



9 PM

Compilation

1st to 6th May, 2023

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General Studies Paper – 1

General Studies - 1

1. [JCBs Not The Answer – on destruction of unauthorised colonies](#)

Source: This post is created based on the article “**JCBs Not The Answer**”, published in Times of India on 3rd May 2023.

Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 1 – Urbanisation and associated issues

News: Recently, unauthorised houses were demolished around Tughlaqabad forte area. This demolition depicts the failure of urban governance in Indian cities.

Corruption of urban governance enable residents to obtain government identification and voting rights but not legal property titles.

However, this is not the issue of Delhi alone, urban centers, including Mumbai and Bengaluru are also facing the same issue.

What are the issues in urban governance of Delhi and other cities?

Although India’s first urban master plan was designed for Delhi in 1962, it has failed to check the unauthorised proliferation of the “silent sprawl”.

Master plans of Delhi, and other big cities were Unrealistic. Today, the Delhi Development Authority estimates that at least 5 million live in unauthorised colonies spread over 175 sq. km. Despite drives to regularise the unauthorised colonies in cities, they face regular threat of clearance drives by municipal authorities.

Inhabitants of these colonies are integral to the city’s economic and social life. Relocating them miles from their workplace is cruel when Indian cities have a poor public transport system.

2. [The history and economics of India’s population growth](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**The history and economics of India’s population growth**” published in **Indian Express** on **3rd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 1 – population and associated issues.

Relevance: About population growth helps economic development.

News: Despite India overtaking China in population, it still belongs to the lower-middle income category (per capita income is around \$2,200) This is just one-sixth of China’s and even lower than Bangladesh’s.

How has India’s population grown over the ages?

Table 1: India’s population over the ages

Period	Population estimate	Remarks
9,500 years ago	2,00,000	
7,500 years ago	5,00,000	
4,000 years ago	4 to 6 million	Indus Valley Civilisation
320 to 220 BCE	15 to 30 million	Mauryan Empire
640	58 million	Around Hsuan Tsang’s visit
1595	125 million	Akbar’s reign
1871	255 million	Census data
1947	343 million	At the time of Independence
2023	1426 million	India becomes most populous

Source: A Population History of India by Tim Dyson (OUP, 2018)

Source: Indian Express

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-Around 4,000 years ago, most of the population (estimates vary between 4 to 6 million) was living in and around the Indus basin. “This was perhaps the largest concentration of human beings anywhere in the world at the time,”

-By the time the Mauryan empire flourished, most of the population had shifted to the Ganges basin. “From this time forth the Ganges basin would always contain one of the world’s largest concentrations of people.”

-The next data estimate has been arrived at by using Hsuan Tsang’s observations.

-The next milestone uses data from Ain-i-Akbari in 1595.

-Since 1871 data has become more and more precise, due to formal census and UN projections.

Does population growth help economic development or hinder it?

The starting point of this debate is Thomas Malthus’ argument in 1798 that population growth would depress living standards in the long run. Malthus suggested that the way to avoid this was to exercise “moral restraint.

During the 1950s and 60s, “the general view of economists was that high birth rates and rapid population growth in poor countries would divert scarce capital away from savings and investment, thereby placing a drag on economic development.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, economists “failed to detect a robust relationship between national population growth rates and per capita income growth”.

In the 1990’s the world was also introduced to the concept of “demographic dividend.”

Note: *Demographic dividend refers to a period in an economy’s trajectory when there is a bulge in the working-age population (roughly speaking, the population between 15 and 65 years). This opens up a window of opportunity during which such a country can potentially raise its level of savings and investment.*

How is population growth associated with economic growth?

	1870-1913	1913-1950	1950-1973	1973-2008	2008-2014
Population	0.79	0.93	1.91	1.53	1.19
GDP	2.10	1.81	4.78	3.31	1.95
GDP per capita	1.30	0.88	2.87	1.78	0.75

Growth rates of world population over the years

Source: Indian Express

The population researchers Fox and Dyson found that the period between 1950 and 1973 saw the fastest growth of population as well as GDP and GDP per capita. They also found few significant developments, **a)** Accelerated population growth in the post-war years was stimulated largely by the diffusion of medical knowledge, technologies, and public health initiatives, **b)** Between 1950 and 1973 poorer countries benefitted from a positive investment environment and burgeoning employment opportunities, **c)** After 1973, the decline in mortality was not due to rapid economic growth.

What will be the impact of population growth and economic development findings on India?

Not every country has managed to escape what is often called the “middle-income trap”. For instance, South Korea and Israel did, but Argentina and South Africa failed the transition.

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India is a lower-middle-income country. India is already the most populous country and still expected to see a rise in total population for the next 40 years despite being below the replacement rate of fertility. We should best use India's demographic dividend.

3. [What is behind Manipur's widespread unrest?](#)

Source: The post is based on the following articles

“Imphal On Boil – Normalisation in Northeast is key to solving inter-ethnic tensions. India must also talk to Myanmar” published in **The Times of India** on **5th May 2023**.

“What is behind Manipur's widespread unrest?” published in **The Hindu** on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 1 – communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Relevance: About ST status for Meiteis.

News: The All Tribal Student Union Manipur (ATSUM) organised a 'Tribal Solidarity March'. The march was called to protest the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status. The march was organised by tribals including Nagas, Zomis, and Kukis who comprise around 40% of the state's population.

About Manipur's ethnic composition

Manipur Valley comprises about 10% of Manipur's landmass. This valley is dominated by the non-tribal Meitei who account for more than 64% of the population of the State.

The Manipur hills comprising 90% of the geographical area are inhabited by more than 35% of recognised tribes.

While a majority of the Meiteis are Hindus followed by Muslims. There are 33 recognised tribes, broadly classified into 'Any Naga tribes' and 'Any Kuki tribes' who are largely Christians.

Note: *The Meitei community have 2/3rd of the assembly seats.*

Must Read: [Who are Meiteis](#)

What is the reason behind the inclusion of Meiteis as STs?

The Meiteis cite their own historic indigenous tribe status to bolster their ST claim. The Meiteis were recognised as a tribe before the merger of the State with the Union of India in 1949. They argued that the ST status is needed to “preserve” the community and “save the ancestral land, tradition, culture, and language” of the Meiteis.

A representation submitted by the Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM) in 2012 demanded ST status for Meiteis in 2012. The STDCM also said the Meiteis needed constitutional safeguards against outsiders, stating that the community has been kept away from the hills while the tribal people can buy land in the “shrinking” Imphal Valley.

In response, the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry sent a letter to the Manipur government in 2013 seeking specific recommendations along with the latest socio-economic survey and ethnographic report.

The Manipur High Court directed the State government to submit a 10-year-old recommendation to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry for the inclusion of the Meitei community in the ST list. But tribals in the state fear this will erode their access to reservation benefits.

Why are tribal groups against ST status for Meiteis?

This is because **a)** The Meiteis have a demographic and political advantage besides being more advanced than them, **b)** The ST status to the Meiteis would lead to loss of job opportunities and allow them to acquire land in the hills and push the tribals out, **c)** The language of the Meitei people is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and many of them have access to benefits associated with the SC, OBC or EWS status.

4. [Delhi demolitions: Under the cloak of law](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Delhi demolitions: Under the cloak of law**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS1- Urbanisation

Relevance– Issues related to urban planning

News– The periodic drama of demolitions of illegal construction has become the unfortunate event of Delhi’s development.

What are issues with demolition drives in Delhi?

The need to demolish is portrayed as a **law and order issue**, not the **failure of urban planning**. The judiciary has **emerged as the arbiter** in the field because the demolition is presented as the **illegal use of land** defined by the **Master Plan of Delhi**.

This hides the **inadequacies of MPD**. It is unable to meet the **needs of all the residents**. These **inadequacies of MPD** need to be analysed by the creators of MPD, and not the judiciary.

All over the world, urban planners have shown **pragmatic creativity** to resolve problems related to the **management of their cities**. They have not used the **police powers of the state**. This is not the case with Delhi.

For example, the development of slums, mushrooming commercial, retail and industrial activities, are all evidence of a robustly **developing political economy**.

Urban planners of Delhi have not mediated this process by modifying the MPD in subsequent revisions. They have treated it as an **urban malaise** that needs to be eradicated.

As a result, the city today is not so much the product of the **original vision of MPD**. It is the product of the **contest between the haves and the have-nots**.

Those facing the police have naturally **appealed to politicians** for relief. They have used corrupt means to “**regularise**” **their initiatives** to survive under hostile circumstances.

As per some analysts, the process has been so pervasive that **70% of the city** has been regularised. It casts doubts on the efficacy of **demolition as an urban planning strategy**.

Demolitions have only shifted the focus from the **original source of the problem**, that is flawed MPD.

What are issues with urban planning in India?

The **spatial norms, development controls**, and even the **basic planning ideology** that are the basis of the Master Plan of Indian cities are modelled on **urban development strategies of Europe and the US**. They have different **social, economic and cultural circumstances**.

These were adopted after Independence by the **governing elite** because they **matched with their aspirations** for creating modern Indian cities.

This model has proved inadequate to handle the **complex problems of Indian urbanisation**. It is unable to deal with the **nature of indigenous urbanism** that fulfils the **expectations of new migrants**:

What is the way forward for urban planning in India?

The mindset of urban planners, civic authorities and the police must change. They must understand that they are dealing with an **ethical, not legal issue**.

The success of urban planning should not be contingent on the outcome of the **contest between the haves and the have-nots**.

Aborting the attempts of the have-nots to fulfil their basic needs is not the efficacious strategy to ensure the success of urban planning. The have-nots have a **legitimate status and rights to the city**.

