Quad such as an “**anti-China tool**”, “**sea foam**” to “**Asian NATO**” have only served to coalesce the Quad states and inclusion of more states (plus format) and agenda (security).

The **Quad Plus** should take this **process forward** and **strengthen cooperation** on critical topics in the **Quad’s agenda** (for instance, security, critical technology, global health, climate).

South Korea also embraced the **Indo-Pacific framework**. In fact, it is keen to participate in the Quad process for a long. For example, During the Covid-19 crisis, South Korea (along with New Zealand and Vietnam) had joined the so-called **Quad Plus** meetings to coordinate actions to stem the pandemic.

Taiwan plays a critical role in the **global semi-conductor supply chain network**. It is a major economy in the Indo-Pacific region and also an active member of the **Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)**. Therefore, Taiwan should be included in the grouping. Its inclusion would also be a **geopolitical statement** against **coercion tactics** by international actors.

A “**corridor of communication**” should be created which can lead to a “**continental connect**” to strengthen a **rules-based order**.

9. Can India turn Quad into an instrument to realize its significant potential as technological power?

Source: The post is based on an article “**Can India turn Quad into an instrument to realise its significant potential as technological power?**” published in the **Indian Express** on **24th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 International Relations, Regional Groupings

Relevance: Minilaterals, Technological Advancement

News: The Prime Minister of India is going to participate in the Quadrilateral Forum that brings together Delhi, Canberra, Tokyo, and Washington.

The US President will visit **Samsung’s semiconductor facility** in South Korea during the visit.

This underlines the role of critical technologies in his Indo-Pacific strategy.

Importance of critical technologies

They are key to propelling us into the next era of **humanity’s technological development** — artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, 5G, and so very much more”.

What are the challenges in front of all the Quad members?

The technology supply chain has disrupted due to the **impact of Covid-19** and the **Russian invasion** of Ukraine on the global economy,

Russia’s Ukraine invasion has shaken “**the very foundation of the international order**”.

Apart from the **Russian aggression** in Europe, there is an emerging issue of the Chinese challenge in Asia.

The **Ukraine crisis** has improved US prospects in the **Indo-Pacific** where China is aggressively asserting itself alarmingly.

For the first time since **the Second World War**, the US and the West are defending the sovereignty of states in Europe and Asia, while Russia and China are grabbing the territory of other states by force.

Japan and **South Korea** fear that China may resort to **Ukraine-like military aggression** against **Taiwan** and in the **disputed islands** of the Western Pacific. Therefore, they have started building national defence capabilities, strengthening the alliance with the US, and taking a larger regional role.

What are the indications that the US and other members can help India build its national technological capabilities?

The US and Western countries wish to reorient **technology supply chains** away from countries that don’t share common values. They want more procurement from their allies and partners across the world.

The recently launched **new Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)** visualises **techno-economic cooperation** across the region on fair trade, digital commerce, resilient supply chains, and clean energy among other issues. Progress on many of these fronts depends on **technological collaboration** between **like-minded partners**.

The IPEF opens the door for **economic re-engagement** with Asia in place of **the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** of which India refused to become part.

Importance of QUAD

The **Quad's** having **techno-politik nature** is about boosting the national capabilities of its members.

The **greater technological collaboration** between the US and its northeast Asian allies is emerging as a major pillar of Indo-Pacific security. The US is eager to strengthen India's technological capabilities for the defence and security sector. For example, in the US-India 2+2 dialogue, **techno-military cooperation** figured prominently.

Similar to AUKUS, and IPEF, the Quad has become the vehicle to shape the **techno-politics of the Indo-Pacific**. This can lead to advancement in **technological collaboration** in a wide range of areas. For example, vaccine production, clean energy, biotechnology, cybersecurity, and outer space

The QUAD provides a major opportunity to enhance **India's national technological capabilities**. This can be the source of India's robust security and economic policies.

Way Forward

The Indo-Pacific region requires a "**rules-based order**". Its principles may include respect for **territorial integrity**, **peaceful resolution of disputes**, and **no violent change** in national borders.

– For example, India strongly believes in the principles of **territorial sovereignty** and **peaceful resolution** of disputes.

In addition, the Quad partners can draw up **new rules** to govern **critical technologies** that are rapidly transforming the **global economic order** and **international security politics**.

The QUAD members can pool technological resources to promote **peace** and **prosperity** across the **Indo-Pacific region**.

– For example, there were reports that India may combine its **space** and **maritime resources** with those of the Quad partners which can help members to counter the growing problem of **illegal** and **unregulated fishing** in their vast **exclusive economic zones**.

India needs to create the right **internal environment** for **technological leapfrogging** and seize the **emerging external opportunities** for deeper technological partnerships with the US and the Quad.

10. [3 Ideas For 4 Countries Hunting for Chips](#)

Source: This post is created based on the article "**3 Ideas For 4 Countries Hunting for Chips**" published in **Times of India** on **24th May 2022**.

Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2, International groupings

News: Quad Leaders' Summit meeting is being hosted today. One agenda item will be to announce a concrete action plan under the Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative.

The goal of the Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative is to strengthen the global semiconductor supply chain's productive capacity and resilience.

Why Quad is focusing on the semiconductor supply chain?

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Through this initiative, the Quad officially recognizes that the semiconductor supply chain has geo-security consequences.

The nature of the supply chain of semiconductors is hyper-global. It means a single country cannot become self-sufficient in its production.

At present, a typical semiconductor production process spans 4+ countries, (3+ trips around the globe, 25,000 miles, and 12 days of travel).

All Quad members have unique capabilities to contribute to its supply chain.

1. The US is the undisputed leader in semiconductor design, with a substantial presence in semiconductor manufacturing.
2. Japan is a powerhouse in specialised semiconductor manufacturing materials.
3. India has notable strength in semiconductor design.
4. Australia has material endowments and niche technology industries relying on rare earth elements, battery technology, and artificial intelligence (AI).

How can Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative be strengthened?

First, build a Quad prototyping semiconductor foundry. Much of the work in the development of semiconductors depends upon the application-specific semiconductors prototypes. Which then can be sent for high-volume production.

Quad countries would contribute their relative GDP share and technological expertise. A joint R&D fab working on next-generation prototypes would be tangible, instead of building four different fabs in each country.

Second, Quad countries could sponsor Centres of Excellence (CoE) in each country focusing on their core strength. For example, Australia could host the CoE for new materials in electronics; Japan could host the CoE for silicon and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, and the US and India could host CoEs on fabless design architectures.

Third, create a Quad go-to-market program. One thing requires change, i.e., at present, international corporate and government joint development efforts continue only to the “pre-competitive” or R&D stage.

Fourth, With wider application of semiconductors, in IoT, 5G/6G communication, smart cities, etc. Quad countries can help each other to better compete in international markets. It would help them better compete against China-sponsored Belt and Road Initiative.

Fifth, Quad can expand this partnership to involve other countries like Taiwan, South Korea, and Canada.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (WEF)

11. Davos is so 1990s: The jamboree has lost shine, thanks to social media

Source: This post is created based on the article “Davos is so 1990s: The jamboree has lost shine, thanks to social media” published in **Times of India** on 24th May 2022.

Syllabus: GS Paper – 2, Important International Institutions

Context: [World Economic Forum](#) has lost its relevance.

What are the factors that led to the decline of the World Economic Forum?

Communications revolution: WEF used to be a special place and a special gathering of global influencers and policymakers to catalyze dialogue and disagreement. However, the rise of social media has changed that now one tweet, from an influential personality like Elon Musk, can make or break the markets. For example, the recent case of cryptocurrencies.

Decline of Transatlantic economies: [G7](#) accounts for 31% of global GDP in 2022, compared to 44% in 2000. Whereas, non-G7 members of [G20](#) accounted for 42. 2% of global output. The share of G7 countries will further reduce to less than 29% by 2026 as per forecasts.

Furthermore, China is closing the gap with the US in terms of no. of Unicorns in the world out of total of 900 Unicorns. India has 100 unicorns.

Failure of global capitalism: global capitalism has failed to avert major crises in the past like the global financial crisis of 2007-09 or the euro crisis thereafter, Brexit, or Climate Change.

WEF has failed to instill the responsibility for global warming among industrialized nations, instead, the platform has been used for preaching lower emissions to countries like India and Africa.

GS2 – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS

INDO-PACIFIC ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK (IPEF)

12. [Indo-Pacific economic bloc offers India a new opportunity](#)

Source: The post is based on an article ‘**the Indo-Pacific economic bloc offers India a new opportunity**’ published in the **Live Mint** on **26th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 International Relations, Regional Grouping; and GS 3 Indian Economy

Relevance: Economic Grouping, External Sector, India’s Export, Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan,

News: Recently, the US launched **the Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)** at the Quad meeting in Tokyo.

Significance of IPEF

In General

Geopolitical: All its members (the US, India, Japan, Australia, South Korea and 8 other East Asian countries), share worries about **China’s muscular nationalism** and **expansionist ambitions**. Therefore, this gives the group a distinct **geo- political flavour**.

On the **economic front**, the group could become the foundation for **longer term economic integration** of **like-minded countries**. It would lead to **cooperation** in **investment** and **technology development** for **clean energy**.

The immediate focus is on **common standards** in areas of labour rights, environmental standards, protection of intellectual property rights and rules covering the digital economy.

For India

The world is dividing itself into **autocracies** and **democracies**. This division is reflected in **economic alignments**. India has a deep stake in aligning with the **democratic group**. Therefore, India leadership has already signalled India’s support of the new initiative.

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Negotiations under the IPEF could be a mechanism for bringing our system in **line** with the **best practices** in the rest of the world.

It would make India an attractive **trading partner** and as a destination for **investment**, especially in new supply chains.

Digital trade and **e-commerce** are another critical area included under the IPEF. India has a **comparative advantage** in software development and application.

What are the challenges?

Economic integration must ultimately be reflected in **trade integration**. But the IPEF is not a conventional **free trade agreement (FTA)**.

Progress in some areas identified under the IPEF may run into problems from India's side. It will involve **many departures** from its **traditional positions**.

The new arrangements will not require a consensus. IPEF is not a **multilateral trade negotiation**, where any country could hold up progress of negotiations by not agreeing. India may simply be left out, if India does not accept terms.

In the past, India has resisted such **behind-the-border alignment** of **standards** because they reduce our policy space.

Taxes and anti-**bribery provisions** are another element of the IPEF that could pose problems. India takes taxation as a sovereign function. Therefore, it is not subject to negotiation. However, India's taxation system is often accused of being a form of "**tax terrorism**".

The US and Europe have differences on the issues of digital trade and e-commerce businesses.

Trade negotiations are too complex. It cannot be handled by individual ministries acting in silos.

There are many contentious issues in **digital trade** and **e-commerce**. For example, issues of **transparency**, the requirements of **fair competition** in a world dominated by a few players, and the ownership and localization of personal data.

Way Forward

Areas should be **identified** where the negotiations require a departure from past practice. India should consider whether these departures are in the **national interest** in the light of **changed circumstances**.

– For example, India adopted what advanced countries were demanding like **freedom for workers** to form **trade unions** because this was in our **national interest**.

If India decides to go ahead with **IPEF**, it should avoid **prolonged negotiations** as were done in the RCEP.

The '**atmanirbharta**' (**self-reliance**) does not mean **isolation** and **protectionism**. It involves attracting **foreign investment** and becoming part of **global supply chains**. Therefore, India should become part of IPEF as building reliable supply chains is part of its agenda.

The exceptions can be carved out for **specially sensitive areas**. India can build in a suitable adjustment period to comply with these standards.

India should initiate an internal review of its **tax administration** with involvement of experts and not just the Department of Revenue.

Indian business should be mobilized in support of the new integration. **Indian businesses** that are potentially competitive globally and are often not heard.

Finally, negotiations involve **multiple ministries**. Therefore, there should be **inter-ministerial consultations**. We need an **empowered trade negotiator** to consult with concerned ministries and report to the Prime Minister and key ministers with an assessment of pros and cons.

The NITI Aayog should be mobilized to conduct **broad consultations** and elicit the opinions of stakeholders, including state governments.

The NITI Aayog should engage in the education of the Indian public on the benefits to India from greater integration.

13. Explained: The new Indo-Pacific bloc

Source: The post is based on the following articles

“Explained: The new Indo-Pacific bloc” published in **Indian Express** on **25th May 2022**.

“Caution and clarity: On the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity” published in **The Hindu** on **25th May 2022**.

Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2, International groupings

Relevance: To understand the challenges surrounding Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

News

Recently, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework was launched by United States President with 12 other countries, including India, as a member. The aim was to reclaim US's economic leadership in East Asia and the ASEAN region without losing them to China.

What is Indo-Pacific Economic Framework?

Read here: [Explained: What is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework?](#)

The IPEF will **a)** set the rules of the road for the digital economy, **b)** ensure secure and resilient supply chains, **c)** make major investments necessary in clean energy infrastructure and the clean energy transition, **d)** raise standards for transparency, fair taxation, and anti-corruption, etc.

What is the stand of India on IPEF?

Read here: [India to join Biden's new trade initiative for Indo-Pacific region](#)

The Issue of data localisation between India and the US

India has fought with the US over the last two or three years regarding data localisation. In 2019, the government has introduced a Bill in Lok Sabha that envisages a framework for localising Indian data and the establishment of a Data Protection Authority.

But the US, in its National Trade Estimate Report, said that the data localisation “will serve as significant barriers to digital trade” between the two countries, and will act as “market access barriers, especially for smaller firms”.

What are the issues surrounding IPEF?

Lack of clarity: The U.S. said that it is not a free trade agreement; nor will it discuss tariff reductions or increasing market access, raising questions about its utility. But the US did not explain what is the focus area of IPEF.

Question on common ground: The 13 countries are part of very different economic arrangements. This raises the question of whether there is enough common ground among the members or not.

Trade relations with members of IPEF and China: Each of the IPEF countries has considerable trade interests in China, with most having large trade deficits.

Credibility of US initiative: The U.S.'s previous initiatives (the Blue Dot Network and the Build Back Better Initiative) have made little improvements in changing the region's infrastructural needs. Hence, the IPEF also faces a credibility challenge.

14. The IPEF could offer us a boat we must not miss

Source: This post is based on the article "The IPEF could offer us a boat we must not miss" published in **Livemint** on **24th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – International Relations – International agreements

Relevance: Indo-Pacific economic cooperation b/w the members of the QUAD

News: The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework may be an opportunity for India's integration with global supply chains and trade flows. But the US must put global aims above its home politics.

Why India should join IPEF?

India should join IPEF as **trade relations with fellow democracies** has been its preference after it gave up on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) led by China.

Also, India is often blamed for its export pessimism. Joining IPEF would change that.

— *Export Pessimism indicates the pessimism about the demand for exports in developing nations in the markets of developing countries.*

Will boost QUAD's influence: Currently just a forum to discuss common concerns rather than a defence alliance, the Quad's agenda has steadily expanded over the years. For the group to acquire durable weight, however, talks on how best to help one another prosper must go simultaneously alongside keeping the Indo-Pacific open and free.

To position India as an **option to China for manufacturing networks** that span borders, we must join forces with a multilateral project aimed at frictionless commerce.

What does the IPEF entail?

Details around IPEF are sketchy at this point. Here's what's known so far:

– The IPEF aims to facilitate fair and shock-proof trade, with e-commerce and supply-chain resilience as major aspects of it

What are some concerns that India must consider?

Washington's dismissal of free trade logic under the Trump administration has not yet been reversed by the White House. So long as electoral fortunes in the US depend on voters who blame globalization for their problems, its leaders will probably be reluctant to openly promote a barrier-free world of exchange.

– Any trade component of Biden's Asian outreach is thus likely to be impacted by calculations of American jobs.

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If the IPEF includes **US labour protection and non-tariff barriers** in the guise of “fair trade”, then India may hang back. However, if it promises to ease market access and enhance our export output overall, then we must not let item-wise shipment specifics stall our participation.

Way forward

While the IPEF will also cover cooperation on infrastructure and clean energy, apart from coordination over taxation, rule enforcement and the like, its **trade prospects should guide New Delhi's approach**.