General Studies Paper –2

General Studies - 2

1. [Focus on the borders – India and China must end the lingering unpredictability across the LAC](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Focus on the borders – India and China must end the lingering unpredictability across the LAC**” published in **The Hindu** on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Relevance: About the border tussle between India and China.

News: Indian Defence Minister met his Chinese counterpart on the sidelines of the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation](#) Defence Ministers Meeting in New Delhi.

What are the key border discussions held during the meeting?

India’s urgency and China’s delay: Indian Defence Minister said that the Chinese violation of border agreements had “eroded the entire basis of bilateral relations.” and conveyed a sense of urgency to resolve the Line of Actual Control (LAC) crisis.

-The Chinese Defence Minister, on the other hand, called on India to “take a long-term view” and “place the border issue in an appropriate position in bilateral relations”.

Issues in disengagement: India conveyed that if normalcy is to be restored in ties, disengagement in the two remaining friction points will need to be followed by de-escalation. This includes the eventual de-induction of the estimated one lakh troops from both sides that have remained deployed in forward areas for close to three years.

Must read: [Disengagement agreement at Pangong Tso Lake – Explained](#)

What is the present state of border disengagement?

Over the past three years, buffer zones have been established in some of the five friction areas where the two sides disengaged.

However, in two other areas, Demchok and Depsang, China is slowing down the initial momentum of the Corps Commander meetings. The recently held 18th round meeting also did not yield a joint statement, suggesting stark divergences between India and China on how to move forward.

All this made **a)** De-escalation of the border a far-off prospect, **b)** Large deployments of military personnel in close proximity, and **c)** Increased the race to build more forward infrastructure in border areas.

What should be done?

India and China cannot restore normalcy in relations with the underlying unpredictability on the borders. So, managing the LAC should certainly remain the priority for both sides to prevent the recurrence of the clashes of 2020.

2. [The ad-hoc epidemic – DU lecturer’s suicide should occasion introspection on recruitments in universities and colleges. Government must regularise posts, fill vacancies](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Express View: The ad-hoc epidemic – DU lecturer’s suicide should occasion introspection on recruitments in universities and colleges.**

Government must regularise posts, fill vacancies” published in the **Indian Express** on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Relevance: About the issues with ad-hoc faculty recruitment.

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News: A former ad-hoc lecturer at Delhi University College took his life after he did not get tenure after a provisional teaching stint of nearly five years. This again highlights the issues with the recruitment system in the country's higher education institutions.

Why are the issues with the ad-hoc faculty recruitment system in higher education institutions is essential?

Not eligible for various benefits: According to the education ministry figures for last year, the central universities employed more than 4,000 teachers on a temporary basis. They perform the same duties as the permanent faculty. But, the ad-hoc lecturers are not eligible for benefits such as gratuity, pensions, and the full range of medical allowances. Last year, the government also said that it had no plans to regularise the services of these ad-hoc teachers.

Not follow the rulebook: The statute books of most universities underline that if a vacancy is for a period longer than what is stipulated in the rules, interviews for permanent posts must be held. For instance, the DU's rules state that "ad hoc appointment shall only be made for a period of more than one month and up to four months". But most universities have found ways to dodge these provisions and normalise ad-hocism.

Increase in ad-hoc teachers: The number of ad-hoc teachers at DU has grown eight times in the last 10 years — last year, they comprised 40% of the university's teaching force.

The issue with permanent recruitment: Even if the permanent posts are advertised, interviews get delayed because of the centralised procedures. According to data presented by the education ministry in Parliament, more than 6,000 teaching positions are currently vacant across the country's central universities.

Read more: [Institutions of Eminence \(IOE\) scheme and issues with higher education – Explained, pointwise](#)

What should be done?

The National Education Policy 2020 envisions teachers' role in bringing about these far-reaching reforms. But, institutions cannot be built on the back of unfair employment conditions. Hence, the government should introspect the recruitment in universities and colleges and regularise posts, fill vacancies

3. [India, its SDG pledge goal, and the strategy to apply](#)

Source– The post is based on the article "**India, its SDG pledge goal, and the strategy to apply**" published in "**The Hindu**" on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS1- Poverty and developmental issues. GS2- Governance

Relevance: Women in politics

News- The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi expressed concern that progress on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) seems to be slowing down.

What are some facts about India's performance on SDG indicators?

India is '**On-Target**' to meeting 14 of the 33 SDGs. It includes indicators for **neonatal and under-five mortality, full vaccination, improved sanitation, and electricity access**. But it does not apply equally across all districts.

Neonatal and under-five mortality are currently both 'On-Target' for the country. But 286 are lagging in case of neonatal mortality and 208 districts in case of **under-five mortality**.

There is significant progress on access to improved sanitation. But 129 districts are not on course to meet this SDG indicator.

Indicators such as **eliminating adolescent pregnancy, reducing multidimensional poverty, and women having bank accounts** have improved across a vast majority of the districts between the years 2016 and 2021.

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For 19 of the 33 SDG indicators, the current pace of improvement is not enough to meet SDG targets.

Despite a national policy push for **clean fuel for cooking**, more than two-thirds of districts remain 'Off-Target'. Some 415 and 278 districts are 'Off-Target' for **improved water and handwashing facilities, respectively**.

SDG indicators for **women's well-being and gender inequality** are causes of concern. No district in India has yet succeeded in eliminating the practice of **girl child marriage** before the legal age of 18 years.

At the current pace, more than three-fourths of districts will not be able to reduce the **prevalence of girl child marriage** to the SDG target of 0.5% by 2030.

Despite the overall expansion of mobile phones, only 56% women report owning a mobile phone, with 567 districts remaining 'Off-Target'.

What is the way forward to improve India's performance on SDG indicators?

India adopted an "**optimisation**" approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was given the focus and resources necessary to succeed.

First, strong and sustained political leadership was critical to the success of both India's COVID-19 vaccination programme and **efficient rollout** of a **comprehensive relief package**. It was supported by a **responsive administrative structure** at all levels.

A similar **mission-oriented approach** that is **assessment-oriented** and provides adequate support for accomplishing India's district-level SDGs is now urgently needed.

Second, India's success with COVID-19 was largely possible both because of the **existing digital infrastructure**, and **indigenous initiatives** like the Co-WIN data platform, the Aarogya Setu application.

India must put in place a **coordinated, public data platform for population health management**. It must **consolidate its many siloed platforms** into an **integrated digital resource** for district administrators, as well as State and national policy makers.

Finally, a **targeted SDG strategy** delivered at scale of India's **COVID-19 relief package** must be executed with the same timeliness. The Government of India provided support through Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana.

This was critical in removing the adverse effects of COVID-19, especially for vulnerable and the socio-economically disadvantaged groups. It also demonstrated the value of a **proactive, government-supported programme** aimed at improving people's well-being.

4. [The erosion of hard-won labour rights](#)

Source– The post is based on the article "**The erosion of hard-won labour rights**" published in "**The Hindu**" on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2– Issues associated with human resources –

Relevance– Issues related to labour rights

News– The article explains the issues of dilution of labour rights by some states.

What are some historical facts about labour rights?

On May 1, 1886, **Chicago in the United States** became the major site of a demonstration by labour unions in support of an eight-hour workday.

There was a violent confrontation between labourers and police in a meeting at the **Haymarket Square in 1886**. It became a **symbol of the international struggle for workers' rights**.

In 1889, the **International Socialist Conference** declared that, in commemoration of the **Haymarket Square affair**, May 1 would be an **international holiday for labour**.

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In 1919, the **International Labour Organization** adopted the **Hours of Work Convention**. It limited the number of working hours to eight a day and 48 hours a week. British India ratified the Convention on July 14, 1921.

How has there been curtailment of labour rights in recent times by Indian states?

Several States amended the **Factories Act, 1948**, using the ordinance route. Recently, the **Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments** also increased the **number of working hours a day**.

Employers, especially in the garment and electronic industries, have demanded for a flexible work time regime to manage export orders.

Under the pretext of '**ease of doing business**', regional governments offer many **subsidies and exemptions** to attract global and domestic capital. Apart from **quantitative subsidies**, these global companies press for **qualitative subsidies**.

Employers prefer **no unions or weak unions** where **cheap and skilled workers** are available. This leads to a race to the bottom. One State after another amended labour laws despite the fact that these companies do not help significantly **reduce unemployment rates**.

The typical demand is to increase the number of hours of work a day while adhering to the eight-hour-day rule. For instance, Karnataka has increased the number of working hours a day, to 12 while complying with the weekly threshold of 48 hours.

There is movement from the **three shifts regime to the two shifts regime**. The worker spends about nine hours in the factory.

What are demands by corporations regarding amendment in labour rights?

Employers, especially in the **garment and electronic industries**, have demanded for a **flexible work time regime** to manage export orders.

In India, mainstream economists are in favour of **increasing exports**, even at the **cost of labour rights and human rights**. They recommend emulating **countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam**.

In 2022, according to the **Global Right Index by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**, Bangladesh ranked among the 10 worst countries where labour rights are not guaranteed.

The companies believe they can **enhance production** by **maximising the workers' time** at the factory. This would help them **cut travelling allowance and transaction costs**.

What are the consequences of amendment in labour laws?

Workers are likely to be away from home for at least 14 hours since some of them spend two hours travelling to work. Eventually there is bound to be **diminishing marginal productivity** and employers may not benefit.

By extending the hours of work and **ensuring job insecurity**, India is going back to the 19th century in the name of **ease of doing business**. Due to lack of **political unity as well as trade union cooperation**, States are able to change labour laws without much opposition.

5. [Exporting into a world with carbon tax](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Exporting into a world with carbon tax**” published in the “**Business Standard**” on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Environment – Climate Change

Relevance– Issues related to climate change and carbon emissions

News– There is concern in India as the tangible implementation of the European “Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism” (CBAM) kicks in on October 1 this year.

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What is the logic behind “Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism” by Europe?

In Europe, dramatic moves have been made by governments for **decarbonization**. In Germany, per capita, annual carbon dioxide emission has come down from the peak of 14.3 tonnes in 1979 to 8.1 tonnes in 2021.

Decarbonisation in the European Union (EU) produces a **global public good**. It comes at the **expense of European industry**. EU voters are conscious that they are paying more for goods in return for reduced emissions.

If **carbon intensive production** merely shifted out of the EU, the **global public good** of decarbonisation would not be delivered. Jobs in Europe would be lost. This has led to the idea of the “**carbon border tax**”:

Imports into the EU should be taxed at the border. It will reflect the **market price of carbon** within the EU, and **achieve neutrality** in the decision of a firm to locate in the EU or outside it.

How India should respond to European “Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism”?

The two industries that matter today for Indian exporters are **steel and aluminium**. Firms that take steel and aluminium into the EU are required to establish **measurement systems** about **carbon intensity**, and deliver statements on it.

Some in India argue for the use of India’s **diplomatic influence** to get the EU to roll back its CBAM. This is likely to be an **inferior strategy**. The EU is only the first to introduce a **carbon tax**. Many other countries will surely follow.

Policymakers need to recognise this emerging landscape and better embed the Indian economy within it.

The CBAM describes the **information systems** required to track **upstream emission**. India needs to work on building these **information systems**.

What are steps taken in India for decarbonisation?

Policymakers and firms in India have known about these moves from the proposal stage in 2021. The Ministry of Steel has run a “**Green Steel**” initiative. **Electricity policy** has given flexibility to buyers for exclusive **renewable electricity-purchase mechanisms**.

Indian firms in numerous industries have moved towards **sourcing renewable electricity**. These steps have helped prepare the ground for this day.

The electricity policy has created freedom for buyers to get renewable electricity at will. The **Union government’s Interstate Transmission System (ISTS)** helps greatly. The system removes the barriers faced by private buyers and renewable-energy generators.

What is the way forward for green energy in India?

Electricity is a **state subject**, and local conditions diverge across the country. Subsidies for farmers are an issue in Haryana but not in Delhi. The **technical possibilities** vary by locale: Hydel in the Himalayas, solar in Rajasthan.

Carbon taxation in the world is one more important factor that varies in various states. For Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, exporting is important. These states require a greater focus on **carbon border taxes**.

These states need to become **pioneers in India’s electricity sector** for full support to the requirements for renewable electricity of their export sector at efficient prices.

What are different strategies for decarbonisation in India?

A path based on **central planning**. Officials design the **electricity system**, and also establish **technical rules** such as the minimum efficiency of air conditioners.

There is another path based on carbon taxation. The carbon tax harnesses **private self-interest**, and is the path to lowest-cost decarbonisation in India.

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6. [Ukraine crisis highlights India's need to reduce dependence on military imports](#)

Source- The post is based on the article “Ukraine crisis highlights India’s need to reduce dependence on military imports” published in “The Indian Express” on 1st May 2023.

Syllabus: GS2- International relations

Relevance- Global geopolitics and its impact on India

News- The article explains the dilemma posed by Ukraine war for India foreign policy makers.

What is the Russian stand regarding the Ukraine war?

As per Putin, the Ukrainian nation does not exist, and it is an **inalienable part** of Russia’s history, culture and spiritual space.” Such claims are made by **hegemonic states** to hide their intentions for **dominance**.

Putin has accused the US and Europe of **bad faith**. Gorbachev was given assurance that NATO would advance “**not an inch eastward**”. This undertaking was allegedly violated when NATO included **10 former Warsaw Pact members**.

How has conflict posed a dilemma for New Delhi?

It remains engaged with Russia and China in the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), while also partnering with the US in the Quad and Malabar groupings. India simultaneously holds **presidencies of the G20 and SCO**. India will need a “**tightrope walk**” while maintaining “**strategic autonomy**”.

The increasing closeness of Moscow with Beijing gives Beijing **great leverage**. It impacts Russia’s capacity to pursue **independent relations** with other states, especially India.

There is a rapid decline in **Russia’s capability as a defence supplier**. It should be a cause of worry for India.

The Quad and Malabar groupings show the **convergence of US and Indian strategic interests**. But their overall impact has been underwhelming. China sees this grouping as a **potential impediment to its hegemonic grand plan**. The Quad members except the US have also shown **nervousness in their responses to China**. Quad meetings have emphasised that the grouping has **no security implications** and is not an “**Asian NATO**”.

What are prospects of Indo-US cooperation in assisting India in improving the security scenario of India?

In September 2021, Australia, the UK and US announced the formation of a **trilateral security pact, AUKUS**. Under it, the US and Britain will share many **advanced technologies** with Australia and would also assist it in acquiring a **nuclear attack submarine force**.

AUKUS shows that there is complete absence of any similar offer of training, military technology or hardware, by the US to India. This is despite the **strategic partnership and Indo-US civil nuclear deal and a host of defence-related agreements**.

An Initiative on **Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)** was announced in May 2022 by Joe Biden. It remains to be seen if iCET results in significant **sales or transfer of technology** to India or ends up like other Indo-US agreements.

What are the options for India to increase independence in defence supplies?

Weak performance of India’s **military-industrial complex** has made it **import-dependent** for weaponry.

While “atmanirbharta” is a good. But technology has **long gestation periods**. India should draw useful lessons from China.

China has employed **reverse engineering, coercion**, and **even blatant theft** to acquire military technology from the USSR and the West.

7. [The importance of constitutional punctuality](#)

Source- The post is based on the article “The importance of constitutional punctuality” published in “The Hindu” on 1st May 2023.

Syllabus: GS2- Issues related to federalism

Relevance- Office of governor

News- Recently, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed a resolution seeking to provide for a time frame for Governors to act on Bills passed by the State Legislature.

Why does the governor withholding the bill passed by assembly is against the spirit of the constitution?

When the Constitution was adopted, some of the **sovereign functions** were retained for the sake of continuity in governance. There was no time limit fixed for various authorities to **discharge duties**.

Drafters of the Constitution assumed that nominated governors will discharge sovereign duties beyond the confines of **political partisanship**.

Article 200 of the Constitution limits the options before the Governor to **give assent to the Bill sent by the legislature, or withhold assent, or reserve a Bill for the consideration of the President**. Governors have wrongly understood this function as some **discretionary responsibility**.

However, a composite reading of the debates in the Constituent Assembly provides a different interpretation.

The original draft Article 175 moved for discussion provided **discretion to the Governor** to return the Bill.

While moving the amendment to this Article, B.R. Ambedkar said that there can be no room for a **Governor acting on discretion**” and recommended **removing the discretion**.

A simple reading of the Article is sufficient to show that the meaning of the phrase **“withholds assent therefrom”** has been misinterpreted to mean **holding back the Bill**.

What are practices followed in other countries regarding the veto of the bill?

In the United Kingdom, there has been **no royal veto** since 1708. In the United States, there is a **time limit of 10 days** for the President to give assent or veto a bill. If the President does not sign or vetoes the Bill within this time, it **automatically becomes an Act**.

What are the views of higher courts on authorities discharging their functions without any regard for a time limit?

The Supreme Court in *Shamsher Singh & Anr vs State Of Punjab (1974)*, held that the **discretion of the Governor** is **extremely limited**. Even in rare cases, the governor shall act in a manner that is not **detrimental to the interest of the state**.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the Governor **shall** only act on the **aid and advice of the Council of Ministers**.

The Supreme Court, in *Keisham Meghachandra Singh vs The Hon’ble Speaker Manipur (2020)*, asked the Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly to decide on the disqualification petitions under the **10th Schedule of the Constitution** within a period of four weeks.

In the case filed by the State of Telangana against the Governor, the Supreme Court acknowledged that the **words in Article 200**, **“as soon as possible after the presentation of the Bill”**, are important. Governors should necessarily bear this in mind.

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8. [India's hunger paradox: Self-sufficiency in production does not necessarily mean food security](#)

Source- The post is based on the article “India’s hunger paradox: Self-sufficiency in production does not necessarily mean food security” published in “The Indian Express” on 2nd May 2023.

Syllabus: GS2- Poverty and hunger

Relevance- Assessment of malnutrition and hunger

News- As per fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) data, 18% of children between ages 6-23 months, did not eat any food whatsoever in the 24 hours preceding the survey.

What are other statistics provided by NFHS5 related to food intake by children?

The **zero-food prevalence** was 30 % for infants aged 6-11 months, remains worryingly high at 13% among the 12-17 months old, and persists even among 18-23 months-old children at 8%.

More than 80% had not consumed any **protein-rich foods** for an entire day.

Close to 40% did not eat any grains for an entire day, and six out of 10 children do not consume milk or dairy of any form every day.

What are the dietary requirements of children?

According to the **World Health Organisation**, at six months of age, **33% of the daily calorie intake** is expected to come from food. This proportion **increases to 61% at 12 months of age**.

The recommended calorie percentages mentioned here are the **minimum amount** that should come from food. It is presumed that the child obtains the remaining calories through **breastfeeding**.

Consequently, the percentage of food-sourced calories only increases further when a child cannot receive breast milk when needed.

What are issues with NFHS surveys to assess the nutritional deprivation among the Indian population?

The assessment of the **extent of nutritional deprivation** among young children in India has relied on measures such as **stunting, wasting, compared to a reference population**.

These measures suggest **overall deficiencies in the child’s environment**, without any guidance on the **specific nature of the deficiencies**.