We need to **go beyond bilateral pacts and focus on broad competitiveness** instead of two-way particulars.

On its part, the US would do well not to insist on caveats that could blunt any Indian advantage.

India must spell out its interests clearly right at the onset of IPEF talks. But then, just as the White House is seized of the need to keep Indo-Pacific sea-lanes free of a Chinese shadow, it must also be aware of how constraints on Indian export success could work against the Quad's geopolitical goals.

GS2 – POLITY – JUDICIARY

DIGITIZATION IN INDIAN JUDICIARY

15. Digitisation will ensure speedy, efficient delivery of justice

Source: The post is based on an article “**Digitisation will ensure speedy, efficient delivery of justice**” published in the **Indian Express** on **28th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Functioning of the Indian Judiciary

Relevance: Digitisation in Indian Judiciary

News: In 2021, the **Gujarat HC** became the first court in the country to livestream its proceedings. Its example was followed by other HCs like Karnataka, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Patna.

Use of technology in the India's Judicial System

In India, e-governance in the field of **administration of justice** began in the late 1990s. However, the e-governance accelerated after the enactment **of the Information and Technology Act, 2000**.

Since then, the focus has been on **digitising** the court's records and **establishing e- courts** across the country. For example, **e-courts** were launched as a part of **the National e-Governance Plan (NEGP)** in the year of 2006.

The **e-Committee of the Supreme Court** has issued directions to ensure that e-filing of cases/petitions by state governments in all matters be made mandatory from January 1, 2022.

The Supreme Court has approved the hearing of a number of **matrimonial cases** through **video-conferencing** in a number of cases. For example, in **Krishna Veni Nagam v Harish Nagam Case (2017)**, and in **Anjali Brahmawar Chauhan vs Navin Chauhan Case**.

In 2018, the Supreme Court allowed the **live-streaming of cases** of constitutional and national importance on the basis of the judgment in **Swapnil Tripathi**.

What are the benefits of digitisation?

Digitisation **prevents the requirement of a large space** needed to store so many files and the decades-old documents.

Ensures that these files are traceable **electronically** as and when required. This prevents the consequences of **missing court records**.

– For example, the SC in **State of Uttar Pradesh v. Abhay Raj Singh Case** held that the courts are bound to set aside the conviction, if court records go missing and re-construction is not possible. Thus, convicts can go free for want of court records.

The **time** consumed in **summoning records** from the lower courts to the appellate courts cause a lot of delay in cases. It will take much less time to transmit the records as and when called for after digitisation.

The cases are **adjourned** simply because **affidavits** filed several years ago were **not restored** with the record or were **not traceable**. The digitisation will not let the cases adjourned by the courts on this account.

The **lawyer** or a **litigant** can **check** the **status** of the filing, the status of applications and affidavits, date of the next hearing, orders passed by the courts etc. Thus, the lawyers or their staff are not required to visit the **reporting sections** or other sections of the court to know about the status of their cases.

Before the pandemic, **virtual hearings** were used only in a limited manner; for example, in criminal cases where it was not possible to produce the accused physically before the court.

The **live-streaming** of cases of national importance would lead to ensuring **transparency** and **openness**.

What are the issues?

There are **Internet connectivity issues**. In addition, it requires **a well-equipped space** where lawyers can conduct their cases.

Judges, court staff and lawyers are not well-versed with digital technology and its benefits.

Way Forward

Political will and the support of **judges** and **lawyers** are necessary. They should be made aware of the **technical know-how** and its **advantages**. They should also be given **adequate training** in the technologies.

The digital technology can be used in terms of **digitisation** of court records, **e-filing** of cases and their **virtual hearing**, live streaming of court proceedings.

Virtual hearings cannot be a substitute for physical court hearings in all cases. Cases related to **matrimonial issues** and **domestic violence**, **bounced cheques**, **motor accident compensation** referred to mediation centres and lok adalats could be included in the list of cases fit for disposal through the virtual hearing.

ISSUES WITH JUDICIAL SYSTEM

16. **How to solve crimes better**

Source: The post is based on an article “How to solve crimes better” published in the **Indian Express** on **28th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Polity

Relevance: Criminal justice System

Context: Forensic sciences have gained great **cultural popularity** over the past two decades with the onset of crime shows on

television. For example, Series like Law and Order, Mare of Easttown, Shetland and Real Detective.

What is forensic science?

Forensic science is the application of **scientific perspectives** and **techniques** to the **legal process**, including **investigations** and **courtroom protocol**. In other words, “It is the use of scientific data and procedures specifically for the legal system.”

There is rigorous procedure involved, including controlled conditions, reliable data collection and the attempt to disprove hypotheses.”

Forensic science involves **methodologies** like the autopsy procedures, fingerprinting, testing and matching for poisons, blood spatter analysis, matching guns to bullets fired (ballistics), voice sample matches, handwriting assessments and DNA analysis.

Forensic science laboratories (FSL) in India

At the Central level

There are **seven central forensic laboratories** in India at Hyderabad, Kolkata, Chandigarh, New Delhi, Guwahati, Bhopal and Pune. The CBI controls the laboratory in Delhi and **the Directorate of Forensic Science Services (DFSS)** controls other six laboratories, barring Delhi.

Their mission is to render high quality and credible forensic services to the justice delivery system

A **National Forensic Sciences University** was established in **Gandhinagar, Gujarat** in 2020.

At the State level

There are **32 state FSLs** and about **529 mobile FSL units**, of which Delhi has **one state FSL** and **six mobile units**.

Others

There are many **private forensic laboratories** in the country and their quality and standards of integrity vary.

What is the importance of forensic science?

The investigation is done for the collection of proof pointing to innocence or guilt. It also involves the deployment of **forensic science**.

The criminal cases are solved by **police conducting investigations** which are aided by **forensic science**. The **well-trained forensic staff** working in good quality laboratories aid the **criminal justice system**.

What are the issues?

India has amongst the **highest disparities** in **police-citizens** and **judge-citizens ratios**.

The DNA tests discovered in 1985 are used to identify individuals involved in alleged crimes. In 2017,

The United Kingdom completes DNA testing on over **60,000 crimes** annually. However, India completes such tests on less than 7,500 cases despite having over 13 times the population of the UK.

India has an inadequate number of **forensic science laboratories (FSL)**. In addition, there is a **lack of adequate qualified personnel**. For example, the Supreme Court observed **In Re: Speedy Trial of Undertrial Prisoners (2018)** that 97 posts of scientific officers and 67 administrative posts are unfilled in the Central Forensic Science Laboratories. Further, in all states, there were over 50% vacancies in personnel at their facilities.

The average pendency at each lab is huge.

The Court recognised that the **lack of personnel** meant that often trials were delayed to non-receipt of **FSL reports**.

In India, the FSL reports take an **inordinate amount of time** to be prepared. This prevents conduct of **forensic analysis** and the criminal justice system relies principally on witness statements.

Way Forward

The Court had asked the central government to address the issue of non-filing of the personnel in FSL.

India needs more investment in the establishment of FSL laboratories, the training and appointment of personnel.

There is a requirement of reforms within our police to establish a **trained and skilled detective cadre** tasked with **solving complex and heinous crimes**.

There is a desperate need for good **quality training facilities**, standards of **accreditation** and continuous **education programmes** for our forensic experts.

As forensic science is ever-evolving, it is important to know which facets of the science are still credible and what methodologies must be discarded.

17. Judicial delays and the need for intervention at the district level

Source: The post is based on an article “**Judicial delays and the need for intervention at the district level**” published in the **Live Mint** on **22nd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Functioning of Indian Judiciary

Relevance: Judicial Efficiency and Effectiveness

News: Recently, Bihar’s Bhojpur district court was in the news. It delivered a judgement on a land dispute case filed in 1914 which is 108 years ago, making it one of the oldest cases in the country.

What are the findings about the pendency of cases in the lower judiciary?

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According to some estimates, the district courts will take 324 years to dispose of all their pending cases at the current rate of disposal.

According to **the National Judicial Data Grid data** in 2021, out of the total pending cases in Indian courts, around 87% are present in district and subordinate courts. Some of the detailed findings:

First, **district-level pendency** in **criminal** and **civil matters** are highly correlated. Courts that have delays in one type of matter (Criminal or Civil matters) are likely to have it in the other type (Civil or Criminal Matters) as well.

Secondly, there are a **few concentrated pockets** of 'high-pendency' courts (see for instance Uttar Pradesh and Bihar).

Third, there is **no state-wide pattern** of high pendency courts. Some districts in the same state do very well, while adjoining ones perform poorly. It implies that Pendency is a district-level problem, and not state or national level.

What are the factors behind such judicial delays?

Supply Side Factors

India has 20 judges per million people, which is extremely low as compared to other countries like the UK (51) and the US (107).

Judicial vacancies: Until two years ago, around 37% of judicial posts in high courts and 21% in subordinate courts were lying vacant.

Demand side factors:

Pendency rates will be closely related to **filing rates**, which may in turn depend on population, legal awareness, education, and income levels of the people.

Note1: In accordance with some work done in **Western countries**, higher incomes increase litigation rates. For example, if more contracts are signed, more get broken.

Note 2: The answer is not so clear in **low-income regions**. In accordance to studies in Kenya and India, the congestion in court cases is lower in **higher-income regions**. This could be due to the better capacity of richer-area courts, money-driven case acceleration, or well-off people do not break any law.

Way Forward

The **PM** and **Chief Justice of India (CJI)**, in a **joint conference** of state chief ministers and chief justices of high courts (HC) emphasized the need for "**speedy**" justice.

The judiciary can increase **working days**, adopt **technology**, and on creating specialized **tribunals** (for instance, the government's recent proposal to set up special courts to close 3.3 million cheque-bounce cases).

There is a need to **decentralize** both identification of policy problems and their solutions to Indian districts. For example, this random distribution of 'high-pendency' courts across the states require **district-level interventions** rather than **state-** or **national-level policies interventions** to address the problem of high pendency.

PARLIAMENTARY SUPERVISION OF TRADE PACTS

18. India needs parliamentary supervision of trade pacts

Source: This post is based on the article “**India needs parliamentary supervision of trade pacts**” published in **The Indian Express** on **24th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Polity – Parliament

Relevance: Parliamentary supervision of international treaties

Context: India is negotiating and signing several free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries like Australia, the UK, Israel, and the EU. While the economic benefits of these FTAs have been studied, there is very little discussion on the lack of parliamentary scrutiny of these treaties.

This gives rise to arguments of **democratic deficit in India's treaty-making process**.

Concerns over the lack of parliamentary oversight were also flagged by the **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution**, set up by the Vajpayee government more than two decades ago.

So, should Parliament exercise some control over the executive's power to sign international treaties?

Can Parliament legislate on international treaties?

Yes.

In the Constitution, **entry 14 of the Union list** contains the following item — “*entering into treaties and agreements with foreign countries and implementing of treaties, agreements and conventions with foreign countries*”.

According to **Article 246**, Parliament has the legislative competence on all matters given in the Union list.

Thus, Parliament has the power to legislate on treaties.

This power includes:

- deciding how India will ratify treaties and thus assume international law obligations.
- Parliament's competence to give effect to treaties within the domestic legal regime by enacting laws.

Article 253 elucidates that the power of Parliament to implement treaties by enacting domestic laws also extends to topics that are part of the state list.

What is the present situation wrt parliamentary oversight of international treaties?

Presently, the Parliament exercises control over the executive's treaty-making power at the stage of transforming a treaty into the domestic legal regime. However, this is a scenario of **ex-post parliamentary control over the executive**.

– In such a situation, Parliament only deliberates how the international law obligations, already accepted by the executive, should be implemented domestically. Even if Parliament does not amend or make domestic laws to transform the treaty, the treaty will continue to be binding on India.

No specific law laying down the processes: Parliament is yet to enact a law laying down the processes that India needs to follow before assuming international treaty obligations.

– Given this legislative void, and **under Article 73** (the powers of the Union executive are co-terminus with Parliament), the Centre has been negotiating, signing & also ratifying international treaties and assuming international law obligations without much parliamentary oversight.

What is the global best practice?

In the **US**, important treaties signed by the President have to be approved by the Senate.

In **Australia**, the executive is required to table a “national interest analysis” of the treaty it wishes to sign in parliament, and then this is examined by a joint standing committee on treaties – a body composed of Australian parliamentarians. In this way, the Australian parliament supervises the treaty-making process and acts as a check on the executive’s power.

In **Canada**, too, the executive tables the treaties in parliament.

Way forward

Effective parliamentary supervision will increase the domestic acceptance and legitimacy of international treaties, especially economic agreements, which are often critiqued for imposing undue restraints on India’s economic sovereignty.

DELIMITATION COMMISSION IN INDIA

19. A Rajya Sabha rebalance must go with Lok Sabha expansion

Source: This post is based on the article “**A Rajya Sabha rebalance must go with Lok Sabha expansion**” published in **Livemint** on **22nd May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Polity – Parliament

Relevance: Federalism in India, allocation of seats to states in Rajya Sabha, domicile requirements for election to Rajya Sabha

Context: India is a federal structure with a unitary bias. The Constitution strikes a balance between popular will, exercised by the Lok Sabha, and the interests of states through the Rajya Sabha.

But, we have allowed popular fashions and political exigencies to undermine the federal structure.

What are the various states’ concerns?

Delimitation exercises have raised the deep anxieties, fears and grievances amongst the states. States in the south and the east are concerned about the prospect of the more populous north gaining Lok Sabha seats.

The fact that delimitation has been postponed twice since the 1970s suggests there are deep misgivings among states over their status and power within the federal structure. These fears are re-emerging now that delimitation is in the offing.

That is why it is crucial to take an enlightened national approach to the matter, not partisan or parochial ones.

What is the way forward?

The Lok Sabha must be expanded and constituted on the basis of population: This can mean that highly populated northern states get more seats, then that has to be accepted. However, the constitutional principles also demand that the standing of states not get diminished relative to each other, or to the Union.

Domicile requirements: The 2003 amendment to the **Representation of People's Act** that did away with domicile requirements for Rajya Sabha candidates and the 2006 apex court verdict in **Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India** that upheld it have undermined the federal balance.

– Students have to prove they have lived in a state for seven years before they can get admission to professional courses under the state quota.

– A citizen must provide proof of residence to register as a voter in the local and state elections. Many states have domicile requirements for government jobs and welfare entitlements.

– Yet, the Rajya Sabha now does not. We thus have people who cannot vote in or stand for a local election in a state representing it in the Rajya Sabha.

Hence, domicile requirements must be brought back.

Equality among states: The Upper House must also be reformed in line with Ambedkar's vision of equality among states.

– In the US, tiny Rhode Island and giant California both have the same number of representatives in the federal Senate.

– Here, Manipur has a single Rajya Sabha member, who does not even have to be from the state, while Uttar Pradesh has 31.

Way forward

Design has consequences. Perhaps the Supreme Court was right to opine that the Rajya Sabha is not akin to the US Senate, but in the interests of national unity, we should make it so.

Let all states have the same number of seats in the Rajya Sabha.

GS2 – SOCIAL ISSUES – SEX WORKERS ISSUE

SEX WORKERS IN INDIA AND RELATED ISSUES

20. **Supreme Court directions on sex workers: history of the case, and where it stands now**

Source: This post is based on the article “**Sex as work**” published in **The Hindu** on **28th May 22**, and on the article “**Supreme Court directions on sex workers: history of the case, and where it stands now**” published in **The Indian Express** on **28th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Social issues, Fundamental rights

Relevance: Sex workers in India and related issues

News: A long-standing demand of sex workers that their work be decriminalised has been partially fulfilled, with the Supreme Court observed that adult sex workers are entitled to dignity and equal protection under law.

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With the ***Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill*** yet to see the light of day, the Court invoked powers under **Article 142** to issue guidelines till the legislation is in force.

What are the observations made by the court?