Due to several factors that cause **stunting or wasting** among children, it is challenging for any single ministry, or department of the Government to take responsibility for designing, implementing and monitoring policies to reduce undernutrition among children.

The well-documented **intergenerational linkages** between child stunting and parental height, makes it a **problematic policy metric** for **evaluating the effectiveness** of current programmes and interventions.

How can NFHS survey be improved to assess nutrition related metrics?

There is a need to **improve the NFHS surveys**. The **24-hour recall questions** on consumption of various food items are currently asked only of the most recently born children under the age of two. It should be systematically **extended to children under five years**.

Questions for adults should also be based on a **24-hour recall** following similar food items as the children’s questions.

To better understand food security for all populations in India, assessments using **household-level food insecurity modules** developed by the **Food and Agriculture Organisation** can be adapted.

What is the way forward to tackle the issues of hunger and malnutrition in India?

The rising burden of **cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases** in India is strongly linked to diet and nutrition. A **national effort** to establish **routine dietary and nutritional assessments** for the entire population is the need of the hour.

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Measuring the **availability, accessibility and affordability** of nutritious food constitutes the foundation for any **evidence-based policy** to end hunger and improve **nutritional security** among Indians.

India must achieve the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 of “zero hunger”, by 2030**. The **Mission Poshan 2.0 programme** is dedicated to it. However, to **effectively monitor and assess** the performance of Poshan 2.0, there is an immediate need to develop **appropriate food-based metrics**.

India should consider a **strategic initiative** led by the Prime Minister’s Office aimed at eliminating food insecurity in India. It should ensure **affordable access** to sufficient quantity and quality of **nutritionally diverse food**, with a special and **immediate focus on India’s youngest children**.

9. [India@75, Looking at 100: Going forward the India way](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**India@75, Looking at 100: Going forward the India way**” published in **The Indian Express** on **3rd May 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 2 – International Institutions**

News: The article discusses India’s role in the United Nations.

How has been the role of India in the United Nations?

UN Security Council: In December last year, **India completed its eighth term on the UN Security Council**. It was a great opportunity for India to preside over the apex UN organ and take measures for the maintenance of international peace and security.

India is also putting efforts for a permanent seat on the Security Council in the intergovernmental negotiations of the UN General Assembly.

India-UN Development Partnership Fund: India is also taking efforts beyond UNSC.

For instance, the **India-UN Development Partnership Fund** which is administered by the **Permanent Mission of India Office in New York**, assists member states of the South with demand-driven socio-economic programs.

United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee: India’s voice on counter terrorism has moved beyond summits and high-level events and has become the mainstream narrative of the international community.

The work of India as Chair of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee is still acknowledged as a powerful voice for a united and cohesive front in the fight against terror.

UN Commission for Social Development: India presided over the UN Commission for Social Development this February. This gave India an opportunity to look into the social development issues, especially those related to women.

The deployment in January 2023 of the all-woman peacekeeping contingent to Abyei in Africa was a step in this direction.

Further, India’s determination to deploy women in the cause of peace is matched by the UN’s bold emphasis on a strong female presence in the field for social cause and ensuring optimal outcomes.

UN Statistical Commission: India achieved a landslide win, capturing 46 of the 53 votes, in the recently concluded elections to the UN Statistical Commission in New York, leaving many member states behind.

This shows that the world considers India as a responsible, caring and contributing partner, willing and able to bring value to the global issues.

UN General Assembly: India’s promotion of millets in International Year 2023 has gained recognition and acceptance at the UN General Assembly.

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Further, the efforts of India to roll out vaccines is still recognised at the UN as India was the first country for many member states of the Global South for Covid vaccines during the pandemic.

What can be the way ahead?

The words of Swami Vivekanand, “Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is achieved”, should be taken into consideration.

This is because India’s diplomacy will have a growing number of roles and duties in a rapidly changing world.

10. The LAC crisis and the danger of losing without fighting

Source- The post is based on the article “The LAC crisis and the danger of losing without fighting” published in “The Hindu” on 3rd May 2023.

Syllabus: GS2- Bilateral groupings and agreements

Relevance- India and China bilateral relationship

News- The article explains the approach of current Indian government on LAC incursions by China.

What is the current situation on LAC?

Three years later after LAC incursions by China, only some areas have witnessed **disengagement**. **Depsang and Demchok**, remain unresolved. 26 of the 65 patrolling points in Ladakh are out of reach to Indian soldiers.

Neither diplomatic meetings nor talks between corps commanders have made any progress since September last year.

Regular meetings between Indian and Chinese Ministers, Foreign and Defence, have not yielded results either. Beijing has ignored **Delhi’s talking points**.

What was the approach followed by the India during 2013 Chinese incursions on LAC?

During the 2013 **Depsang crisis**, the PLA had blocked Indian patrols at **Y-Junction**. It is the same place where it has blocked them in Depsang since 2020.

Within three weeks, the PLA was forced to lift the block after the Indian Army launched a **quid pro quo operation** on the Chinese side in Chumar. The status quo as it existed before PLA’s block was restored.

What has been the Chinese approach towards India in the recent incursions?

Over nine years, China’s approach towards India has been hostile. China sent PLA soldiers to Chumar during **Xi’s visit to Ahmedabad in 2014**.

The Chinese leader did not pay attention to the Indian leader’s plea in Beijing in 2015 to **delineate the LAC and** has blocked India’s **entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group**.

Satellite imagery shows that the Chinese were already building **massive military infrastructure** in Ladakh by the time the **Second Informal Summit** was taking place in **Mamallapuram** in late 2019.

What is the way forward for India on LAC incursions by China?

India is under pressure on the border. It needs to find a way to **transfer that pressure** back to China. Beijing has **never compromised** unless it has been forced into an **uncomfortable spot**. India has deployed this tactic since **Nathu La in 1967**.

India needs to be **proactive**. Political leadership needs to use its **bold imagination**. If the political leadership is fearful, the military on the China border will remain in a **defensive posture**.

Military is used as an instrument by states to pursue **policy ends and impose its will** upon the adversary. New Delhi must take **some military actions**. It will provide **leverage to its diplomats**.

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China is a much **bigger economic, military, industrial and geopolitical power** than India. But the gap shrinks considerably when it comes to local balance on the LAC. If Russia is unable to vanquish Ukraine, China cannot **militarily walk over** India.

Three years after the border crisis began, a **status quoist approach** can no longer be the answer. India will have to **wrest the initiative** from China.

11. No further delay – on sedition law

Source: This post is created based on the article **“No further delay”**, published in Business Standard on 3rd May 2023.

Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 2 – Governance – Criminal Justice System

Context: The article analyses the progress on the Supreme Court's order that ordered the government to stop registering cases under Section 124A of IPC.

India's Supreme Court (SC) ordered the government, last year, to suspend all sedition trials and stop registering cases under Section 124A of the IPC until the provision was reviewed.

Consequently, those detained under this law were permitted to apply for bail. However, the government recently informed the SC that stakeholder consultation is not yet complete. It resulted in the postponement of the case that challenges the constitutionality of Section 124A.

This delay leaves the contentious law in a state of uncertainty.

What are the issues with government's delay in fulfilling the SC's order?

Shows unwillingness: The government's extended consultation period demonstrates its previous unwillingness to address the issue.

Against democratic ethos: Section 124A, implemented by colonial rulers, is inconsistent with India's democratic constitution and dedication to free speech.

Ambiguity of the law: Supreme Court decision in Kedar Nath versus State of Bihar, contributed to making this law more ambiguous. The ruling maintained the legality of Section 124A but made its application conditional. It allowed the state to interpret the law widely to arrest dissidents. From 2015 to 2020, 356 cases were filed under the sedition law, with only 12 convictions. The petitioners have called for a review by a seven-judge Bench. The Supreme Court should expedite its decision, as Section 124A provides state actors with a tool to suppress dissenting voices.

12. A good divorce – Irretrievable breakdown of marriage should be a ground for divorce

Source: The post is based on the following articles

“Consent Is The Soul Of Marriage” published in **The Times of India** on **3rd May 2023**.

“A good divorce – Irretrievable breakdown of marriage should be a ground for divorce” published in **The Hindu** on **3rd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Relevance: About SC ruling on granting divorce for irretrievable breakdowns.

News: The Supreme Court in Shilpa Sailesh vs Varun Sreenivasan case held that a court can directly grant a divorce under Article 142 of the Constitution in cases where the marriage has irretrievably broken down.

About the status of divorced and separated couples in India

In India, divorcees have doubled in number over the past two decades. But the incidence of divorce is still at 1.1%, with those in urban areas making up the largest proportion.

According to Census 2011, the population which is “separated” is almost triple the divorced number. There are many women, particularly among the poor, who are abandoned or deserted.

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About the current procedure for getting a divorce

For fault-based cases: Under Section 13 of the Hindu Marriage Act, a marriage may be dissolved on grounds of adultery, cruelty, desertion, bigamy, rape, etc. These are often called as fault-based cases. In these, a divorce petition can be moved by either party without the consent of the other.

For No-fault divorce: This could be sought only by mutual consent under Section 13-B. In such cases, the parties would ordinarily file a motion for divorce, and then have to wait six months before the decree could be passed by court.

The intent was to give a 'cooling-off period' and allow the couple time for reflection.

About the recent SC ruling on granting divorce for irretrievable breakdowns

Read more: [Divorce can be granted on 'grounds of irretrievable breakdown': Supreme Court](#)

What is the rationale behind granting divorce for irretrievable breakdowns?

a) Courts in the past recognised that in many cases, the mandatory waiting period only prolongs the misery of the couple, and often delays or impedes a settlement, **b)** Irretrievable breakdown of marriage was considered by the Law Commission in a few of its reports. The Commission in its 71st report recommended that the law be amended to provide for "irretrievable breakdown of marriage" as an additional ground for divorce. The same was reiterated in its 217th report also.

c) In 2010, the government introduced the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2010. It proposed to add irretrievable breakdown as a new ground for divorce in both the Hindu Marriage Act and the Special Marriage Act. But after amendment the 2013 bill mentioned that the six-month waiting period could be mutually waived by the parties, **d)** In **Sivasankaran vs Santhimeenal (2021)**, SC considered the question of social acceptance and economic security of women during irretrievable breakdown and said it should be granted unilaterally.

Note: Under the Hindu Marriage Act, irretrievable breakdown of marriage is not yet a ground for divorce.

What is Article 142 of the Indian Constitution?

Read here: [What is Article 142?](#)

What are the advantages of granting divorce for irretrievable breakdowns?

The ruling is much needed as **a)** it provides relief to couples from the "agony and misery" of waiting six to 18 months for a local court to annul the marriage, **b)** many women are still not financially independent. So, a faster divorce might provide faster financial settlement, **c)** normalise divorce and can eliminate the social stigma around divorce in India.

What are the concerns highlighted by experts on granting divorce for irretrievable breakdowns?

The experts point out that granting divorce for irretrievable breakdowns without a cooling-off period might push women into a disadvantageous position as there are high levels of gender discrimination in India.

The liberal notion of marriage as a partnership of mutual consent is not yet the reality in much of the country, and its dissolution usually entails enormous social and economic hardship for women and children.

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13. Tariffs on electricity, water and gas: The cost of inefficient pricing

Source– The post is based on the article “**Tariffs on electricity, water and gas: The cost of inefficient pricing**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Government policies and interventions. GS3- Economy

Relevance– Pricing of essential goods and services

News– The article explain the issues of tariff on utilities

What are the issues with tariffs on utilities in India?

The pricing of utilities like electricity, water and gas is a **complicated exercise** in India. Prices are **largely administered**. They are **not market driven**. They seldom cover the **costs of provision**.

They are a **deeply political decision**.

Take the **example of electricity**. Tariffs levied by power distribution companies across states do not reflect the **cost of supplying power**. In 2020-21, the average cost of supplying power was pegged at Rs 6.19 per unit. In comparison, the revenue from discoms operations worked out to only Rs 4.21 per unit.

In the **case of water**, the recovery is even lower. According to some estimates, water boards across the country are able to recover only around a third of their operation and maintenance costs.

In the case of the [Delhi](#) Jal Board, in 2021-22, its projected income was insufficient to cover its **operating costs and its interest liability**.

The **distribution of tariffs** among different consumers is another issue . In most states, power and water tariffs paid by **agricultural consumers** are a fraction of those paid by **industrial and commercial users**.

For instance, in 2020-21, power tariffs for commercial users were **nine times more than** those for agricultural consumers, and industrial tariffs were seven times higher.

In comparison, in **developed countries**, tariffs for industrial consumers tend to be lower than those for households.

There are **multiple pricing regimes**. **Chhattisgarh’s tariff order** is an example of this. Industrial consumers are further divided into six slabs and each slab is charged a **different fixed and energy cost**. Domestic consumers are divided into five slabs.

In the case of gas too, there are **multiple pricing regimes** — from the administered pricing mechanism (APM) framework to the non-APM and imported LNG regimes.

What is the way forward for tariffs on utilities in India?

Consumers should get the full benefits of lower gas prices during a down cycle, and producers get the full upside when prices rise.

The imposition of the **floor and ceiling** is **arbitrary** but so is the proposed increase in gas prices every year.

Prices tend to **act as signals** for both producers and consumers. Market based pricing tends to lead to **optimal usage, increased efficiency and better outcomes**.

For instance, higher prices that reflect the **true costs of electricity and water** would perhaps encourage farmers to shift away from water-guzzling crops. But their low cost encourages **inefficient usage**.

What are the impacts of lower tariffs?

Costs are more than revenues. So, the supplying entities have little funds for **repairs and maintenance or invest in capacity enhancement**.

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As per a CAG report, of the 1,797 **unauthorised colonies** in Delhi, 1,573 colonies had not been provided with sewerage facilities as of March 2018. Moreover, 567 unauthorised colonies were still **dependent on tube-wells/hand-pumps**.

Higher tariffs would have allowed for greater investments by the Delhi Jal Board to ramp up water supply in these areas.

The provision of free or **heavily subsidised utilities** is not a **governance model**.

14. [Staying Married To China – ON tackling threats from China](#)

Source: The post is based on an article “**Staying Married To China – Whether US, EU or India, decoupling from the world’s second biggest economy is near impossible. De-risking is the new buzzword. But even that’s not easy**” published in **The Times of India** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – International Relations

Relevance: concerns with economic dependence on China.

News: The US and the EU countries have changed their mind towards their strategy of decoupling from China. This could be seen from their speeches.

What are some of the speeches from the US for China?

The US secretary recently said that the US will speak out when its interest is at stake. However, **this does not mean that it wants to decouple its economy from China’s**.

This is because a full separation of our economies would be disastrous for both countries. It would also be destabilising for the rest of the world.

A similar kind of message was given by **the US national security adviser**. He said that the US thinks of de-risking and diversifying, not decoupling from China.

What is the new de-risk strategy of the US and how does it differ from the previous decoupling strategy?

The new ‘de-risk’ strategy is a departure from the ‘decouple’ plan. It also intends to change the perspective of the US from the fact of geo-economic containment of China is not easy.

The decouple plan stated that the geo-economic containment of China would preserve the world’s equilibrium without involving any form of conflict.

It was suggested that the US should restrict trade with China; deny China access to key raw materials; and stop technology transfers that China would need. These all would slow China’s economic growth.

This advice was accepted by both Biden and Trump which aimed at starting **New Cold War**. However, it is different from the Old Cold War with the Soviet Union.

What are the differences between New Cold War and the Old Cold War?

The Old Cold War sought the Soviet Union to be geopolitically contained while the **New Cold War aims at geo-economic containment of China**.

However, **it is not easy to sustain the New Cold War because China** is the world’s biggest manufacturing and trading nation with almost every country around the world having economic relations with it.

Hence, **the US and the EU have discovered that it is not easy to achieve the geo-economic containment of China in the long run because** they remain dependent on China in many ways and reducing these dependencies will take time.

They have also realised that countries and industries around the world are deeply integrated into China’s economy, and vice versa. Hence, due to the complex global supply and value chains, decoupling is not easy.

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What steps have been taken by India to reduce its dependence on China and what are the associated concerns?

In 2019, the Indian government opted out of the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#) agreement to reduce India's trade dependence on China.

However, four years later India's trade deficit with China reached an all-time high of over \$85 billion.

Indian businesses urged GoI that while decoupling is tough, even de-risking would require investments and policy changes that are not easily forthcoming.

Hence, it is not easy to substitute the dependence on China for India as well as the rest of the world.

15. USCIRF's International Religious Freedom Report: Present imperfect – Irrespective of what the USCIRF says, India must review its rights record

Source: The post is based on the article **“Present imperfect – Irrespective of what the USCIRF says, India must review its rights record”** published in **The Hindu** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Relevance: About USCIRF's International Religious Freedom Report.

News: For the fourth consecutive year, the government rejected the recommendations of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) latest report, calling it “biased and motivated”.

What is the USCIRF's International Religious Freedom Report?

Read here: [International Religious Freedom Report](#)

About the latest USCIRF's International Religious Freedom Report 2023

Like the previous one, this one also designated India as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) for its “worsening” record on religious freedoms.

The report has said that the Indian government is “promoting and enforcing religiously discriminatory policies”, naming laws that deal with conversion, interfaith relationships, wearing the hijab and cow slaughter, as well as the CAA and the NRC.

According to the report, all of these have impacted minorities including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and Adivasis (indigenous peoples and Scheduled Tribes) negatively.

The report has criticised the U.S. State Department for not having designated India as a CPC, and has called for sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials.

Note: *The U.S. State Department imposed sanctions only once in 2005 in the aftermath of the 2002 Gujarat riots.*

What are the concerns associated with the USCIRF's International Religious Freedom Report?

a) The process the USCIRF follows is non-inclusive, **b)** The organisation does not study the state of religious freedoms inside the U.S. This suggests a double standard and **c)** Its recommendations hold no influence within India. Instead, the reports are meant only for the U.S. government to deliberate on, and accept or dismiss.

India is a secular, inclusive and pluralistic democracy. The Centre may well consider an internal review of its conduct and the direction it hopes to lead India on issues such as religious freedoms and rights.

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16. Reversal of OPS: Guaranteed pension is not bad economics

Source: The post is based on the article “**Guaranteed pension is not bad economics**” published in the **Business Standard** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Relevance: About the reversal of OPS.

News: Many State governments are announcing reversion to the old pension scheme (OPS) and some are speculating to do the same. Many economists have said that this is a bad economics. But that is not correct.

About the National Pension Scheme and OPS

Must read: [Comparison of National Pension Scheme with Old Pension System – Explained, pointwise](#)

Why do many economists think the reversal of OPS is bad economics?

This is because **a)** the State has to bear the full burden of pensions, **b)** the scheme will become fiscally unsustainable in the medium to long run, and **c)** the unsustainable rise in pension allocation can only come at the cost of essential welfare expenditures allocated to the poor and marginalised sections.

Read more: [Schemes like OPS will only exacerbate the gap between richer and poorer states](#)

What are the concerns associated with continuing NPS?