Court directed the police to respect the rights of consenting sex workers, and it further observed that –

- Notwithstanding the profession, every individual has a **right to a dignified life under Article 21** of the Constitution.
- It reiterated what the Court had ruled in ***Budhadev Karmaskar (2011)***, that sex workers are also entitled to a “life of dignity”.
- Police should **treat all sex workers with dignity** and should not abuse them, verbally and physically, or subject them to violence or coerce them into any sexual activity.

What happened after the Budhadev Karmaskar judgement?

In 2011, the SC appointed a panel asking it to study and make “suitable suggestions” on “prevention of trafficking, rehabilitation of sex workers who wish to leave sex work.”

Findings of the panel: In its final report submitted on September 14, 2016, the panel noted that

- Sex workers found it difficult to acquire proofs of identity such as ration cards or voter cards because they lacked a proof of residence.
- District authorities did not recognise the identities of sex workers and their children, and sex workers did not have access to schemes meant for their rehabilitation.
- They also had no access to credit offered by states, because the lack of documents prevented them from opening bank accounts.

The committee recommended that amendments should be made to The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.

On May 19, a Bench led by Justice L Nageswara Rao noted that despite its assurances, the Centre was still to bring a law on the subject. Therefore, the court used its **extraordinary powers under Article 142** (*which enables it to pass orders necessary to do “complete justice” in a pending matter*), and directed that some of the recommendations be implemented by states and UTs.

Which are the recommendations that the SC has directed to be implemented?

The May 19 order listed 10 recommendations of the panel, and directed that six of them should be implemented.

These include:

- a) provision for immediate medical assistance for any sex worker who is a victim of sexual assault;
- b) direction to states to do a survey of all Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act Protective Homes so that cases of adult women who are detained against their will can be reviewed and processed for release in a time-bound manner;
- c) sensitising police and other law enforcement agencies to the rights of sex workers and to ensure that police treat them with dignity and do not abuse them verbally or physically or coerce them into any sexual activity;

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d) ask The Press Council of India to issue appropriate guidelines for the media to take utmost care not to reveal the identities of sex workers; and

e) direction that measures that sex workers employ for their health and safety (condoms, etc.) must neither be construed as offences nor seen as evidence of commission of an offence.

How has the Centre responded?

The Centre said it had “**certain reservations**” on **four recommendations** of the panel.

These are:

a) no criminal action against a sex worker who is adult and participating with consent;

b) arresting only the brothel owner and not sex workers during raid on brothels;

c) role of sex workers in decision-making processes, including planning, designing and implementing policy relating to sex work;

d) a recommendation with regard to children of sex workers.

The SC has asked the Centre to file its response to the recommendations of the panel within six weeks.

Way forward

The Court’s general observations should help sensitise the police, media and society toward sex workers, who have generally been invisible and voiceless.

The ball is in the Government’s court to draw up appropriate legislation to free consenting sex workers from stigma, and grant them workers’ rights. In that, too, the Court suggested the Centre and States involve sex workers or their representatives to reform laws.

GS2 – SOCIAL ISSUES – COMMUNAL HARMONY

HINDU-MUSLIM DISPUTE OVER RELIGIOUS SHRINES

21. Hindus and Muslims must give up rigid positions on contested places of worship

Source: The post is based on an article “**Hindus and Muslims must give up rigid positions on contested places of worship**” published in the **Indian Express** on **28th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Important Provisions of the Indian Constitution

Relevance: The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991, Fundamental Rights

News: In the Ayodhya temple case decided in 2019 by a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court. It was projected as a law falling within the parameters of the **inviolable basic structure of the Constitution**. In the present-day circumstances, other such disputes like Kashi-Mathura disputes have come to the picture.

What are the problems at present?

The masses remember only what **a medieval-age despotic Muslim ruler** had supposedly done to some ancient shrines in certain holy cities of India. They forgot the tributes paid by **India’s spiritual figure** of one community to holy places of another community. For example, **Freedom-**

fighter Hasrat Mohani once went to **Mathura** on **Janmashtami** and pleaded with Lord Krishna to accept his pilgrimage to Mathura.

The ongoing developments on the places of worship in India goes against the nation's professedly **secular Constitution**.

At present, the nationalists are reading the provisions of the statutes in accordance with their ideology. They do not go by **jurisprudential discourses** on interpretation of statutes. For example, the **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991** has acquired an inferior status in present discourse.

Way Forward

We should go by the **Constitution's prefatory terminology** — "We the people of India" should join hands to preserve peace in our beloved nation, no matter what cost is to be paid for it. Both minority and majority community should **amicably settle** the disputes in the interest of peace in the country.

There is no solution in **obstinacy** and **fanaticism**. Each community whether minority or majority should respect the freedom of religion. Both have to find together a **viable roadmap** to nationwide peace. The **perennial fighting** over a few chosen shrines situated in each other's vicinity is irrational and indefensible.

The judiciary has a role to balancing competing claims in religious disputes of large magnitude. It forms part of the **judiciary's Constitutional obligations**. For example, the Ayodhya dispute Judgment 2019.

The nation's top court decisions in earlier disputes as mentioned above and in the future disputes like the **Kashi-Mathura disputes** have been/would be in the interest of peace and harmony. This should not raise eyebrows.

GS2 – SOCIAL ISSUES – HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

22. Disability and the barriers to feminine hygiene

Source: The post is based on an article "**Disability and the barriers to feminine hygiene**" published in the "**The Hindu**" on **28th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Welfare Schemes for Vulnerable Sections of the population by the Centre and States and the Performance of these Schemes;

Relevance: Person with Disabilities (PWD)

News: The **United Nations Population Fund** and **WaterAid India** are collaborating to understand the key **challenges** and **constraints** faced by persons with disability with regard to menstrual health and hygiene.

According to Census 2011, nearly 27 million persons (or 2.2% of the Indian population) are disabled.

Measures taken in India so far

The government and non-governmental actors have increased **awareness** about **menstrual health and hygiene management** (MHHM), enhanced access to female friendly/gender appropriate sanitation facilities and availability of menstrual products (like sanitary pads).

What were the limitations?

A section including **girls** and **women** with disabilities have not been focussed so far. They face an exceptional burden on account of the intersections between gender and disability.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

The 2016 Act, stipulates the rights and entitlements of persons with disability. It also recognises that women and children are particularly vulnerable sections of the PWD Community.

It specifies that a person with disabilities has “long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment”. This impairment while interacting with other barriers, hinders [her]/his full and effective participation in society equally with others”.

What are the issues?

Persons with disabilities are unable to fully **participate** in many areas of daily life. They are excluded from doing so as a consequence of **impairments/societal barriers** or **socio-cultural attitudes**.

The **reproductive rights** are even more neglected or disregarded as compared to others.

The realisation of rights and entitlements of persons with disability has been very poor. It is poorer in case of **socially** and **economically vulnerable groups**. For example, girls and women with disabilities from poor households and marginalised communities.

According to the **National Family Health Survey 2019-20**, fewer than two-thirds of girls and women with disabilities aged between 15 to 24 years use hygienic menstrual protection methods.

There are deeply embedded **prejudices** and **misconceptions** about the **reproductive anatomy** and abilities of persons with disability. For example, they are considered asexual, unsuitable for marriage, and incapable of having and raising children.

They are denied **information** about sexual and reproductive health as compared to those without disabilities. Their menstrual health is also found to be compromised. For them, menstruation is more than a mere physiological process due to preconceived notions.

They face **additional hurdles** to hygiene management, good health, and health-seeking behaviours due to **economic** and **structural constraints; mobility constraint**, among others.

Objectives of United Nations Population Fund and WaterAid India Collaboration

First, understand the key **challenges** and **constraints** faced by persons with disability with regard to menstrual health and hygiene.

Second, identify simple and potentially **scalable solutions** in critical areas like accessible and adapted Information, education and communication on menstrual health and hygiene based on their differential needs and capacities, and an enabling socio-cultural environment. For example, **Tactile models** accompanied by **audio explanations** can help people with visual impairment.

Third, appropriate and safe **menstrual products** and **hygiene promotion**. They should be provided with a diverse range of products to choose from the most appropriate product.

Fourth, responsive and inclusive **water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities**, including disposal solutions in different settings like schools, rural, and urban areas.

Fifth, caregivers, both from within the family and institutions should be included as **participants** and **partners**. They are vital to ensure success of disability focused interventions.

Way Forward

Every menstruating person has the right to menstrual health, irrespective of their gender identity, ability, or socio-economic status.

HEALTH REPORTS, SURVEYS – FINDINGS AND ISSUES

NFHS 5

23. [India is a nation of meat-eaters — they are mostly men](#)

Source: The post is based on an article “**India is a nation of meat-eaters – they are mostly men**” published in the **Indian Express** on **26th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Health

Relevance: NFHS-5, Gender-based Discrimination, Dietary habit in India etc.

News: According to the **NFHS-5 data**, a staggering 83.4% of men and 70.6% of women in the 15-49 age group are non-vegetarian. Thus, the NFHS does not support a contention that India is primarily a **vegetarian nation**.

Statistics in the NFHS-5

(A) Consumption of non-vegetarian food

The percentage of the **vegetarian population** has declined by a **5 percentage-point** from the 21.6% recorded in the **NFHS-4** to 16.6% recorded in the **NFHS-5**. However, in the case of women, the reduction was almost insignificant. It was recorded 29.9% in NFHS-4 and 29.4% in NFHS-5

Globally, the proportion of those who are vegetarian would, at best, be 8%. But the kind of gender skew found in India is an exclusive feature of the country. It is not replicated anywhere else.

(B) Consumption of alcohol

There has actually been a 7% decrease in the consumption of alcohol among men aged 15-49 between the NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 data.

Other Arguments which reject India being a vegetarian society

Archaeological and **anthropological data** do not give any credence to the claims and assertions that India is a vegetarian society.

The Vedas too do not support this narrative. In fact, it is unequivocally held that it was unviable to depend only on vegetarian food anywhere in the world even during the Vedic times.

Description about Vegetarianism and Non-vegetarianism

Firstly, it is wrong to say that people only consume **meat**. All such people who **consume non-vegetarian food** also consume pulses, grains, vegetables, fruits and the like. Such people should have to be categorised as **omnivorous** because their food is derived from both animals and plants.

Secondly, some sections/groups have deviated from an earlier **omnivorous form** of food intake. They refrained from animal food. They are defined as “**vegetarians**”. Vegetarianism has been

projected, particularly and almost exclusively in India, as something **pious, saintly, virtuous** and **righteous**.

Why more men consume non-vegetarian food?

One, there are more opportunities to eat **animal food** outside of the home than at home. Men have **more opportunities** to go outside. They often eat in **restaurants**. It is rare to find single women (or even a group of women) dining by themselves in restaurants in most parts of India. Therefore, men have a lot of **autonomy** as well as **anonymity** at the same time to eat non-vegetarian food in restaurants than women.

Second, on the home front, women face **gender discrimination**, women often get deprived of certain kinds of food.

Third, there are many **religious** or **cultural reasons** for avoiding certain foods. It applies, at times loosely, and sometimes **exclusively**, to women.

Fourth, Indian society is primarily patriarchal. The **process of socialisation** is so biased in favour of men. Men exercise control over almost everything, including **women's piety** and related **dietary observances**.

PANDEMIC MORTALITY DATA

24. **Inadequacies of the Civil Registration System**

Source: The post is based on an article "**Inadequacies of the Civil Registration System**" published in the "**The Hindu**" on **25th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Governance

Relevance: Public data, Civil Registration System (CRS), Sample Registration System (SRS)

News: Recently, the **World Health Organization (WHO)**'s estimated excess deaths due to COVID-19 in India which has triggered several responses.

What has been the government's response against WHO estimates?

Various **State Health Ministers** slammed the WHO estimates. They asserted that India has a "robust, legal and transparent system for data collection and COVID mortality surveillance", referred to as **the Civil Registration System (CRS)**.

System for registration in India

The Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969 mandates the registration of births and deaths.

The State governments are responsible for the establishment and management of the registration system.

The Registrar General of India (RGI) coordinates and unifies the activities of registration.

The Sample Registration System (SRS) is used for further analysis of the birth and death registration in India.

A birth/death should be registered within 21 days. After 21 days, birth/death can be registered under the RBD Act with an order of a **First-Class Magistrate** issued after verifying the facts about the birth or death.

What are the issues with India's registration system?

The SRS figures are not available for the year 2020 in which Covid-19 hit India.

Further, Past studies on the SRS indicate that the vital rates are underestimated by 2-3%.

Further, **2020 annual reports** have shown that the number of births and deaths registered one year after occurrence is quite high. For example, more than **15% of** the births registered had occurred in earlier years in Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Assam. However, such a proportion of delayed registration was lower in case of deaths.

Many deaths like **female deaths** and child deaths have low level of registration because the family may not require **the death certificates** for settling inheritance, insurance claims, etc. For example, Female deaths formed only 39.8% of the total registered deaths in 2020.

Only about 20% of the deaths have a **Medically Certified Cause of Death (MCCD)** that conforms to the WHO standard. The State governments have not issued **statutory notifications** to increase the coverage of MCCD.

Impact of COVID-19 on registration

The Covid-19 lockdowns significantly affected the **efficiency** of the CRS in the following manner.

One, the **registrars** could not work during lockdowns in many areas.

Two, **people** could not travel to the **registrar's office** to report the births/deaths that had occurred at home within the prescribed time.

Three, in case of a delay in reporting, the procedure of getting an affidavit or a **Magistrate's order** as required under **Section 13 of the RBD Act** is a very cumbersome process.

Four, the functionaries handling registration were deployed on COVID-19-related duties and could not register the events.

It means a large number of births and deaths that had occurred in 2020 would have been reported for registration in 2021 or even later.

Way Forward

A robust system should be instituted to ensure the registration of almost every birth and death within a short time after its occurrence.

COVID-19 may act as an **eye-opener** on the importance of the CRS. The CRS has **several shortcomings**. India does not have a robust system of registering births and deaths.

While the **law** and a **registration system** are in place. The State governments should put in more effort to ensure that all births and deaths are registered and more deaths have **medically certified causes**. This would require coordinated action by several state departments.

The data should be published in a timely manner so that it can aid in the formulation of **evidence-based policies and programs**.

SC's verdict on vaccination policy

25. **Why vaccine mandates are essential**

Source: The post is based on an article “**Why vaccine mandates are essential**” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **24th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Important Provisions of the Indian Constitution

Relevance: Fundamental Rights – individual’s bodily integrity and personal autonomy under Article 21 of the Constitution

News: Recently, the **Supreme Court** has given its verdict on **the government’s ongoing vaccination policy**. The court held that restrictions imposed by States and Union Territories on **unvaccinated individuals** cannot be said to be **proportionate**.

Background

The governments have imposed partial or full vaccination of individuals as a precondition for accessing public spaces, services, or using public transportation, among others.

Past trends of safeguard community interest

In 1905, the U.S. Supreme Court in **Jacobson v. Massachusetts**, upheld the punishment of citizens who rejected smallpox vaccinations. Such a stand was taken in various judgments in the western world.

In India, the Supreme Court in **Asha Ranjan v. State of Bihar (2017)**, echoed the prioritization of **community interest** over **individual interests**. The court had observed that the community interest cannot be **sacrificed** at the **altar** of individual interests especially in a situation where a **fear of psychosis** is running through the **community**.

The Supreme Court’s observations in this case

The government’s policy seeks to invade an **individual’s bodily integrity** and **personal autonomy** under **Article 21** of the Constitution.

What is the basis of the Supreme Court’s observations?

In General

The proportionality test was used to check on the **infringement** of **bodily integrity, personal autonomy**, and **privacy** of an individual by the state. The test requires satisfaction of the following conditions:

- (1) the state action should be sanctioned by law;
- (2) the proposed action should have a legitimate state aim; and
- (3) the extent of interference by the proposed state action should be proportionate to the need for such interference. It means **less restrictive measures** are absent.

In particularly this case

- (1) The State is empowered under **Entry 6** of the State List of Schedule VII of the Constitution, the **Disaster Management Act of 2005** and the **Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897** to take effective measures (including legislate) on issues concerning ‘**public health**’.