Those who defend the NPS say that **a)** The returns in the market do not stay the same, and it may actually be higher and better than the OPS, **b)** NPS is inflation-covered because, under normal circumstances, the returns are higher than the inflation.

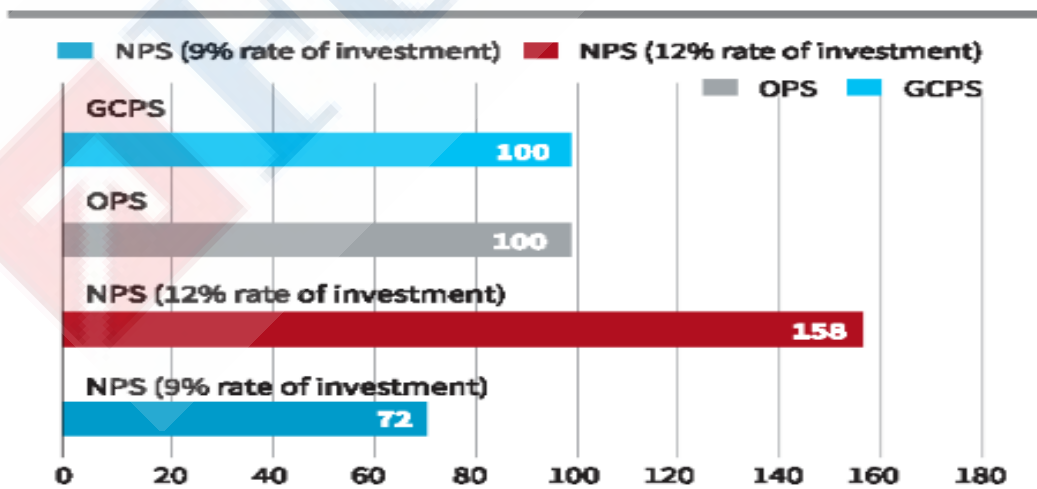
But they failed to understand that the NPS puts the entire burden of uncertainty on employees alone and not on the employers.

What can be done to provide OPS without any fiscal constraints?

The government should **rationalise taxes** as these are either negligible or non-existent in India. This can be done by implementing inheritance and wealth taxes.

Instead of OPS, the government can **implement a contributory guaranteed pension scheme (CGPS)**.

How a CGPS can be implemented without any fiscal constraints?



Source: The Hindu

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Let's assume that the employee contribution of CGPS is 10% like NPS and the return is 50% of the last drawn salary like OPS.

The State pays an additional balance of the difference between the 50% guaranteed pension and the market-determined pension amount. If the market returns are higher, then the State governments might get revenue.

Based on the chart, one can derive that, **a)** When the market return is 9%, the State ends up paying the gap, i.e. 28, but when the return is 12%, it gets to pocket the extra 58%, **b)** Under the CGPS, the burden is only the employer's contribution part.

So, it is safe to assume that the CGPS gives guaranteed pensions to the employees without putting the exchequer under additional burden necessarily.

Read more: [Select Central staff can opt for Old Pension Scheme](#)

17. [UAE's minister of economy writes: UAE-India CEPA promoted a favourable environment for startups to thrive in both countries](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **“UAE’s minister of economy writes: UAE-India CEPA promoted a favourable environment for startups to thrive in both countries”** published in **“The Indian Express”** on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Bilateral groupings and agreements

Relevance– India and UAE bilateral relationship

News– The article explains the evolving partnership between India and UAE.

What are some important facts about the bilateral relationship between India and UAE?

The relationship is shaped by years old **cultural and economic engagement** through the **Indian Ocean’s network of exchange**.

India-UAE relationship is today more than an **economic partnership**. It shows the **deep, fraternal, and strategically important relationship** between two countries.

The **India-UAE** partnership was based on the **trade of traditional items**. It was **strengthened with oil**. It found a formal dimension after the creation of the UAE Federation in 1971.

The relationship accelerated in the 1990s **after liberalisation**. India started exporting to the UAE and markets beyond. Today UAE is India’s **third-largest trade partner**.

How is the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) beneficial for the two countries?

It has generated **greater trade volumes** and improved **mutual access to markets**. It has generated a wide range of **economic, industrial and investment opportunities**.

The UAE-India CEPA has been an incredible success. The volume of non-oil trade reached the \$50 billion mark in 2022, with growth of about 10%.

It has generated **multiplier effects**. It is covering the **widest possible range of subjects** from digital economy to free trade, among other mutual priorities. It has served as a powerful platform for **unprecedented partnerships and multi-sectoral collaboration**.

The UAE-India CEPA is unleashing the **spirit of entrepreneurship, inspiring innovators and investors**. It is **encouraging SMEs, startups** to make inroads into new markets.

The UAE-India CEPA is also a **strategic catalyst** in addressing **vital developmental challenges**.

It can tackle issues such as **energy and food security, agriculture, and sustainability**,

It adds greater importance to the presence of India and the UAE in **regional blocs and multilaterals** such as the I2U2 and UFI.

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What is the potential of India and UAE relationship?

The UAE looks forward to the opening of the **IIT-Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi** next year. Positive outcomes are expected from the **MoU in academic cooperation** signed between Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) and O P Jindal Global University.

In September last year, the UAE and India signed an MoU to establish the Emirati India Cultural Council.

More recently, thAbu Dhabi unveiled its first exhibition of the year — **‘Bollywood Superstars: A Short Story of Indian Cinema’**. This deepening of **India-UAE exchange of arts, culture and education** indicates **mutual trust and shared values**.

The UAE-India CEPA and our strong **people-to-people relations** have created a **highly favourable business environment**.

It is an opportune moment for India’s dynamic startup ecosystem, its unicorns and innovators, to **explore growth and diversification** into the Emirati market, and from there to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

18. [Indo-Pacific naval strategy](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **“Indo-Pacific naval strategy”** published in the **“Business Standard”** on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- International relations

Relevance– Issues related to Indian maritime strategy

News– The article explains the reason for neglect of maritime diplomacy. It explains the importance of the Indo-Pacific for Indian maritime strategy.

What are the aims of New Delhi’s Indo-Pacific policy?

India is safeguarding the world’s **sea lines of communications**. India is seen in the role of **“net security provider”**. There is fighting piracy threats, sea-based terrorism, smuggling, and fishing. It is providing **humanitarian aid, disaster relief and search and rescue**.

India also has a **huge diaspora** working and remitting money from the Gulf. In case of emergency, India has **evacuated its citizens**. India supports its overseas citizens on its own dollar.

India foots its own bill for overseeing the Indian Ocean. In addition, New Delhi currently provides \$18 billion dollars in **lines of credit** for **development projects in littoral states**.

Why was there a delay in developing India’s maritime diplomacy and Indo-Pacific policy?

New Delhi was **preoccupied northwards**. New Delhi’s **strategic attention** remained on China and Pakistan. The four wars fought against these two adversaries reinforced its **“continental mindset”**.

It was shaped by the **historical experience** of centuries of **invasions from Central Asia**. In the 19th century, there was the **Great Game**. Britain and Russia competed for **influence in Central Asia, Asia Minor and to the borders of British India**.

This **“continental outlook”** is deeply entrenched in New Delhi. This is despite the fact that most Central Asian invaders were assimilated into India.

However, sea-borne colonial powers repatriated Indian wealth to Europe, and completely destroyed the small-scale Indian economy. It taught India a valuable lesson about the **criticality of maritime power**.

Britishers believed that the Indian Navy should limit itself to the **defence of the British Commonwealth**. This view prevailed because New Delhi’s **precarious finances** made it dependent upon Britain for warships.

The decision to buy a **Royal Navy light aircraft carrier, HMS Hercules** Shaped India’s Navy decision making. The INS Vikrant was commissioned in 1961.

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In 1962, the year after INS Vikrant was commissioned, China defeated India heavily. That reinforced India's **continental mindset**. It led to army and **air force modernisation and marginalised the navy**.

Its share of the defence budget, which had tripled from 4% in 1950-51, to 12% in 1959-60 was back to 4% after the war.

What is the current outlook of the Indian navy?

During the 1960s and 1970s, New Delhi realized that an **economically declining Britain** was an **inadequate partner**. The Soviet Union supplanted the UK as its **principal supplier of warships, technology, and design expertise**.

American design influence will begin shaping the Indian Navy's aircraft carriers. The first of the two indigenous carriers, INS Vikrant, are based on Russian design. But a **second indigenous carrier, INS Vishal**, will draw heavily on the US carrier philosophy.

So, the Indian Navy's Sea control strategy is likely to be based on **three aircraft carriers**, with two of them operational at any given time.

Each will be at the centre of a carrier battle group drawn from a total fleet of about 175 ships, including about 50 capital warships and about 600 naval aircraft, with about 100 of them based at sea.

Today, the navy has achieved significant headway in **heavy engineering skills**. The navy learnt the art of **integrating diverse weapon systems**, onto multi-role warships.

For example, in the Shivalik-class frigates, which began entering service in 2009, the navy integrated Russian Shtil anti-air missiles, Russian Klub anti-ship cruise missiles, the Israeli Barak-1 missile defence system, and the Italian Oto Melara 76-millimetre super rapid gun mount.

19. As Russia, China vie for upper hand, what SCO means for India

Source: The post is based on the article "**As Russia, China vie for upper hand, what SCO means for India**" published in **The Indian Express** on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – International Institutions

Relevance: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

News: The Council of Foreign Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will meet Friday in Goa.

About Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

[Click Here to Read](#)

The main work of the foreign ministers' meeting is to prepare for the upcoming meeting of the Heads of State Council, or the SCO summit, expected to be held in July.

China and Russia dominate the SCO. Due to which, the SCO is criticized, and different views are often put up.

What are the different views regarding SCO?