(2) The **state's aim** is legitimate. For example, the Indian Council of Medical Research said that 92% of COVID-19 deaths in India in 2021 occurred in unvaccinated individuals.

(3) The extent of **state's interference** with the privacy and bodily autonomy of an individual, like the vaccination is the **essential precondition** for availing certain services, is not disproportionate when the state faces the challenge of preventing the **transmission** of COVID-19 and the **number of deaths**. However, such a state's interference is **disproportionate** until the time infection rates remain low.

At present, the infection rates are low. Therefore, the court held that the state's interference are violative of an **individual's bodily integrity** and **personal autonomy** under **Article 21** of the Constitution.

Argument against the Supreme Court's decision

The decision will **impact India's ability to equip itself** and its citizens for further **mutations** of the virus, if any, in the times to come.

The vaccines have proved to be medically essential to prevent severe illness and reduce deaths among infected persons. Should the virus mutate further, the presence of a class of unvaccinated persons would have wide-ranging ramifications for an already **overburdened healthcare system**.

India is a signatory to **the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**. Thus, India is bound to take all possible measures to progressively realise the enjoyment of **"highest attainable standard of physical and mental health"** of its citizens under **Article 12**. Therefore, the state should **expedite inoculations** at a time when infection rates are relatively low.

The vaccination will alleviate the **burden** on the **healthcare system** during more difficult times. It will also ensure that the **state's healthcare policies** are proactive and not merely reactionary.

The state should first safeguard the life and health of its citizens before individuals' decisional autonomies.

ASHA WORKER PROGRAMME

26. Serving those who serve: On WHO honour for ASHA workers

Source: This post is based on the article **"Serving those who serve: On WHO honour for ASHA workers"** published in **The Hindu** on **25th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Health related issues

Relevance: Recognition to ASHA workers in India

News: World Health Organization recognized the immense contribution of India's ASHA (accredited social health activists) workers by according them the Global Health Leader award.

This has given due recognition to the efforts of the workers at the very bottom of the hierarchy.

Why were ASHA workers awarded?

The **ASHAs** were honoured for their crucial role in linking the community with the health system, to ensure those living in rural poverty can access primary health care services.

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These workers, all women, faced harassment and violence for their work during the pandemic, well documented in the media.

Way forward

Even as they contribute to better health outcomes, ASHA workers continue to protest across the country, for better remuneration, health benefits and permanent posts.

It is the duty of the governmental agencies that employ them to ensure their welfare, safety and security.

27. ASHA: A successful public health experiment rooted in the village community

Source: This post is based on the article “**ASHA: A successful public health experiment rooted in the village community**” published in **The Indian Express** on 24th May 22.

Syllabus: GS2 – Health

Relevance: ASHA worker programme

News: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recognized the contribution of India's 1 million Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) during the Covid-19 pandemic

ASHA workers have received the **Global Health Leaders Award-2022** in the backdrop of the ongoing 75th World Health Assembly.

Genesis of the ASHA worker programme

The ASHA programme was based on Chhattisgarh's successful **Mitanin programme**, in which a **Community Worker** looks after 50 households. The ASHA was to be a local resident, looking after 200 households.

The programme had a very robust thrust on the **stage-wise development of capacity** in selected areas of public health.

Many states tried to incrementally develop the ASHA from a Community Worker to a Community Health Worker, and even to an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)/ General Nurse and Midwife (GNM), or a Public Health Nurse.

In many states, ASHAs are involved in national health programmes, and in the response to a range of communicable and non-communicable diseases. They get **performance-based payments**, not a fixed salary like government servants.

– The idea behind this was to make her a **part of the village community rather than a government employee**, i.e. to prevent governmentalisation and promote communitisation.

Over 98% ASHAs **belong to the village where they reside**, and know every household. Their selection involved the community and key resource persons. Educational qualification was a consideration.

With newly acquired skills in health care and the ability to connect households to health facilities, she was able to secure benefits for households. She was like a **demand-side functionary**, reaching patients to facilities, providing health services nearer home.

In a way, it became a programme that allowed a local woman to develop into a **skilled health worker**.

The ASHAs brought basic health services to the doorstep of households.

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What were the challenges faced by ASHA workers, and how were they addressed?

The ASHAs faced a range of challenges: Where to stay in a hospital? How to manage mobility? How to tackle safety issues?

The solutions were found in a **partnership among frontline workers, panchayat functionaries, and community workers.**

– The **Community Worker added value to this process.** Incentives for institutional deliveries and the setting up of emergency ambulance services like 108, 102, etc. across most states built pressure on public institutions and improved the mobility of ASHAs.

There have been challenges with regard to the **performance-based compensation.** In many states, the payout is low, and often delayed.

What have been the public policy lessons from the ASHA worker programme?

The important public policy lessons are –

- the need to **incrementally develop a local worker** keeping accountability with the community,
- make **performance-based payments**, and
- provide a **demand-side push with simultaneous augmentation of services** in public systems. The system can sustain and grow only if the compensation is adequate, and the ASHA continues to enjoy the confidence of the community.

What is the way forward?

There is a strong argument to **grant permanence to some of these positions** with a reasonable compensation as sustaining motivation.

The **incremental development of a local resident woman** is an important factor in human resource engagement in community-linked sectors. This should apply to other field functionaries such as ANMs, GNMs, Public Health Nurses as well.

It is equally important to ensure that **compensation for performance is timely and adequate.**

- Ideally, an ASHA should be able to make **more than the salary of a government employee**, with opportunities for moving up the skill ladder in the formal primary health care system as an ANM/ GNM or a Public Health Nurse.

Upgrading skill sets and providing easy access to credit and finance will ensure a sustainable opportunity to earn a respectable living while serving the community.

Strengthening access to health insurance, credit for consumption and livelihood needs at reasonable rates, and coverage under pro-poor public welfare programmes will contribute to ASHAs emerging as even stronger agents of change.

ISSUES RELATED TO PUBLIC HEALTH

28. Sighting the finishing line in measles-rubella elimination

Source: The post is based on an article “**Sighting the finishing line in measles-rubella elimination**” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **27th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Social Sector; Health Sector

Relevance: Universal Immunization Program, Measles-Rubella (MR) Vaccination Program

News: The COVID-19 pandemic stole two years from the MR Elimination programme. The MR elimination target has been re-set to 2023.

About measles-rubella (MR) Program

It is a program for providing **immunisation** to children from 5 to 15 years. It is being implemented as a **school-based vaccination programme** and is being conducted in all States.

Furthermore, it will lead to **vaccination-induced immunity** against both Measles and Rubella diseases.

To cover immunity gaps after one dose of measles vaccine, a second dose was necessary.

Why is MR Elimination important?

MR elimination is defined as **zero transmission** of measles and rubella viruses. It should have evidence of zero clinical disease, sustained over three years.

It can be achieved through **two methods: (a) surveillance:** identify places where either virus is still in transmission, and **(b) vaccination:** two doses of the MR vaccine — the first dose between nine and 11 months and second dose ideally in the second year of life

The MR vaccine is a **combined product** which targets **two diseases** in one shot. This is because fever and rash surveillance cover both diseases

How was the program implemented?

The district was chosen as the ideal **population-cum-administrative unit** for efficiently implementing all activities.

For epidemiological reasons, rubella vaccination had to cover children up to 15 years. **School registration** and **attendance** are high in all States and as a programme, therefore children were to be vaccinated in schools.

(A) Why should measles be eliminated?

In the **pre-vaccination era**, while polio paralysed about 1% of all children before the age of five, measles actually killed 1% of all under-five children. During measles outbreaks, the case-fatality rate may range from 10%- to 15%.

It leads to loss of **weight** as well as **cognitive development** and **scholastic performance**.

Measles affects the **immune system** rendering the child vulnerable to other infectious diseases.

(B) Why should rubella be eliminated?

The rubella virus is a **slower transmitter**. The risk of rubella extends from **childhood** through **adolescence** into the **reproductive age range**.

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It can show no symptoms, or with a short fever and a skin rash that is less pronounced than that of measles.

In case of an infected pregnant woman, the virus has a tendency to cross the **placenta**. Affected babies are born with severe birth defects such as cataracts, deafness, heart defects and developmental delay which is called as '**congenital rubella syndrome**' (CRS). This is preventable with vaccination if given prior to pregnancy.

What are the issues in the implementation of the MR Elimination program?

The stakeholders such as school managements, teachers, children themselves and parents **were not properly informed** about the basis and features of the new programme.

Due to a lack of information, there was **antipathy towards about the programme**, in the minds of parents and school authorities.

Lack of information has led to **shifting of goal posts**. For example, the Government first missed target of 2015, and second missed target of 2020

Way Forward

In order to achieve the MR Elimination in all 773 districts, the **Immunisation Division** of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare should support the **state governments**, and all the states should galvanise the **district administration** to carry out activities.

The District Magistrate should activate **the Task Force mechanism** overseeing the Universal Immunisation Program (UIP) that is managed by the District Immunisation Officer.

Clinical and laboratory surveillance and vaccination have to be sustained. Measles virus, could be imported from outside.

There are 19 months available to achieve the target before the finishing line b of **y July-August 2023**.

The cooperation of parents, health-care personnel at all levels, opinion leaders, influencers, the media, non-governmental organisations such as the Rotary and Lions, can play a role in making this **district-by-district programme** a story of success.

29. Diversifying plates for girls

Source: The post is based on an article "**Diversifying plates for girls**" published in the "**The Hindu**" on **26th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Social Sector; Health Sector;

Relevance: Nutritional Security

News: The **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 data (2019-20)** has shown an increase in **anaemia** among **adolescent girls** by 5% when compared to **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4**.

About nutrition requirement

In the **adolescence** phase of life, both boys and girls demand a lot of **nutrition intake**. As girls face more **physiological demands**, thus they require a **higher intake** of macro and micro nutrients. Therefore, Adolescent girls are 40% and boys are 18% prone to anaemia.

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The **adolescent's nutritional status** is related to the burden of **multiple micronutrient deficiencies**. Currently, 80% of adolescents suffer '**hidden hunger**' due to micro nutrient deficiencies.

Over 10% of adolescents are overweight in 12 States of India

What are the causes of low nutrition?

As per the **Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2019**, the consumption of diverse food groups among adolescents was low even before the pandemic.

The COVID-19 has further worsened **dietary diversity**, especially of women, adolescents and children. For example, as per a study, women's dietary diversity in India declined by 42% during COVID-19 lockdowns as they consumed fewer fruits, vegetables, and eggs.

The lockdowns have led to the loss of **mid-day meals**, interruptions in **Weekly Iron Folic Acid Supplementation (WIFS)** and nutrition education in schools for adolescent girls. The **out-of-school adolescent girls** were even more vulnerable to poor nutrition outcomes.

Way Forward

During adolescence, **dietary diversity** can be promoted, when **dietary habits** are in the formative stage. The behaviour imbibed during adolescence has a higher chance of being continued in adult life. It can correct **nutritional deficiencies** and replenish the body with much-needed nutrients, especially for girls.

Appropriate nutrition should be ensured to the **adolescent girls**. This can be done in following ways:

First, the **WIFS services** should be continued, the **government's health and nutrition policies** should promote **diverse diets** (like inclusion of millets) and **physical activities**. This can be done with better **school ecosystem** (like Nutri-Smart schools having kitchen gardens in schools); and strengthen **nutrition counselling** through **community-based** events and Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Days.

Second, apart from schools, young girls having **adequate information** and **knowledge** about appropriate diets can act as **change agents** for their families, community, and peer groups.

Third, in addition, increasing the **legal age of marriage** for women from **18 years** to **21 years** was a good step. Further, it should be ensured that girls remain in school or formal education. This will provide opportunities to girls to improve their nutritional and health outcomes.

Fourth, to address hidden hunger, we need to strengthen our policy initiatives to **address deficiencies** of not just **iron** and **folic acid**, but also **vitamin B12**, **vitamin D**, and **zinc**.

Fifth, POSHAN 2.0 Mission strongly integrates the aspect of under-nutrition and anaemia among women, girls, and children. In addition, non-communicable diseases and obesity among adolescents should also be included.

30. India needs to keep an eye on its myopia prevalence

Source: This post is based on the article "**India needs to keep an eye on its myopia prevalence**" published in **The Hindu** on **23rd May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Social Issues – Public health related issues

Relevance: Myopia prevalence in India

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Context: Millions of young children are growing up short-sighted every year because of myopia. While East Asia and the Pacific have been reporting some of the highest numbers for a decade now, current estimates out of India do not yet reflect this trend.

It may mean India has time to act and save the sight of its children.

Prevalence of Myopia in children

Myopia is commonly found in children.

As they grow and their bodies change, the **length of the eyeball** and its **power to refract light** do not always align, leading to vision that is blurry.

A pair of spectacles is enough to correct this mismatch. However, spectacles address the symptom and not the cause (eyeball length), so myopia can progress all through childhood.

Progressive myopia, after a point, leads to **'high' myopia**, increasing the risk of **retinal detachment**, **glaucoma** or **macular degeneration** that can cause permanent vision loss.

What are the reasons behind Myopia in children?

Many children, especially in urban environments, are **spending more time indoors** and **on near-work**. Be it at school or at home, the quantum of near-work — looking at books, television, phones or laptops — has increased over the decades. The **COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this trend** by robbing children of outdoor playtime and exposure to sunlight.

This big shift to near-work seems to be triggering an increase in myopia prevalence.

Is Myopia turning out to be an epidemic?

Global estimates

The WHO is warning of a **global myopia epidemic**, where millions of children are at risk of vision impairment. Projections show **nearly 50% of the world's population** will be myopic by 2050.

There were nearly two billion people with myopia in 2010 — a quarter of the human population.

– Data from the **East Asian countries** have been particularly alarming. Even before the novel coronavirus pandemic, 80%-90% of high school children in East and Southeast Asia were presenting with myopia. Nearly 20% of them had high myopia.

India

Current studies in India are recording **low myopia prevalence** among schoolchildren when compared to East Asia. In a large study that surveyed 1.2 million schoolchildren in Telangana and parts of Andhra Pradesh, experts found myopia prevalence of a little over 5%.

Even including those already with glasses, the prevalence numbers are low.

Why Myopia prevalence is still low in India?

Majority of children still live in rural areas: As urbanisation increases, so does the burden of myopia. Myopia can be twice as high among urban children when compared to rural ones. One study found a higher prevalence among South Asian children in the United Kingdom compared to those living in rural India.

And, despite a demographic shift towards cities and towns, nearly 65% of India's population still lives in rural areas. Hence, Myopia prevalence is still low in children in India.

But, as urbanisation increases in the future, so will the Myopia prevalence.

For instance: Prediction models are pointing to a myopia prevalence of nearly 50% in India too by 2050 — similar to global projections.

What steps can be taken?

Treatment strategies to constrain myopic progression include **pharmaceuticals** and **specialty spectacles** or **contact lens**.

But like all public health issues, **prevention strategies** are far more inexpensive and cost-effective. **For instance:**

- Encourage parents to take children out to parks and other outdoor spaces regularly.
- Schools must ensure adequate exposure to sunlight. Educational methodologies are needed at every school level that balance near-work with distance-work.

Make it easy to screen and provide spectacles for the many who will need them. **Basic, annual screening** can be performed by schoolteachers, who can then refer myopic children to eye-care professionals.

Tackling the social stigma around spectacle wear with tact and compassion.

It is critical that we **step up surveillance for myopia** so that India is not caught unawares by a runaway epidemic that will destroy its children's vision.

GS2 – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

INDIA – RUSSIA RELATIONS

31. Indigenous weapons will have to wean India off Russian arms

Source: This post is created based on the article “Indigenous weapons will have to wean India off Russian arms” published in **Live Mint** on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS Paper – 2, International Relations

News: According to Bloomberg News, the US is considering a \$500 million defense package for India to finance the purchase of US weapon systems.

According to Researchers at the Stimson Center, 85% of India's weapons are of Russian origin. Further, in the next 5 years, Russian arms export to India will increase.

India showed its unwillingness to condemn Russia, due to its dependency on Russian arms. After that, US is looking to reduce India's dependency on Russian arms.

What are the issues facing India in reducing its dependency on Russia?

Like all other developing nations, India is facing the situation of an **impossible trinity**, i.e., it cannot simultaneously achieve **autonomy, affordability and quality** in weapons development or purchase from US.

Shifting its dependency on western weapons would increase India's autonomy, but it would have to sacrifice affordability. It is because US weapons are much more costly compared to the Russian arms. For example, Russia's S-400 surface-to-air missile platform is costing India \$5.5 billion, whereas US-made Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system costs about six times that.

If India wants affordability and quality, its reliance on Russia is right. Some nations are getting that by close ties with the west and China. However, China is hostile toward India and the West is far away. Western countries can't help India in times of emergency. For example, during the 1971 war with Pakistan, India found itself short of artillery shells and had to secretly import mortars from an Israel it didn't even recognize at the time. **Insufficient weapons on hand represent a loss of autonomy.**

What are the issues with indigenous weapons in India?

India's efforts toward establishing a local defence industry have not been fruitful. **Indigenization offers affordability and autonomy at the cost of quality.**

For example, the indigenously built Arjun tank and the Tejas fighter jet are not preferred by the army and Air force.

Arjun tank is heavy (70 tonnes), compared to Russia's T-90 tank (50 tonnes). It could collapse most bridges in Punjab, making it unusable for a canal-heavy, militarized border with Pakistan.

Tejas's payload is smaller than the F-16's, and the plane takes too long to service.

What should be done?

India can take lessons from China, which invested for decades in the Shenyang J-8 fighter jet. It was able to finally build the Chengdu J-20 stealth jet, which may well be a "near-peer" of US fifth-generation fighters.

Similarly, India needs to invest in homegrown defence companies for a reliable and affordable pipeline of weapons of decent quality that arrive quickly enough to deter an aggressive China.

GS2 – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – EFFECTS OF POLICIES OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON INDIA'S INTERESTS

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

32. Lessons from Russia for India

Source: This post is created based on the article “Lessons from Russia for India” published in **The Hindu** on 25th May 2022.

Syllabus Topic – GS Paper 2 – International relations

Context: Russia's invasion of Ukraine is ongoing. Strategic failures and success of Russia is providing lessons for the Indian military as well.

What are the key lessons from Russian invasion for Indian military?

First, it has revealed the level of effectiveness of Russian tanks. American-built Javelin or Advanced Anti-Tank Weapon System have resulted into destruction of several of Russian T-90 tanks.

However, Germans used these tanks effectively during ring World War 2, but they were used along with the infantry. Russia has not used its tanks along with infantry, which is the main reason behind heavy destruction of its tanks.

Second, drones and anti-tank missiles have caused a great devastation among Russian forces.

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Emerging technologies like cyber and digital technology, Artificial Intelligence, and UAVs should be used along with the legacy platforms such as fighter planes, warships, and artillery weapons. It will provide the best performance. Emerging tech can provide precision, whereas legacy platforms can launch firepower.

Third, it is well known that Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses should be the foremost requirement for any invading force. However, Russia failed to neutralize Ukrainian air defenses, leading to Russia's revision of its plan by confining its military operations to Donbas and the Black Sea coast.

Fourth, Russia stretched its military lines thin. It resulted in long lines of communications and military columns that could not be supplied and reinforced.

All these strategic failures led to low morale among Russian forces.

Thus, India should start investing more in sensors, electronic warfare, greater digitization, satellite communications, and unmanned systems. It should be not just for reconnaissance and surveillance, but also for attack missions.

India should also develop greater missile forces to enhance its offensive capabilities.

33. Unexpected, but also unacceptable – Shocks due to Russia-Ukraine war

Source: This post is created based on the article “Unexpected, but also unacceptable” published in **Business Standard** on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS Paper 2- Impact of policies of developed and developing countries in India

News: Russian invasion of Ukraine represents an unexpected and undesirable shock to global economies, including India's Economy.

Indian economy is facing some unexpected shocks due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Even the areas which were looking beneficial for India are turning out to be harmful.

Impacts on Indian economy

Both Russia and Ukraine have been major exporters of foodstuff, including food grain and cooking oil. Russia alone was a key supplier of energy, fertilizer, and metals. However, the following are some unexpected shocks to the Indian economy:

Food grains: India was expecting to take benefit from a sharp increase in global food grain prices by supplying its excess stocks stored with FCI. However, the government's recent decision to shut down the export of wheat has reversed the expectation.

Energy: India was expecting discounted supplies of Ural oil from Russia. However, the price is at the same level, as it was in 2021 i.e. around \$30 less than Brent Crude. Furthermore, India is facing logistical difficulties to India in accessing oil from Russia. The unavailability of tankers due to the unavailability of marine insurance and the threat of sanctions is a major hurdle.

Food Prices: Food supplies are under pressure due to increase in price in the global food market and increases in domestic input costs due to the unavailability of potash from Russia and Belarus.

Fiscal pressure: the government has increased fertilizer subsidy outlay for the year to insulate farmers from increased prices.

Monetary policy dilemma: RBI is facing a dilemma between supporting inflation targeting and supporting the growth recovery.

Present India is much more powerful and effective as compared to 1991 India. Thus, India should be more aggressive in speaking against the disruptions caused by global events like the Ukraine invasion.

States must follow Centre's fuel tax cuts

Source: Published in Times of India on 23rd May 2022.

News: Government has announced lowering excise duties on petrol and diesel, as well as offering a subsidy for LPG cylinders.

States must also reduce the taxes on oil. The combined impact of tax cuts will provide much-needed relief to stressed household budgets and small business balance sheets.

Because, unlike previous inflationary pressure, that took place along with high economic growth, this time, it has arrived in the backdrop of five years of economic weakness and a pandemic shock.

How has increasing inflation helped the government?

A sharp rise in inflation has helped central governments in two ways:

- 1.) First, buoyant tax collections. GoI's net tax revenue between April 2021 and February 2022 was almost Rs 3.75 lakh crore higher than what was collected two years ago in a pre-pandemic year.
- 2.) Second, growth of nominal GDP has outpaced liability of interest on government borrowings.

Similarly, state governments have also benefitted from inflation. The ratio of fiscal deficit to state domestic product in 2022-23 is lower than the cap fixed by GoI for many states.

GS2 – POLITY – FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

34. The executive seems more fragile than hurt sentiment

Source: This post is based on the article “**The executive seems more fragile than hurt sentiment**” published in **The Hindu** on **25th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Govt policies and interventions

Relevance: increased use of Section 153A IPC and Section 295A IPC by the executive

Context: A Dalit academician, was recently arrested for an ‘objectionable’ post on the Gyanvapi mosque row. He is alleged to have promoted disharmony or enmity between religious groups (**Section 153A** in the Indian Penal Code) and intentionally and maliciously hurt religious sentiments (**Section 295A** in the IPC).

His arrest adds to the trend of increased use of the two provisions.

[Data indicates an increased use](#)

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The latest annual report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) records more than four jumps (458%) of cases registered under Section 153A since 2014; it almost doubled in the last two years.

Conviction could only be secured in merely 20.4% of cases.

Though no separate data is available on Section 295A, anecdotal evidence suggests its increased use by the executive.

What is the legislative history of these provisions?

In 1927, when Section 153A was already in existence, Section 295A was brought on the demand of a religious minority community which alleged that a pamphlet titled 'Rangeela Rasul' published objectionable content against its founder.

A more direct measure was incorporated through Section 295A, which would not require proving that the speech promoted enmity or hatred between classes; now, a **hurt sentiment would be enough**. It can be argued that it safeguarded the spirit of tolerance amidst religious diversity. But its enhanced misuse raises the question: safeguard for who and against what?

The Legislative Assembly debates at the introduction of Section 295A expressed concern about its subjectivity that could be misused.

– **Rationale behind Sec 295A:** The rationale behind the provision was to **deal with intentional insults to religion** or outraging religious feelings. At best, the Assembly members found it a temporary remedy for a temporary aberration, not one that would be in active use a century later.

Concerns expressed wrt Section 295A

The debates sensed and cautioned against a looming **threat over free speech**. It was anticipated that it **could be misused** to suppress honest, candid, and bona fide criticism, and hinder historical research towards social reform.

If individuals were allowed to register complaints about a hurt religious sentiment, the **courts would be flooded with frivolous cases**. Then there would be a sweeping class of offences, where it cannot be objectively adjudicated if a crime has been committed.

What are some safeguards to prevent misuse?

Statutory safeguards were incorporated that required **deliberate intention** and **malice**; and judicial rulings that needed looking at — words used, intent, and effect to ascertain criminality.

Only a **deliberate** and **aggravated form of religious insult** would attract the rigor of the provision.

The judiciary laid down two ways to measure the effect —

- one by establishing a link between speech and public disorder, and
- by measuring the effects from the standards of a reasonable man, and not from one who fears all hostile viewpoints.

What are the associated concerns?

No attempt was made to translate the statutory safeguards into practice.

Unlike bodily harm that can be verified, **sentimental hurt is subjective and cannot be tested against strict measures**.

Even the statutory safeguards of 'deliberate intention and malice' **cannot be objectively determined**. The police do not get into the legislative nuances before registering a criminal case or making an arrest. A hazy legal paradigm criminalising hurting religious sentiment facilitates the ruling dispensation's strategy to stifle all dissent and further divisive politics.

Way forward

A critical inquiry of orthodox practices and superstitious beliefs encourages social reforms.

India's Constitution celebrates diversity with the guarantee of free speech. With that aspirational pledge, should not the answer to hurt religious sentiment be tolerance, and not rampant criminalisation?

SEDITION LAW IN INDIA

35. Striking off sedition will have little impact if UAPA remains untouched

Source: The post is based on an article "**Striking off sedition will have little impact if UAPA remains untouched**" published in the **Indian Express** on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 – **Fundamental** rights – Important Provisions of the Indian Constitution

Relevance: Sedition Law and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act(UAPA)

News: Recently, the Union Government has shown its willingness to **reconsider** the colonial law in the spirit of **Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav** and the Supreme Court order has ordered to keep the **152-year-old sedition law**, i.e., Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in abeyance.

What are the issues?

According to the **NCRB** and **Article 14 database**, more than 13,000 Indians have been trapped in Sedition law cases since 2010.

An accused is most likely to spend up to 50 days in prison until a trial court grants bail and up to 200 days until a high court does so.

Argument against the law

The sedition law has been used to **criminalise dissent**. For example, various citizens have been charged with sedition during the anti-CAA protests, farmers protests of 2021; etc.

What are the challenges in striking off of the sedition law?

The discussion and deliberations on removal of the sedition law has always been political in nature in India. There has been **election promises** for the removal of the dark laws like the AFSPA and sedition, but nothing has happened on the ground.

Is Sedition law removal enough?

The retired **Justice Manmohan Singh** has said that the removal of the sedition law makes a dent, but it will be **small** and **ineffective** measures if the UAPA remains untouched. The UAPA contains many aspects of the sedition law with a number of **far-reaching consequences**.

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First, the sedition law involves a number of **safeguards** and **constitutional remedies**. For example, **anticipatory bail**, compulsion of filing a charge sheet within 90 days, failing which the accused arrested is entitled to bail, and so on. However, the UAPA is an anti-terror law having stringent provisions and far fewer safeguards. For example, detention is allowed without a charge sheet for up to 180 days, a presumption of guilt, burden of proof on the accused and creates a strong presumption against bail.

For example, the **three Kashmiri students** who were charged with sedition for shouting pro-Pakistan slogans in a T-20 cricket match were easily granted bail. In contrast, especially after the **SC's Watali judgment (2019)**, bail has become a virtual impossibility for the UAPA accused. Second, in the sedition cases, the **charge sheet** is filed in fewer cases and **the conviction rate** is as low as 2.25%. Thus, the sedition law is not a **very effective tool** for incarceration. However, as per the NCRB data between 2014-2020, 27.5 per cent of the UAPA cases saw convictions. In addition, such cases have taken a long time for trial to reach the stage of completion.

Way Forward

Those imprisoned under the sedition law should get immediate bail as the SC has issued interim order.

General Studies Paper –3

OIL PRICE RISE

1. **Crude Economics – Marco-Economic impacts of oil price rise**

Source: This post is created based on the article “**Crude Economics**”, published in **Business Standard** on **26th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS Paper 3, Indian Economy – Energy

News: The level of crude oil prices often changes the macroeconomic outlook in India.

How do oil prices impact India's economic outlook?

India's macroeconomic outlook improves when oil prices are low and stable.

Whereas, a **rise in oil prices means a higher Current Account Deficit and pressure on the currency**. It also results in inflation and pressure on government finances.

High oil prices also lead to the **reversal of the price decontrol reforms**. For example, Oil Marketing Companies have stopped changing retail oil prices lately.

As a result, the **system of under-recovery for OMCs is back**. Under-recovery for petrol is over Rs. 13 per liter and Rs 24 for diesel.

It is putting private retailers in a weak and harmful position. They don't have any pricing power, thus their business is becoming unsustainable. At present, they are looking to scale down their operations to cut losses. However, if the situation prevails, they may have to shut down their business.

It will **discourage any private investment** in this sector in the future. It will also become more difficult for the government to find investors for Bharat Petroleum Corporation.

What should be done?

Government must reduce its dependency on tax revenue from the petroleum sector. For instance, the contribution of the sector to the central exchequer was over Rs 4.55 trillion in 2020-21, which was 2.6 times more than in 2014-15.

Rationalization of taxes will make it easy to put them under the GST system. It will enable taxpayers to claim input credit and the government to impose a separate carbon tax.

A **review of both direct and indirect tax systems** is required, which could push up the tax-to-GDP ratio.

Government should **avoid interfering in pricing and implement price decontrol** effectively.

GIG ECONOMY AND RELATED ISSUES

2. [Indian gig workers may finally be getting a fairer deal](#)

Source: This post is based on the article “**Indian gig workers may finally be getting a fairer deal**” published in **Livemint** on **26th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy – Issues related to growth and development

Relevance: Gig economy and related issues

Context: Uber’s recent announcement of new terms for drivers may prove revolutionary in the long history of labour relations, specifically wrt the Gig economy.

To work around the recurrent problem of drivers cancelling rides because they did not want to go to the destination or wanted a cash payment upfront rather than waiting for the company to reimburse them weekly, the cab hailing service is making that information available to drivers so that they can pick which rides to accept.

[What are some recent issues faced by the Gig economy and the startup ecosystem?](#)

First, poor working conditions and high fuel prices are making the retention of drivers and two-wheeler delivery personnel an uphill battle. Attrition at food delivery companies is estimated at around 40% every month.

Second, the US Federal Reserve’s accelerated rate hikes this year mean that **funding might not come as easily as before**. India’s low labour costs had made windfalls for startup founders even more dramatic. Unicorns were minted at rich-world valuations while the pay offered to ‘delivery partners’ stayed decidedly developing world. Last year, 40 new unicorns—companies with valuations of \$1 billion or more—were created in India.

[Is India’s startup growth slowing down, and why?](#)

Yes.

As The Economic Times reported on 28 April, in March and April, “four unicorns were minted in India compared to 10 during the same period last year. So far this month, no new unicorn rounds have been announced, against eight new ones in April 2021.

Reasons:

The backdrop for this slowdown is a global bear market. At the start of the May, the S&P 500 and US government bonds have fallen simultaneously for five or more weeks consecutively.

[What is the economic situation in India?](#)

Large consumer goods companies are reducing the size of packages of biscuits and detergents or raising prices. As volume and margin growth slows, and interest rates rise, **new investments will be postponed**.

Core inflation, notably of medical services and education, has been there for some time now and has likely cut into middle class spending on goods.

The Centre’s continual hikes of taxes on petrol and diesel over the past couple of years may have been necessary to keep its fiscal deficit in check, but it has also acted as a **consumption tax**.

Markers of middle-class prosperity as **sales of entry-level cars and two-wheelers are languishing**.

India's middle class has been shrinking for a few years. Last March, Pew estimated 32 million Indians had fallen out of the middle class during the pandemic, amid a global drop in the size of the middle class.