The West views the SCO as a club run by China and ally Russia where the two dominant powers are in competition with each other for influence.

Moreover, **four of the five Central Asian republics are members of SCO.** **Russia views** these resource-rich republics, that were part of the erstwhile Soviet Union, as its strategic backyard.

However, **the influence of China in the Central Asian-5 (C5) countries has grown with the Belt and Road Initiative** and Russia has not been able to stop growing Chinese footprint over the region.

Despite this, Russia's economic influence in the central Asian region is still strong, due to its political, cultural and people-to-people connections.

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This power play in central Asia has its impact in the SCO and this is where Russia needs India.

Why is the presence of India in the SCO important for Russia?

Russia sees India's presence in the SCO as a potential countervailing force to Chinese dominance of Central Asia.

It was Russia which pushed for India's membership in the group. Due to which, in 2015, India was admitted as an observer along with Iran and Pakistan.

Moreover, the visit of the PM to the central Asian countries in 2015 and India becoming a member of the SCO in 2017 gave India a higher profile in Central Asia.

In post-US Afghanistan, SCO has helped India stay involved in the regional discussion on Taliban rule. **SCO has also helped India to improve its ties with Russia** given the increasing tensions with China after the Doklam issue.

What are the concerns with India membership in the SCO?

Some experts view the Quad grouping as a counter to the influence that Russia and China seek to project through the SCO, and **India's membership of both as a contradiction.**

However, **the Quad is India's diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific and the SCO represents its diplomacy in the Eurasian landmass.** It can also be seen as an exercise of true multipolarity.

Further, if the SCO is a bipolar China-Russia platform, it offers several multipolarities within itself as members have options to get the best deal for themselves.

For instance, India was the only country that did not sign a joint statement calling for the strengthening of the **Biological Weapons Convention** in last year's foreign ministers' meeting.

What is the way ahead for India?

SCO is described as a "diplomatic battlefield". Hence, the challenge for India is to use both the SCO and the Quad for its own interests instead of getting trapped in.

20. [Switching on India's smart electricity future](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **"Switching on India's smart electricity future"** published in **"The Hindu"** on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Government policies and interventions

Relevance-Issues related to electricity sector

News– The article explains the smart meter initiative of the government.

What is the progress level of the country on smart meters?

More than **5.5 million smart metres** have been installed in India, and **over 100 million sanctioned.**

The target is to **replace 250 million conventional electric meters** with prepaid smart meters by 2025-26.

India is supporting this initiative through a **results-linked grant-cum-financing** to help power distribution companies become **financially sound and efficient** to deliver better services to consumers.

What are the benefits associated with smart meters?

A recent study by the **Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)** found that the majority of smart meter users have already begun to experience some of the technology benefits. The study covered about 2,700 urban households that use prepaid or postpaid smart meters across six States. Half the users reported improvements in **billing regularity**, and two-thirds said paying bills had become easier.

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Around 40% of users alluded to **multiple co-benefits** such as a greater **sense of control** over their electricity expenses, a drop in instances of **electricity theft**, and **improved power supply** to the locality.

In fact, 70% of prepaid smart meter users said they would recommend the technology to their friends and relatives. These findings give confidence that India's **smart metering transition** is heading in the right direction.

What are issues with the use of smart meters?

Half the users were not using the **smart meter mobile app**. Many were unable to access detailed electricity bills. It leaves them doubtful about their **bill computation and deductions**.

What is the way forward for the success of smart meters?

The Ministry of Power should drive a **nationwide campaign** to **educate consumers** about smart meter benefits and improve the uptake of smart metre apps.

The apps should be **accessible to users** from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and provide **actionable tips and information**.

High-user satisfaction in Assam and **high uptake of the mobile app in Bihar** indicate **learning opportunities** on how to scale smart meter usage for discoms in other States.

Discoms must **co-own the programme** and take the **driving seat**. The majority of smart meters in India are being deployed by the Advanced Metering Infrastructure Service Providers.

Discoms must closely work with AMISPs to ensure a **smooth installation and recharge experience** for users. For this, discoms will need to **strengthen their internal capacity** through **suitable staffing and training interventions**.

Discoms, system integrators and technology providers should **collaborate** to devise **innovative and scalable data solutions**. Effective use of smart meter data is fundamental to unlocking their true value proposition.

This would require an ecosystem that fosters **innovation in analytics, data hosting and sharing platforms**, and enables key actors to **collaboratively test and scale** new solutions.

Policymakers and regulators must strengthen regulations to **empower consumers** to unlock new retail markets.

Currently, **important provisions** concerning phase-out of paper bills, arrear adjustment, frequency of recharge alerts, buffer time, rebates, and data privacy are scattered across **different regulatory orders** or simply missing.

Their incorporation within **existing State frameworks** will be crucial for a positive technology experience for end users.

Regulators must also enable **simplification and innovation** in tariff design and open the retail market to **new business models and consumers**.

21. [Delhi University ad hoc teacher suicide: Chronicle of a tragedy foretold](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Delhi University ad hoc teacher suicide: Chronicle of a tragedy foretold**” published in the “**The Indian Express**” on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Issues related to development and management of education

Relevance– Faculty recruitment in higher educational institutions

News– Recently, an ad-hoc professor of Delhi University committed suicide after he was not given permanent appointment after 5 years of service.

What are the issues related to recruitment of permanent teachers by Delhi university that are relevant for other educational institutions also?

There had been **no permanent appointments** in most of the colleges for over a decade or more. So, there were thousands of applicants for the jobs.

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Unlike the usual practice of shortlisting candidates for the interviews based on their **credentials**, everyone who had more than a certain number of **regulation-demanded points in their API score** was called.

API is the **Academic Performance Index**. It is a metric devised by the UGC to decide **academic merit**. But, a single metric cannot capture the **total capabilities of a teacher**.

The **lower standards** meant that every college had to interview hundreds and in some cases thousands of candidates. One college had more than 1,500 candidates in physics.

Each candidate was interviewed for only a few minutes by the board. Based on this limited interaction, candidates were selected for the appointment.

The **criteria of academic merit** was neglected. The candidate was recommended by certain **“social and cultural organisations”**.

What are the challenges faced by adhoc teachers of the university?

The ad-hoc teachers who had been teaching for more than 15 years, were not selected and were left without a job. College had **renewed their contract** year after year. So, there is less doubt about their **competence in teaching**.

A more **sympathetic and humane administration** could have devised **creative ways** for giving preference to existing ad-hoc teachers.

The chances of getting a teaching job for these displaced teachers in the future are **very bleak**. The government has decided that the **expansion of institutions of higher education** is no longer a priority. Instead, students are now encouraged to **opt for online courses**.

What are the limitations of online teaching?

Online teaching can at best **supplement classroom interaction**. The interaction with a teacher in a classroom, the peer group interaction plays a decisive role in **learning** and **developing the “soft skills”**. A video can never **replicate that experience**.

22. [Why we must focus on curing, not criminalising drug users](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **“Why we must focus on curing, not criminalising drug users”** published in **“The Indian Express”** on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Government policies and interventions. Issues related to development and management of social sector

Relevance: Drug abuse

News- There are reports that Himachal Pradesh is considering joining Uttarakhand, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh as states that have legalised cannabis cultivation.

The **production, manufacturing, possession, consumption, sale, purchase, transport and use** of cannabis is prohibited and criminalised by the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act 1985**.

What are issues with the current approach to deal with drug abuse?

Criminalisation is used to deter the use of drugs. However, **drug dependence** has increased over the years across the world.

In India, 3.1 crore people are reported to have used a cannabis product in the last 12 months and about 72 lakh people required help to address their **cannabis dependency-related problems**.

Criminalisation means long **pre-trial incarceration and stigmatisation** of users. They lack **access to de-addiction centres**.

The 2001 amendment to the law differentiates between those who possess a “small quantity” of the drug and those found storing it in “commercial quantities” ‘. This is a welcome step in distinguishing between “drug users” and “drug traffickers”.

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However, **possession of the drug** for personal consumption or consuming it for recreational purposes remains an offence under the Act. Such cases constitute 60% of the total NDPS cases reported in India .

People who end up in jail often belong to the **socially and economically vulnerable class**. They constitute the **majority of the undertrial prisoners** under the NDPS Act.

Putting drug users behind bars makes their **rehabilitation** difficult and exposes them to the risk of becoming peddlers.

Rehabilitation of drug users is systematically replaced by the **denial of bail and enforcement of jail terms and penalties**.

The bail provision of the NDPS Act makes **jail a rule, and bail an exception**. The **moral panic** in society relating to drug use and abuse has an impact on the **pre-trial procedure**.

The **over-criminalisation** of drug users undermines their social well-being. It results in the wastage of precious time of the **criminal justice machinery**.

What is the way forward to deal with drug abuse?

In 2021, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment recommended the **decriminalisation** of the possession of small quantities of drugs for **personal consumption**. Drug consumers should be treated as victims rather than culprits.

The Ministry also suggested **mandatory de-addiction and rehab facility** for 30 days followed by **mandatory community service** for one year for drug addicts. The ministry's position was along the lines of the approach advocated by **UN human rights experts**.

There is a need to focus on a public **health approach** to deal with drug addiction. Countries such as Portugal and Canada have demonstrated the **efficacy of the public health approach**.

Law enforcement agencies view drug users as offenders, whereas the public health systems focus on their **well-being**.

In India, **Sikkim** has tried to tackle the drug problem by differentiating between peddlers and consumers. It has tried to advance healthcare services to the **most vulnerable drug users**. The state's **model of decriminalisation** can be replicated at the national level.