This year's **sharp rise in Indian inflation** even before Russia's invasion of Ukraine will have undermined the recovery in earning power for those working in restaurants and hotels, even as those industries continue to see a welcome rebound.

Way forward

India is set to face a 6%-plus inflation for the foreseeable future.

In the US, workers in labour-intensive industries are demanding and getting a better deal.

Thus, indexing petrol costs to payouts for gig economy drivers and delivery riders and giving them better working conditions marks a welcome socioeconomic shift, in India.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

3. Universal basic income plan faces implementation issues

Source: This post is based on the article “**Universal basic income plan faces implementation issues**” published in **Livemint** on **27th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Economy – Issues related to growth and development

Relevance: Universal Basic Income and related issues

News: Practical challenges in implementation have come in the way of rolling out a universal basic income scheme proposed by experts and mooted in the 2016-17 Economic Survey, an official privy to the government discussions said.

Background

Universal basic income has often come before on the radar of policymakers as a means of support for the bottom of the pyramid, but designing the scheme has proven to be a big challenge.

The latest recommendation for such a scheme came earlier this month in a **report** commissioned by the economic advisory council to the PM on **income inequality**.

The idea of universal basic income, or a single unconditional income that reduces government efforts to ensure last-mile delivery of individual social security schemes, **first featured in the Economic Survey 2016-17** prepared by the then Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian.

– The suggestion then was that the scheme will **provide every citizen unconditional cash transfer** in place of the many benefits, like health facilities, fertilizer, fuel, food subsidies etc. The case for a single unconditional income is that it reduces government efforts to make sure individual schemes reach the right targets.

But over the years, the idea has turned from being a universal scheme to a **targeted scheme** that brings with it implementation challenges and problems in identifying the right beneficiaries.

What are the challenges that have cropped up?

For rolling out universal basic income, an **institutional mechanism** has to be in place.

Which **institution can do it, who are the eligible beneficiaries and how to track and verify the delivery of benefits on a large scale**—these are questions that need to be looked into before taking a decision on UBI.

Also, the problem in the scheme comes when **cut-offs are set and benefits** are targeted at certain groups, i.e. instead of being a universal scheme, a targeted scheme is aimed at.

Fiscal issues also surface when, rather than having a fixed budget for the scheme covering all citizens, cut-offs for various segments have to be worked out.

A targeted scheme cannot be called universal and this will also require **another round of Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC)** to get updated data on beneficiaries as the 2012 data is now outdated and does not provide the correct picture.

Why a universal scheme would be unsustainable?

In its original form of being a universal scheme, applicable for all Indian citizens, the scheme is expected to become unsustainably large, stretching the country's finances to a breaking point.

– Even going by the decade-old urban poverty line of ₹1,000 per person per month, providing UBI to about 1.3 billion citizens would cost the government **₹15.6 trillion a year**.

4. Time for us to work out a universal basic income

Source: This post is based on the article “**Time for us to work out a universal basic income**” published in **Livemint** on **23rd May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy – Issues related to growth and development

Relevance: Rising inequality and Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Context: India's debate on the need and feasibility of a **universal basic income (UBI)** as an **elementary safety net for all our citizens was revived again after the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister released a report on inequality**.

Regardless of divisions in opinion over the poverty levels in the country, inequality demands a bold policy response.

What are the two key suggestions made in the report?

Urban employment guarantee scheme: It advocates fallback job options for urban Indians along the lines of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which assures rural residents 100 days of pay-for-work each year for the asking.

Universal Basic Income (UBI): The report also supports a UBI, an idea that is still seen as somewhat radical in policy circles.

Must Read: [Issues with the idea of an urban employment guarantee scheme](#)

How has the pandemic affected the economy?

Large numbers of asset-poor suffered a **severe impact on their income**.

Modest earners had been hit hard by a formalization drive a few years earlier, while an overall slowdown of India's economy **worsened a job scarcity** that is yet to ease.

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To be sure, free food rations and job handouts played vital roles in offering the poor relief. But the distress has spanned multiple socio-economic classes. Credible reports suggest that **even middle-class homes were pushed into poverty**.

What are the factors involved in the implementation of UBI in India?

For welfare efficiency, we should institute **leak-proof direct transfers** covering all adults.

Expensive scheme: No doubt, a UBI scheme would be expensive. For about a billion beneficiaries, it would cost an annual ₹12 trillion just for each adult to get a monthly ₹1,000.

– But what looks like **premature welfarism** today could well be affordable tomorrow as central coffers expand, especially if we cut inefficient fiscal expenses and urge the non-needy to opt out of UBI net.

An **eligibility cut-off** is sure to be proposed, but a **denial criterion** could defeat its inclusivity and pose barriers to upward mobility at that level.

As for the **worry of workers not working hard**, an assured income would act as a belly-filler at best, so that should not deter an Indian UBI plan.

– In general, a decrease in an economy's labour-supply caused by cash giveaways have been debunked by studies. In the US, a 2018 working paper by Ioana Marinescu on the behavioural effects of cash transfers found just a 1% drop in labour supply induced by a 10% income boost.

– Earlier research by Abhijit Banerjee and others, outlined in 'Debunking the Stereotype of the Lazy Welfare Recipient', had similar findings for emerging economies.

Way forward

It's time for a plan to share public funds with all citizens in need.

GS3 – AGRICULTURE – MAJOR CROPS

FOOD SECURITY IN INDIA

5. How consumption is set to outstrip food grain production

Source: This post is created based on the article “**How consumption is set to outstrip food grain production**”, published in **Business Standard** on **26th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS Paper 3- Indian Economy- agriculture, GS Paper 2 – Hunger and malnutrition

Context: Food consumption is outpacing food production. It may prove the Malthus theory correct.

In 1798, British philosopher and economist Thomas Malthus gave a theory. The theory predicted a catastrophe, which is also called “Malthusian catastrophe”. He predicted in his theory that population growth would outpace food production to cause shortages and famine.

His theory was widely criticised at that time for not taking technological developments into consideration. However, it may become a reality in the near future.

What are the indicators that are proving Malthus theory correct?

First, some of the following policy decisions of countries are an indicators of this:

- 1.) India banned most wheat exports.
- 2.) Indonesia banned palm oil exports.
- 3.) Europe is being criticised for its farm-to-fork strategy promoting sustainable farming.

Second, the following findings of the Business Standard analysis are also strong indicators:

- 1.) The number of moderately or severely food insecure people rose to 30.6 percent in 2020, compared to 22.6 percent in 2014.
- 2.) In Africa, food insecurity increased from 47.3 percent to 59.6 percent during this period.
- 3.) The United States Department of Agriculture reported that global consumption of corn, wheat, and rice will outstrip production in the coming year.

However, all these factors may not result in a shortage immediately. A sustained period of production and consumption gap may cause problems. If innovation comes to the rescue this time also, then Malthus's theory can be proved wrong again.

TRENDS IN INDIA'S AGRI SECTOR

6. Can agri-exports be made more sustainable?

Source: The post is based on an article “Can Agri-exports be made more sustainable” published in the **Indian Express** on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS3 Indian Economy – Issues related to Direct and Indirect Farm Subsidies and Minimum Support Prices; Public Distribution System

Relevance: External Sector, India's Agri-Export in wake of present crisis, Subsidies etc.

News: In the fiscal year 2021-22 (FY22), agri-exports scaled an all-time high of \$50.3 billion with registering a growth of 20% over the preceding year. For example, India's exports constituted 41% of a global rice market of 51.3 MMT.

What were the driving forces?

This was made possible largely by **rising global commodity prices**. In addition, there were other driving forces like **favourable** and **aggressive export policy** of the Ministry of Commerce and its various export promotion agencies like APEDA, MPEDA, and commodity boards.

The composition of India's Agri-exports

Among the several agri-commodities exported in FY22, rice ranks first, followed by marine products, sugar, spices and bovine (buffalo) meat.

How sustainable is this growth in agri-exports?

Given India's resource endowments and the country's **domestic needs**, the government has already banned **wheat exports**.

Of the Agri-export commodities, two commodities, rice and sugar, are **water guzzlers**. This issue poses a challenge to their **global competitiveness** as well as their **environmental sustainability**.

The case of rice:

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When most of the other commodity prices were surging in global markets, the price of rice collapsed by about 13%, largely due to India's massive exports. This means that India had to export a **greater quantity of rice** to get the same amount of dollars. This is not in India's economic interest.

Another concern is that a substantial part of its global competitiveness comes from highly subsidised **water, power and fertilisers** that go into its production.

The rice export led to a **virtual export** of India's **water** because rice crop is another **water guzzler** crop.

The Case of Sugar

The sugar export led to a **virtual export** of India's **water** because Sugar crop is another **water guzzler** crop.

The sugar industry receives a number of subsidies (including **export subsidy**). These subsidies have crossed the 10% limit mandated by the WTO. Therefore, India lost **the sugar case** in the WTO.

Others

The non-basmati rice was exported at a price which was lower than the MSP of rice. This might have been the result of **leakages** and divergence in the **PDS** and **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)**.

India exported at least 62 billion cubic meters of virtual water. Much of this water is extracted from groundwater in **Punjab** and **Haryana** belt (for rice), and in **Maharashtra** and **Uttar Pradesh** for sugar. This can lead to a water disaster.

The rice production systems contribute to 17.5% of GHG emissions generated from agriculture (2021). This is among the most important sources of **anthropogenic methane emissions**,

Way Forward

In accordance with **trade theory**, the optimal export tax of 5 to 1% must be levied. Further, India should optimally not go beyond 12 to 15 MMT of rice exports, else the marginal revenue from exports will keep falling.

The upcoming **environmental disaster** can be tackled if farmers are supported smartly. They should be given aggregate **input subsidy support** on a per hectare basis and the input **prices of fertilisers and power** should be allowed to be determined by market forces and their costs of production.

Innovative farming practices such as **alternate wetting drying (AWD)**, **direct seeded rice (DSR)**, and micro-irrigation should be promoted. They can save up water and reduce the **crop's carbon footprint**.

The farmers should be incentivised to switch some of the area under **rice** and **sugar cultivation** to other **less water-guzzling crops**. For example, Haryana has launched **Mera Pani, Meri Virasat** for incentive farmers to switch from paddy to alternate crops and **Kheti Khaali, Fir Bhi Khushali** Scheme to give money to farmers if they do not grow any crop during the kharif season.

It is high time that the government can introduce the option of **direct cash transfers** in lieu of almost free grains under the PDS and PMGKAY. This will help plug leakages as well as save costs. The savings can be used for **better diversification** of our food systems, better use of scarce water and other practices that lower GHG emissions, and saving on burgeoning food and fertiliser subsidies.

FALL IN THE PROCUREMENT OF WHEAT

7. **India can't feed the world with a major chapaati crisis at home**

Source: This post is created based on the article “India can't feed the world with a major chapaati crisis at home” published in **Live Mint** on **27th May 2022**. **Syllabus Topic – GS Paper 3 – Agriculture – Agriculture produce and marketing**

News: India has imposed ban on wheat import amid the global food crisis.

What are the reasons behind the export ban by the government?

First, this year India's wheat output is around 6.5% less than the previous year.

Second, the hottest March in 122 years has stunted grain formation. Last year, a kilogram of Indian wheat resulted in about 770gm of flour. This year, that might go down to 720gm.

Third, India's crop will at best exceed 100 million tonnes this year, it is a steep decline from the initial government estimate of a record 111 million-tons harvest.

Fourth, Food Corporation of India (FCI), also slashed its procurement target to less than half of the last year's target of 43 million tonnes.

What can be done to tackle the issues?

If prices of food grains increase, the following options can be adopted:

The government can impose stock limits to force traders to release their hoards.

FCI could also offload more rice than wheat into the subsidized public distribution system. This could free up about 10 million tonnes of wheat for government-to-government supply deals such as with Egypt, as most of the Indians use both rice and wheat.

8. **Food security does not need this 'surgical strike'**

Source: The post is based on an article “Food security does not need this 'surgical strike'” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS3 Issues and Challenges in PDS and Food Security

Relevance: Wheat Export, Food Security, and Public Distribution System (PDS)

News: Recently, the Government of India announced a sudden ban on export of wheat when the government was looking out for ways for augmenting India's wheat exports.

Two schools of thought for ensuring food security in India

One school of thought argues that food security has to be ensured through **domestic production**.

Other school of thought suggested that food stocks be run down in India and that needs of food security be met through **world trade** and the **Chicago futures market** as part of the **liberalisation policy**.

About Indian Public Procurement System

Since the mid-1960s, India's public procurement system has been the backbone of food policy in India to ensure food security

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In summer 2022, procurement of wheat by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been very low.

Why has there been low wheat procurement in India?

The wheat production this year has been lower than estimated on account of **high heat** and **other factors**.

For more: Click [here](#)

What are the issues with increasing India's export?

Those western countries which have asked India to meet the shortfall, are already much **larger exporters** of wheat. They have themselves not increased their exports in the current context.

The stock of wheat in the **central pool** has been much lower than last year. Although, it is comfortably higher than **buffer stock norms**. But lower procurement in year can lead to **food security** in problems.

Other challenges

Over the last two years, costs of production have risen sharply. The important causes are the **spiralling price of fuel**, higher input costs and yield losses.

The flip-flop on export of wheat is one example that this government lacks a coherent policy of food security.

The Way Forward

During the two COVID-19 years, the **Public Distribution System (PDS)** played a stellar role. It kept people out of starvation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it should not be dismantled.

The PDS and open market operations can be used to cool down **food price inflation**. At present, most States have high inflation rates and States with better PDS, such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, have low inflation rates.

The government ensures adequate distribution through **the food rationing network**. Further, the **open market operations** should be undertaken to ensure stable prices. If needed, rice can be distributed in lieu of wheat.

Food security is both an immediate and **long-term concern**. A well-functioning PDS can control prices and offer relief to consumers.

The government should overcome the shortfall in public procurement by increasing the procurement price and buying more. The government should provide **remunerative prices** to farmers to promote production. **The National Commission on Farmers** has highlighted the issues of inadequately announced minimum support price (MSP) for wheat.

9. Why GoI Can Resume Wheat Exports

Source: This post is created based on the article “Why GoI Can Resume Wheat Exports”

Published in **The Times of India** on **23rd May 2022**.

Syllabus Topic – GS Paper 3 – transport and marketing of agricultural produce

9 PM Compilation for the Month of May, (Fourth Week) 2022

News: As per the third advance estimate of crop production for the year 2021-22, India has harvested a record foodgrain production, up by 3.77 MMT over the preceding year.

While the rice production is up compared to previous year, wheat production is a bit low.

It has led to several negative effects on traders who purchased wheat at higher price, on farmers due drop in price. Also, Export controls and stocking limits inflict an 'implicit tax' on farmers.

Read- [Implications of wheat export ban](#)

What government can do to contain negative effects of export ban?

It should announce that it will honour its commitment to exporting 10 MMT of wheat. Additionally, it can export 10-15 MMT of extra rice.

It can provide bonus for wheat farmers who want to sell wheat to government.

Under, PMGKAY and NFSA allocations, government can give option of cash to beneficiaries. It will give beneficiaries an option to buy more nutritious food, be it pulses, milk, eggs, meat or fish.

Lastly, government should reconsider its policy of free food under [PMGKAY](#) and NFSA to 800 million plus people.

GS3 – ENVIRONMENT – BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION

ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION

10. Nature has the answers

Source: The post is based on an article “Nature has the answers” published in the “The Hindu” on 23rd May 2022.

Syllabus: GS3 Environment and Ecology

Relevance: Importance of Biodiversity and Nature Based Solutions

News: Recently, The **International Day of Biodiversity on May 22, 2022** was celebrated. It was done amid the pandemic, and the recent heat waves in much of northern India and floods in Meghalaya. The uncertainty is being further fuelled by the continuing degradation of lands and biodiversity, growing malnutrition and hunger, and inequities and environmental injustice.

Man-Environment Relationship

We, the human species, are an **integral** and **influential component** of biodiversity. Our own bodies host living microbiomes of tiny organisms without which we cannot survive.

Our cultures shape the biodiversity around us, and biodiversity shapes our cultures and our future here on Earth.

India's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity has been greatly influenced by the **unique features** of our land, climate and geography as well as **forces of migration** and **evolution**. These forces have enriched our land with a multitude of species of plants, animals, and other organisms.

Importance of international day celebration

The day provided us an opportunity to appreciate the wonder of biodiversity, renew our commitment to nurture and protect all the many forms of life with which we share our planet.

What are the problems?

India's biodiversity is under assault. For example, our natural landscapes and waterscapes have seen decline and degradation.

Way Forward

Nature-based solutions: Biodiversity provides us with **potential solutions** to our most pressing **sustainability challenges**. The use of biodiversity and natural world processes are the best path for sustainability. These can be done as below:

Climate change: The **restoration of biodiversity** over the vast tracts of **deforested** and **other degraded lands** can mitigate climate change. This direct connection between biodiversity and climate change has been acknowledged in the Glasgow Summit of the UNFCCC. Further, Restoration also has the potential of creating **millions of jobs**, diversifying farming systems and agriculture-based livelihoods. It can also help India to meet its intended commitment to tackle climate change.

Enterprises working in the **biotechnology** and **healthcare sector** can harness the untapped potential of our **rich medical heritage** that includes thousands of **medicinal plant species**.

Nature can lead to our economic, and physical well-being; and minds and spiritual enrichment.

It will help India in the realisation of the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals**.

The government has launched a **National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being**. The key features of the missions are:

The mission will promote biodiversity in **development programmes**, particularly in the sectors of agriculture, health, bioeconomy, ecosystem services, and climate change mitigation.

The mission seeks to ensure public engagement which is key for **biodiversity conservation**.

The Mission seeks to develop a system for assessing and monitoring, restoring, and enhancing biodiversity.

The Mission can help address various issues: the emergence of infectious diseases; inadequate food and nutritional security; rural unemployment; and climate change.

GS3 – INDIAN ECONOMY – GST AND RELATED ISSUES

GST AND RELATED ISSUES

11. Storm in a GST cup

Source: The post is based on an article “**Storm in a GST cup**” published in the **Business Standard** on **28th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Important Provisions of the Constitution of India; Issues and Challenges pertaining to the Federal Structure

Relevance: Fiscal Federalism; GST Council

News: The Supreme Court has given a ruling on a commercial dispute, **the Union of India versus Mohit Minerals**, over the levy of the integrated goods and services tax (GST) on ocean freight charges paid by importers. It has triggered a nationwide debate.

About the Judgment

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The judgment is virtually a recitation from **the Article 279A (4)** of the Constitution of India. The article states that the GST Council shall “**make recommendations**” to the Centre and the states on all matters relating to the GST.

In legal terms, the recommendations are not binding on either the Centre or the states. Had the recommendations been binding, it would have been in **violation** of the **legislative supremacy** (Tax Sovereignty) of both Parliament and state legislatures.

The SC ruling also endorses the broader **Constitutional position** of **fiscal federalism**. It explicitly placed Centre and individual states on a par with each other in respect of GST. The Article 246(A) provides for **concurrent taxation powers** of the Centre and the states in relation to the levy of GST.

The bench has articulated that the **GST’s Council’s deliberations** have “persuasive value”.

Implications of the judgement

The “landmark” ruling has unintentionally “**stirred and shaken federalism**”. It has the potential to alter the nature of **fiscal federalism** in India.

The GST compensation will end from July 1, 2022. This will trigger dissent in the GST Council. This can lead to disruption and confrontation within the Council.

The judgment can be used by the GST Council members to pursue their agendas, the Centre to renege its committed obligations, or states to get some elbow room on indirect taxation policy.

The council will be driven more by **political consideration** than **policy persuasions**, and **performance** of the GST regime. The **political view** that state governments compromised their **tax sovereignty** in the GST regime is gaining currency.

Way Forward

All decisions of the GST Council have been based on consensus, rather than on voting.

The GST Council should start and strengthen the **dispute resolution mechanism**. **Article 279A (11)** requires the GST Council to establish a mechanism to adjudicate on any disputes arising out of its recommendations and its implementation. This should be in the form of the GSTS Tribunal.

The GST Council must use its status as a **constitutional body** and **skills** as an institution to draw up guidelines for **adjudication mechanisms** to address disputes amongst GST Council members.

All the stakeholders should be made aware that more than **loss of tax sovereignty** of states, the GST was premised on **pooling of tax sovereignty** by both the centre and states.

The **next Finance Commission** can recognise the changes in the **institutional landscape** of the **fiscal federalism post-GST Council**. A new set of principles will be developed that will empower the states without disempowering the Centre must be worked on.

The GST Council could work out a **state-specific GST** outside the existing GST framework. This would transition from a **co-operative federalism mindset** to a **collaborative federal system**.

12. [Making sense of the GST bonanza](#)

Source: This post is based on the article “**Making sense of the GST bonanza**” published in **The Indian Express** on **27th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Economy

Relevance: Goods and Services Tax (GST) and related issues

News: There has been a remarkable upswing in GST collections in recent months. In fact, collections touched a record high of Rs 1.67 lakh crore in April.

What are the reasons behind an inc in the GST collections?

First, the **sharp rise in inflation** has played a significant role. After all, as output turnover increases, taxes paid per filing will automatically increase. Thus there is a price effect. However, even after taking away the price effect, collections have grown at a pace faster than GDP, indicating an increase in buoyancy.

When a tax collects greater revenue without changing the rate of taxing, it is said to be buoyant.

Second, part of the overall increase in collections can be traced to **higher imports**. But even if one is to exclude the revenue accruing from imports, the rise in GST collections has outstripped GDP growth, indicating higher buoyancy.

Third, in order to improve compliance levels, the **GST Council has been modifying the rules to tighten the system**. This can be observed at multiple levels.

– Earlier, filers could get away without submitting returns for a few months. But the screws have now been tightened. As a consequence, returns filed have gone up, while the number of non-filers and those who delay filing have fallen.

– Alongside, the administration has also taken steps to **tackle the menace of fake invoices** by placing restrictions on the quantum of input tax credit that can be used to pay off tax obligations.

– The **introduction of e-invoicing** has also played a role. Until recently, this was being implemented for firms with a turnover of more than Rs 50 crore. From April, this process has been extended to firms above Rs 20 crore.

Fourth, some part of the revenue gains are likely to have accrued due to the **changing structure of the economy**.

– The formalisation of firms, the growing concentration of economic power in the hands of a few, imply that for the same level of output, the tax paid will be higher.

This explanation is also in line with data that shows a rise in GST registrations, filings and tax paid per registration.

Way forward

Considering that some of the drivers discussed above are unlikely to sustain at current levels, **tax rates will need to be raised** to fulfil expectations of higher collections. However, this requires careful consideration.

Lower compliance levels and greater exemptions require higher rates to garner the same level of revenues. Hence, compliance must be improved.

Considering the current economic situation, **now may not be an opportune moment to raise taxes.** But there is no getting around it. Both the Centre and the states need to work towards this.

13. Supreme Court's ruling on GST deepens the churn in the tax regime

Source: This post is based on the article “**Supreme Court's ruling on GST deepens the churn in the tax regime**” published in **The Indian Express** on 26th May 22.

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy

Relevance: GST and related issues

News: Recently, the Supreme Court ruled that the decisions taken by the GST Council are merely recommendations with “persuasive value” and are not binding.

The ruling has opened up serious questions on the stability and certainty of the structure and operation of GST which is still evolving.

What has been the reaction to the SC judgement?

The states, notably those ruled by non-BJP parties, have **welcomed the judgment** stating that this is the triumph of cooperative federalism and provides them enough scope to have a say in the decisions.

The revenue secretary has clarified that the SC has merely stated the obvious, and, in effect, **does not alter the ground situation.** All the decisions taken in the Council are based on consensus (except the one on lotteries) by the Union and states (and Union Territories with legislatures), and that spirit will continue to guide the deliberations and decisions in the Council.

How the SC verdict states the obvious?

In some ways, the verdict states the obvious.

Article 246-A inserted after the 122nd constitutional amendment states, “*Notwithstanding anything contained in articles 246 and 254, Parliament, and, subject to clause (2), the **Legislature of every state, have the power to make laws** with respect to the GST imposed by the Union or by such state.*”

Thus, the power to levy the **central GST (CGST) vests with Parliament**, the power to levy **state GST (SGST) vests with state legislatures** and Parliament has exclusive power to make laws with respect to the GST on items that are part of inter-state trade or commerce. Thus, the **GST Council is only an advisory body** and the actual decisions regarding model GST levies, principles of levy, etc will have to be taken by either Parliament in the case of CGST and IGST or the states in the case of SGST.

In effect, decisions on the structure and operation of the tax can be made by the Centre and individual states without discussion and deliberation in the Council and both can ignore any recommendation made by the Council.

What will be the impact of the SC verdict?

Inc in bargaining strength of the states: It paves the way for **more intensive bargaining and negotiations**, placing states on an equal footing with the Centre in taking decisions on the structure and operations of the tax.

– The immediate impact of this will be **bargaining by states for extending the period of compensation** for the loss of revenue. The five-year period of compensation gets over at the end of June. States have therefore been demanding the extension of the compensation period by another two-three years and this decision will now help the states to bargain hard for the extension.

The lasting solution lies in increasing the revenue productivity of the tax by pruning the list of exempted items, rationalising the rates and taking administrative measures.

Way forward

The decision that GST Council's recommendations are not binding will have significant implications in determining the nature of the tax, which is still evolving.

Hopefully, the Court's decision will also **strengthen the cooperative spirit** in reforming the domestic consumption tax system in the country.

14. A new road for India's fiscal federalism

Source: The post is based on an article “**A new road for India's fiscal federalism**” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **25th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS2 Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure

Relevance: Fiscal Federalism, GST Council

News: Recently, the Supreme Court of India delivered its verdict in the **Union of India vs Mohit Minerals** case, where it also made several observations on the GST Council recommendations

About GST Regime

The GST regime was introduced through the 101st constitutional Amendment in July 2017 which aimed for unification of tax administration in India – ‘**One Nation, One Tax**’.

GST Council: The Amendment Act introduced **Article 279A** which mandated creation of a GST Council.

GST Council Composition: This body comprises the **Union Finance Minister**, the **Union Minister of State for Finance**, and **Ministers of Finance** from every State government.

Functions: The act led to deletion and amendment of many entries in the State list of Schedule VII of the Constitution. It enabled the state government to legislate on GST through a newly introduced **Article 246A**. The State governments could not legislate on sale or purchase of goods (barring a few exceptions, such as petroleum and liquor).

The Council was empowered to make **recommendations** to the Union and States on various matters. The matters included goods and services that may be **subjected** to or **exempted** from GST and **the rates** at which tax is to be levied.

Voting share: The Union government was granted a virtual veto in the GST Council's voting structure and system

Confusions between advisory and binding nature of GST Council's recommendations

The use of the word “**recommendations**” suggested that the GST decisions would be advisory, at best.

The mandate of establishment of a mechanism under **Article 279A** to adjudicate disputes between governments on decisions taken by the Council suggested that advice rendered were binding in nature.

Impact of making recommendations binding in nature

It could lead to dissolution and destruction of the well-laid plans of the Constituent Assembly, which carefully divided **Fiscal responsibilities** between the Union and the States.

Must read: [Let's keep GST good and simple](#)

What are the Supreme Court's observations in the *Union of India vs Mohit Minerals?*

The Court proceeded on a technical reading of the provisions of the **Central Goods and Services Tax Act**.

The Article 246A provides **concomitant power** both to the Union and to the State governments to legislate on GST. It does not discriminate between the two in terms of its allocation of authority.

The **concomitant powers** allocated in **Article 246A** cannot be limited by Article 279A, which establishes a GST Council, and which treats the Council's decisions as "recommendations".

Both Parliament and the State legislatures enjoy equal power to legislate on **Goods and Services Tax (GST)**. The **Goods and Services Tax Council's** recommendations are just advisory that could never be binding on a legislative body.

According to the Court, the **State legislatures** can deviate from any advice rendered by the GST Council and to make their own laws by asserting, in the process, their role as equal partners in **India's federal architecture**.

If the GST Council was intended to be a decision-making authority having binding recommendation. Such a qualification would have been included in Articles 246A or 279A.

Way Forward

The legislatures can give binding effect to the **Council's recommendation** through statutory law. But, according to the SC, a **constitutional power** can never be limited through statute.

Indian federalism is a dialogue between **cooperative** and **uncooperative federalism**. The federal units are at liberty to use **different means** of **persuasion** ranging from **collaboration** to **contestation**.

GST was conceived as a product of what some described as "**pooled sovereignty**" where our nation can take a genuine turn towards a more "**cooperative federalism**".

GS3 – ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE – ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVs)

ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND RELATED ISSUES

15. [Let commercial vehicles take the lead in going electric](#)

Source: This post is based on the article "**Let commercial vehicles take the lead in going electric**" published in **Livemint** on **24th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Energy and Infrastructure, Industrial policy and growth

Relevance: Increasing the adoption of Commercial Electric Vehicles (EVs) in India

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Context: India's air quality has been diminishing on the back of urban development and higher e-commerce adoption, among other factors. The cost of this progress means some of our large Indian cities figure among the world's most polluted.

Citizens' right to clean breathable air is a fundamental need and is a critical parameter in global benchmarks used to list the world's happiest and most liveable cities.

A shift from ICE vehicles to EVs is crucial to reversing the impact on air quality.

Efforts at reducing air pollution

India has set promising targets and taken several steps to bring about both accountability and action. For example, the government aims to reduce carbon emissions by 45% by 2030,

In 2019, it launched the **National Clean Air Programme** as a strategic intervention to reduce air pollution levels across the country. City-specific clean air action plans have been prepared and rolled out for implementation in as many as 132 cities.

Meanwhile, the NITI Aayog and Rocky Mountain Institute's **Shoonya campaign** is building awareness around fleet adoption of electric vehicles (EV) for last-mile deliveries.

– **Urban freight vehicles** account for over 10% of transportation-related CO₂ emissions in India, a number that is set to increase by about 115% by 2030 due to the sharp rise in e-commerce demand for deliveries, according to the NITI Aayog.

Meanwhile, Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru are **upgrading their public transport facilities**, albeit they are still using internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles.

Why a shift from ICE vehicles to EVs is necessary for India?

A shift from ICE vehicles to EVs is crucial to reversing the impact on air quality as ICE commercial vehicles are large users of diesel in India.

China reduced air pollution in its major cities of Shanghai and Beijing by limiting ICE vehicles, relocating polluting units and using EV incentives, among other steps.

A glance at ecology-conscious markets like **Norway and Iceland** offers a clear picture of how rapid EV adoption can meaningfully reduce pollution levels.

Way forward

Various Indian states have proposed independent EV policy frameworks, but these do not include light commercial vehicles (LCVs). **Policy incentives** need to be given to logistical service providers to shift to electric LCVs.

Incentives to EV original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and green taxes levied on ICE vehicles based on emissions and time spent in urban areas could deter ICE vehicle usage.

An effective policy framework for **charging infrastructure** would help too.

As of now, no distinction is made between slow, medium and fast charging set-ups, and India's recent battery swapping policy applies more to the 2W and 3W segments than their 4W counterparts. A **push for a reliable pan-India fast-charging network** will be an essential driver of EV adoption across vehicle categories.

Lowering the cost of ownership and bringing in more fleet financing options will support the EV adoption rate for commercial transport. The total cost of ownership (TCO) for EVs, a key determinant, needs parity with ICE vehicles.

An **upfront subsidy for fleet owners** to purchase commercial EVs could be instituted.

Recently, the NITI Aayog recommended the inclusion of EV and EV-charging in the **Reserve Bank of India's framework for priority sector lending**. This would help finance EV fleet conversion, as 60-70% of vehicles are financed with little or no difference in interest rates.

Loans for EVs could be made more efficient. While banks typically offer a 25-50-basis-points benefit on ESG (environmental, social and governance) assets, lending institutions currently take a hit on their bottom line in providing ESG finance.

Incentivizing innovation among new-age electric OEMs and helping build a **talent pool** that will fuel this growth story are equally important.

India has the potential to leap into a **global leadership position on the commercial EV front**. It is among a handful of countries supporting the global 'EV30@30' campaign that aims for 30% of all new vehicle sales by 2030 to be electric.

GS3 - ENVIRONMENT - ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

DESERTIFICATION AND RELATED ISSUES

16. **Combating desertification**

Source: This post is based on the article "**Combating desertification**" published in **Business Standard** on **25th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Relevance: Tackling desertification and reclaiming the degraded land

News: The 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was recently held at Abidjan.

It called upon nations to invest in restoring degraded land for future prosperity, and urged the 196 participating nations to **reclaim 1 billion hectares of degraded land by 2030**.

What is the global situation wrt land degradation?

Globally, about 40% of the land, supporting about half of humanity, is facing the threat of desertification.

In the business as usual scenario, an additional area equivalent of the size of South America, might get degraded by 2050, warn the papers presented at the COP15.

Why restoring of the degraded land is esp relevant for India?

India is a **land-stressed country**, where close to 30% of the land falls in the degraded category.

More worrying, the **process of decline in the quality of land is still ongoing** despite the government's resolve to achieve "land degradation neutrality" (zero addition to degraded land) by 2030.

According to the data collected by the Indian Space Research Organisation through satellite imagery, **the extent of deteriorated land has risen** from 94.53 million hectares (mha) in 2003 to 97.85 mha in 2018-19.

The Energy and Resources Institute had assessed the **losses due to decline in land productivity** as worth around Rs 3.17 trillion in 2014-15, amounting to about 2.5% of GDP in that year. About 82% of these losses were attributed to the deterioration in the quality of land under agriculture, forests, and pastures, and the remaining to the changes in the land-use pattern — diverting land to less productive use.

– This study, significantly, had also underscored the need to expedite implementing land improvement projects as the cost of land reclamation could rise above the potential economic gains by 2030.

What are the factors behind land degradation?

Among the major factors responsible for land degradation, the most significant ones are –

– **soil salinity** and **water-logging** in agricultural fields due to flawed agronomic practices, and

– **water** and **wind erosion** in the areas that have lost their vegetative cover.

– In the Northeast, a hilly region, the continuation of the **practice of shifting cultivation**, also known as slash-and-burn agriculture or jhum, is the main cause of land degradation. Under this system, the farmers clear the forested land, cultivate it for a few years, and then move to another spot, leaving the old patch **barren**.

Way forward

India is fortunate to have time-tested technologies capable of rejuvenating problematic lands.

- These have already been tried successfully in reclaiming the sprawling **salt-affected tracks in Haryana** and the **lime quarrying-hit slopes of the Mussoorie hills in Uttarakhand**, besides **stabilising the shifting sand dunes in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan**.

These should now come in handy for the country to achieve its self-determined target of restoring 26 mha of degraded land by 2030.

However, more important would be to **make soil conservation an integral part of all land-related programmes** to curb further land degradation. It would further help India contribute to **meeting the COP15's main objective** of combating desertification and **acquiring resilience against droughts**.

GS3 – INDIAN ECONOMY – ISSUES RELATED TO GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

SEMICONDUCTOR CHIP SHORTAGE

17. Knotty supply chains deepen global chip shortage

Source: The post is based on an article “**Knotty supply chains deepen global chip shortage**” published in the “**The Hindu**” on **27th May 2022**.

Syllabus: GS3 Indian Economy, Effects of Liberalization on Indian Economy

Relevance: Global Supply Chain Disruptions, Automobile Industry

News: Recently, Toyota Corporation has been struggling to meet its production targets. It has apologised to its suppliers and customers a third time in less than two months for delaying making new vehicles and changing production plans.

Nature of Semiconductor Industry

The manufacturing process is a complex, and interconnected ecosystem with its own ebb and flow.

The chip-making process is divided into **front-end** and **back-end parts**. Wafer fabrication and probe are generally referred to as **front-end operations**, and **assembly** and **test** as **back-end operations**.

The front and back-end processes are spread out across the globe, creating a **global chip-making ecosystem**. This semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem involves roughly **25 countries** in the direct supply chain, and **23 countries** in allied functions.

A semiconductor-based product could cross international borders about 70 times before finally making it to the end customer.

Semiconductors are produced as **200mm** or **300mm wafers**. The **larger wafers** are expensive and mostly used for advanced equipment, whereas **smaller diameter wafers** remain in high demand in automobile sector, laptops, tablet, and smartphone production.

Why there has been a global shortage of semiconductor chips?

There has been a **global shortage** of **chips or semiconductor devices**. This has been due to many reasons:

The industry faced its share of glut and shortage in the past decade as **consumer preferences shifted** from one electronic fad to another.

The **manufacturing equipment** needed to make the semiconductor devices were in short supply even before the pandemic began. That's because the industry was moving in the direction of **5G** and **advanced communication**, which required **expensive wafers**.

The chip making production also halted as the **factories were closed during Covid-19** induced lockdowns.

Due to the pandemic hit, people switched to **work from home**, children **connected** to schools through **laptops**, get-togethers happened over **video calls**, and subscription-based **mobile games** became popular. This shift led to a surge in demand for semiconductors in **laptops** and **tablets** production.

Post-lockdown, the industry gradually tried to pull itself out of the supply crunch, but they started facing the problem of **exacerbated logistical complexities**. The global supply chains were disrupted.

The Just-In-Time (JIT) Approach used by the chipmakers became a weakness. It let firms take inputs from suppliers only when they are needed. During, due to poor demands from automobile industry, chipmakers concluded deals with other industries.

About a decade and half back, semiconductors have been produced through **global supply chain** by interconnecting several parts of the world.

The geopolitical events in Central Europe and production shutdowns in China add pressure to the already complicated semiconductor supply chain.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine strained exports of **essential commodities** required to make chip sets. For example, Moscow supplies **rare materials** like **palladium**, and Kyiv sells **rare gases** to make semiconductor fab lasers.

Way Forward

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Europe and the US have taken measures such as the European Chips Act (45 billion euros) and CHIPS for America Act (\$52 billion). These measures would incentivise fab makers to set up their units in these regions and balance.

Together, these two will enable the semiconductor manufacturers to have equal investments in the East and West by 2030. At present, 80% is in Asia, and 20% is in Europe and the U.S.

INDIA'S TRADE POLICY

18. **Be wary of growing exports**

Source: The post is based on an article “Be wary of growing exports” published in the “The Hindu” on 26th May 2022.

Syllabus: GS3 – Environment and Ecology, Food Security

Relevance: Net Carbon Dioxide Export

News: Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the western sanctions on Russia, and Sri Lanka’s ongoing struggles have created **export opportunities** for countries such as India. However, there are **environmental concerns** into it.

What are the issues?

The developed countries consume polluted goods which are produced elsewhere like China and India. Such exports from developing countries are said to be carbon emissions-embodied products

About Net CO₂ exports

It can be calculated by taking the difference between carbon emissions-embodied exports and carbon emissions-embodied imports.

Global Trends

(A) Net CO₂ Export

China is the largest exporter of carbon emissions-embodied products, followed by the U.S., Russia and India.

China’s net exports began to decline from 2007-08, whereas India’s net CO₂ exports or carbon emissions-embodied products started to steadily increase in that period. India’s recent **export performance** has been attributed to petroleum products, electronics and chemicals.

India’s agricultural and food export items involve virtual export of depleting natural resources such as water. For example, Rice export.

Net CO₂ Import

Most developed countries, for instance, the **OECD member countries**, are the net importers of polluted goods produced elsewhere, especially in the developing countries.

The largest net importers of carbon emission-intensive goods are the **U.S., Japan and Germany**.

Why did the development countries become Net-CO₂ import countries?

Pollution haven hypothesis

Due to the **stringent environmental measures** adopted by developed countries, **pollution-intensive industries** relocate from developed countries to developing countries. They impose an **environmental tax** to address a **broad spectrum** of environmental issues. For example, in OECD countries, the tax roughly constitutes 2% of the GDP.

The destination countries have the **lowest environmental standards/weak enforcement of environmental standards** in order to cut resource, labour costs among other costs. For example, the environmental tax in India is around 1%. Further, the tax as a percentage of GDP has marginally come down from 1.38% in 2005 to 1.07% in 2019.

Environmental Kuznets curve: There is an **inverted U-shape relationship** between the income of a country and its environmental degradation. This implies that as income increases, environmental quality begins to deteriorate, but improves after some time.

Consequences of such export

The growing consumption in rich countries has come at a cost for developing countries such as India.

The **virtual water trade** will have an adverse impact on **long-term sustainability** and food security in India.

For example: (1) the **agricultural water withdrawal** as a percentage of total available renewable water resources has increased from 26.7% in 1993 to 36% in 2022, and (2) The total per capita renewable water resources have also declined from 1909 cubic metres to 1412 cubic metres during this period.

Way forward

As per the **water use efficiency index**, there has been an **overall improvement** in water-use efficiency.

Strict environmental measures need to be explored in order to ensure long-term sustainability. For example, increasing the **environmental tax**, **water-saving policies** to promote **sustainable production** of rice and also safeguarding food security in the country.

GS3 – INDIAN ECONOMY – INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND GROWTH IPR AND RELATED ISSUES

19. You can't fight a pandemic without IP: Intellectual property rights were vital in producing life-saving Covid vaccines

Source: This post is based on the article “**You can't fight a pandemic without IP:**

Intellectual property rights were vital in producing life-saving Covid vaccines” published in **The Times of India** on **26th May 22**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Issues related to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

Relevance: Vaccine development and IPR

News: Recent data from ‘Our World in Data’ suggest Covid-19 related infection around the world and India is waning. Hospitalisations and deaths are very low.

Vaccines must take great credit for keeping Covid largely out of the headlines after two years. There are now 10 Covid-19 vaccines recommended by the WHO, and over 60 vaccine candidates in late stage clinical trials or pending regulatory review.

How have IPRs played a critical role in quick vaccine development?

The **intellectual property (IP) rights** have given companies ownership and rights over their inventions.

– IP has **enabled dozens of research collaborations** and **manufacturing partnerships** all over the world, often between competitors. Rivals have shared proprietary compounds, platforms and technologies to develop new vaccines and flood the market in record times.

– Since June 2021, the number of vaccine manufacturing partnerships has risen from **93 to 357**.

What are some concerns related to IPR?

Health NGOs and some governments argue that developing countries will get speedier access to new vaccines if IP rights are suspended so that manufacturers everywhere can produce them.

Others argue that patented drugs and vaccines by **increasing price create deadweight loss for the consumers**, negating the idea of endogenous growth models that innovation leads to economic growth and prosperity.

That argument drives a World Trade Organisation proposal to **dismantle IP rights for Covid vaccines**, now in the final stages of negotiation. Meanwhile, an equal push to weaken IP rights in a new treaty on Pandemic Preparedness is in its early stages at the WHO.

- *A deadweight loss is a cost to society created by market inefficiency, which occurs when supply and demand are out of equilibrium.*
- *Endogenous growth theory maintains that economic growth is primarily the result of internal forces, rather than external ones. It argues that improvements in productivity can be tied directly to faster innovation and more investments in human capital from governments and private sector institutions.*

What happens if IP rights are diluted?

Removing or weakening IP rights for pandemic vaccines and therapeutics would be highly counterproductive, **undermining the incentive to invest in new technologies and treatments**.

– IP rights allow for **risk-taking** that brings rewards – such as the first mRNA vaccines that underpin global Covid vaccination.

Removing IP rights in pandemic situations would also **destroy the international manufacturing collaborations and partnerships** essential to saving millions of lives in the current pandemic.

If IP rights are weakened, few private sector companies would be willing to commit resources to pandemic vaccines and therapeutics. This would **leave the world reliant on alternative open source or IP-free models of drug and vaccine development**.

– One IP-free vaccine from the University of Helsinki was unable to secure funding for clinical trials, while Corbevax, another patent-free vaccine developed by Texas Children's Hospital has been authorised for use in India, but there is no public data on its efficacy or clinical trials.

If successful, IP-free vaccines could prove useful additions to the pandemic preparedness arsenal. But these patent-free models face **difficulties in securing the capital and expertise to rapidly scale up global production**. In other words, they would be unreliable if needed quickly in another pandemic.

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By contrast, vaccines that have leveraged IP rights have moved quickly through clinical development, regulatory authorisation, and into mass manufacture and distribution.

What's the way forward?

The TRIPS Agreement already gives flexibility to the individual countries to minimise the deadweight loss that may arise from higher drug and vaccine prices.

– For example, any individual country **may decide not to grant patents** to diagnostic, therapeutic and surgical methods for treating patients.

Many other governments are already **subsidising patented drugs** to lessen the impact of drug price rise. **Jan Aushadhi outlets** in India are a step in that direction.

There's also a **need for greater global harmonisation** of regulation.

Meanwhile, various **trade barriers have disrupted vaccine availability globally**. Governments should agree on a legally-binding way to ensure this can't happen again, preferably at the WTO.

Covid has shown what works and what doesn't in pandemics. IP is clearly fundamental. It would be a mistake to remove it, either for Covid or for future pandemics.

GS3 – INDIAN ECONOMY – MONETARY POLICY

INFLATION AND RELATED ISSUES

20. [The Indian consumer will have to spend more for a little longer](#)

Source: The post is based on an article “**The Indian Consumer will have to spend more for a little longer**” published in the “The Hindu” on 27th May 2022.

Syllabus: GS3 Indian Economy

Relevance: Inflation, Consumer Food Price Index, Wholesale Price Index

News: In April 2022, the **consumer price index-based inflation** for food had reached 8.4%. This implies that the gap between **wholesale** and retail food inflation has been narrowing, suggesting a **higher pass-through of input costs**.

Situation of Inflation

Around **40%** of overall consumer spending is on food. Its purchase frequency is also higher. Thus, food witnessed a higher impact on inflation expectations.

The **headline inflation** started picking up for imported commodities. For example, edible oils and cereals. Now, domestically produced items are getting caught in the price fire.

What are the causes of concern?

The average food inflation, of 6% in the past three years, is significantly higher than the pre-pandemic five-year average of 3.5%.

The driving forces behind current inflation are **exogenous**. Further, their impact will become worse when domestic demand improves.

There is little that **monetary** and **fiscal policies** can do to soften the **primary exogenous** blow in the short-term.

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The frequency of purchase, rather than the share of expenditure, **shapes inflation-related expectations of consumers.**

Why is food inflation surging?

Proximate Causes

There are three reasons: (1) a surge in transportation costs; (2) rising cost of production; and (3) elevated global food prices.

Ultimate Causes

The Russia-Ukraine war is a cause of concern. It is affecting everything, including the food prices.

A sharp rise in transportation costs has pushed up retail prices of agricultural commodities like vegetables,

The **domestically produced commodities** such as wheat and products, coarse cereals, and meat are witnessing inflation due to a low base and a sequential price rise in these components.

The food production costs have risen also due to increase in fertiliser, pesticides and also animal feed prices.

Impact of the inflation

Rising **food inflation hurts** consumers a lot **more** than inflation in other commodities since households do not have much discretion in altering food consumption.

The consequences are more adverse for the **rural population** which spends a higher share (around 47%) than the urban (roughly 30%) on food; and the **bottom 20%** of the population which spend out a **higher share** (60%) on food consumption.

Measures Taken by the government

The **Monetary policy** has seen hiking of the **repo rate**, the **cash reserve ratio** and gradually winding down the easy **liquidity situation**.

On the **fiscal policy front**, the government has reduced **excise duties** on petrol and diesel, increased fertiliser and cooking gas subsidies, and allowing duty-free imports of edible oils.

Way Forward

The RBI is expected to raise repo rates by another 75-100 basis points in the rest of this fiscal.

The pressure on prices of agricultural commodities will take time to soften. Therefore, the government can go for extending the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana** beyond the stipulated period.