23. Yes, Kids Are Born Digital

Source: The post is based on the article **"Yes, Kids Are Born Digital – Where they need adult help is in fighting digital addiction. Because the neurochemistry of excessive smartphone usage is the same as that of narcotic drugs"** published in **The Times of India** on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues Related to Children

Relevance: issue associated with use of mobile phones by children

News: Tim Cook, CEO of Apple who recently visited India, advised parents to limit the screen time for children. Even various surveys on Indian children show alarming findings.

What are the findings of various surveys on the use of mobile phones by Indian children?

A survey by Saurashtra University in Rajkot finds that 92% students prefer playing mobile games over playing outside and 78% students are habituated to having their phone while having meals.

Another survey finds that nearly 55% of parents admit that their children aged 9-13 have access to a smartphone throughout the day.

As per the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, 24% of children use smartphones while they are in bed, which increases with age and 37% of children frequently experience reduced levels of concentration due to smartphone use.

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What are the concerns with children using smartphones?

Science has found that these phones have the same effects on the brain like other addictive substances such as drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol.

Excessive use of phones also causes bad effects like loss of concentration, lethargy, strain on the eyes and wastage of time.

Children have now become addicted to smartphones to get pleasure and enjoyment. Hence, whenever our brain gets any form of pleasure, **a neurochemical called dopamine is released in our brain.**

Dopamine makes us want more of the same pleasurable experience. **This is the same as the dopamine released when getting addicted to narcotic drugs.**

Hence, this dopamine is also released in the children causing them to want more and ultimately affecting them and making them feel uncomfortable when phones are taken away.

Furthermore, our brains also become habituated and after some time we develop tolerance to any pleasure. Hence, our addiction no longer gives us pleasure and we are only left with pain.

And if the phone is taken away from us, our pain manifests as anxiety, low motivation, depression, irritability and an inability to feel joy in anything. The same things happen with the children.

What can be the solution for children addicted to phones?

Ideally, **a child should be removed from their phone or minimise its usage for 30 days.**

Movement, such as **exercise or sports, should be a daily part of a child's life.** Only activities that require some effort such as reading, playing an instrument, sport or art should be the activities of choice for relaxation.

This would prevent any kind of addiction and the release of dopamine while enhancing their extracurricular activities and developing their brain in a good way.

24. Perils of new multilateralism

Source: The post is based on the article **“Perils of new multilateralism”** published in **The Hindu** on **6th May 2023.**

Syllabus: GS 2 – Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Relevance: About India's participation in multilateral institutions.

News: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) foreign ministers' meeting was held recently in Goa. This SCO meeting serves to underline India's current geopolitical dilemma.

What are the issues with India's participation in multilateral institutions?

Issues with India's participation in Western institutions: Not only western institutions but also the western governments' are criticising India's record on human rights, civil liberties and minorities.

The only places India can seek refuge are the organisations China founded or dominates.

Issues with India's participation in China-dominated institutions: China, Russia, and India are common to SCO, BRICS and RIC (Russia-India-China) groups. All these three multilateral organisations have come up in the two decades when both India and China have grown phenomenally.

The common factor in all three forums is the pre-eminence of China and Russia as its loyal follower. This highlights the quality of multilateralism and multilateral institutions India is part of.

This is because, **a)** India is forced to spend so much time and energy, and invest so much political capital, in a grouping where it has so many serious clashes of interest, **b)** On border debates,

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India would be seen as rude to Pakistan as China itself have border disputes with India, **c)** These bodies, the SCO in particular, given its military-strategic priorities, do not help India's quest for strategic autonomy. Instead, they only limit that.

Other regional institutions: Over the decades, India has failed even to build a regional forum of its own to create a sense of geopolitically limited multilateralism. For instance, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been rendered mostly defunct.

Read more: [G20 meet shows a deepening crisis in multilateralism](#)

What should be done to revive India's participation in multilateral institutions?

SAARC should be expanded to include other major nations in the region. Such as, Afghanistan, Thailand, the Central Asian republics, Iran, and Russia.

As an instinctive reaction to Western institutions and governments' and Chinese dominant institutions, India should focus on non-alignment to attain strategic autonomy.

Must read: [India's Approach to Multilateralism – Explained, pointwise](#)

General Studies Paper – 3

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General Studies - 3

1. [Spot The Problems – Deaths of two cheetahs call for thorough expert investigation, not speculation. And space is the key](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Spot The Problems – Deaths of two cheetahs call for thorough expert investigation, not speculation. And space is the key**” published in **The Times of India** on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 3: Environment and Bio-diversity Conservation.

Relevance: About issues in India’s cheetah reintroduction project.

News: Uday is the second cheetah – among the 20 cheetahs that were translocated to Madhya Pradesh’s Kuno National Park (KNP)– has died within a month. This is the second such cheetah death within a month.

About Sasha, Cheetah Reintroduction Project and Kuno National Park

Read here: [Cheetah Sasha dies due to kidney ailment in Madhya Pradesh’s Kuno National Park](#)

What are the challenges in Cheetah conservation?

Space issue: Unlike tigers that stalk prey, cheetahs race to hunt. Thus demanding wide ranges, typically grasslands. India has lost about 90-95% of its grasslands over the last two decades. For instance, a cheetah was tranquilised when seen roaming beyond human-defined borders.

Note: *Kuno is the only national park for cheetahs.*

What should be done?

To save the cheetahs, India should **a)** Focus on conserving and expanding grasslands responsibly. India should also avoid haphazardly planting grasses, which make up a fraction of grasslands’ ecosystem, **b)** Focus on conserving prey species, and **c)** Focus on mechanisms to protect livestock, including compensation for villages that fall in the roaming ranges.

2. [India must prepare its workforce to assume global leadership of AI](#)

Source: The post is based on the following articles

“**Why we can’t ‘pause’ AI**” published in the **Indian Express** on **1st May 2023**.

“**India must prepare its workforce to assume global leadership of AI**” published in the **Livemint** on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Relevance: About Artificial General Intelligence.

News: A letter coordinated by the Future of Life Institute and signed by apparently thousands of scientists, technocrats, businessmen, academics and others called for a six-month pause in the further development of Artificial General Intelligence. The signatories include Elon Musk, Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple and others.

On the other end, [ChatGPT](#) has improved its ability to answer social sciences and humanities subjects much better than answering mathematics problems.

About the letter for pausing the development of Artificial General Intelligence

The central message of the letter is that further unconstrained development of such language models could create “human competitive intelligence” that if not circumscribed by governance protocols could pose a “profound risk” to humanity. Further, AI’s impact on society may be more exponential and will play out in a shorter time span. Therefore, the work should be halted until such protocols are in place.

Read more: [\[Kurukshetra October Summary\] Artificial Intelligence in Agripreneurship \(AI in Agriculture\) – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the counter-arguments against pausing the development of Artificial General Intelligence?

According to some experts,

-Every technological transformation has triggered opposition by vested interests. For Instance, **a)** The industrial adversaries of the early 19th century protested the mechanisation of the knitting loom out of concern for the livelihood of skilled weavers, **b)** Many have cautioned against the adverse impact on jobs, data privacy and individual rights of the digital revolution.

-Technological progress will make the efforts towards sustainable development easier. So, pausing technological development will exacerbate the problem. For instance, technological progress might enable the sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere. Thereby making a transformational step in the journey towards decarbonisation.

-The basic job did not disappear with technology: For example, earlier ‘runners’ were used to deliver mail. Later postman came. Now e-mails are delivered through telecommunication experts. Despite the evolution, the basic job (mail) did not disappear. Instead, it evolved into an avatar which required more skills but less physical work.

Read more: [Significance and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence\(AI\)](#)

What is Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI?

Must Read: [Generative AI \(Artificial Intelligence\): Benefits and Challenges – Explained, pointwise](#) and [\[Yojana June Summary\] Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning – Explained, pointwise](#)

What should be done?

Pausing will not solve the problem: The international community must look beyond narrow interests towards a collaborative effort to address the problems of the global commons, instead of pausing the problem. Such as increasing the availability of cybersecurity experts.

Understanding job evolution and preparing society for Artificial General Intelligence: This is the key to guarding against structural unemployment created by technologies such as ChatGPT.

What India should do to assume global leadership in Artificial General Intelligence?

Amend CSR norms to facilitate upskilling: Companies need to spend massively in upskilling their existing resources to leverage AI. Considering training and upskilling expenses as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending will increase private investment in that area.

Develop intellectual property (IP): India should frame policies to attract AI researchers from global pools.

Academic infrastructure: All school boards and Universities in India need to focus on Science-technology-engineering-mathematics (STEM). This will require a capability-building exercise of re-training relevant teachers for newer ways of teaching.

Apart from this, India should move away from rote learning also. Instead, India needs empathetic creators with a superior grasp of technology.

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3. [Stray dogs and poor waste management](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Stray dogs and poor waste management**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS1- Urbanisation, GS 3 – Human – Wildlife Conflict

Relevance– issue of Stray dogs in urban areas

News– In April, a 65-year-old woman in Srinagar was attacked by street dogs outside her home. A garbage collection point was situated in front of her house.

How does poor solid waste management contribute to dog bites?

The ability of a city to support a species is determined by the availability of food and shelter. Free-ranging dogs, in the absence of these facilities, **are scavengers**. They search around for food, and eventually look for **garbage dumping sites**.

A **population boom** in Indian cities has contributed to a staggering rise in solid waste. Indian cities generate **more than 1,50,000 metric tonnes of urban solid waste every day**.

According to a **United Nations Environment Program 2021 report**, an **estimated 931 million tonnes of food** was wasted in 2019. Indian homes on average generated 50 kg of food waste per person.

This waste often serves as a **source of food** for hungry and free-roaming dogs. They move towards **densely-populated areas** in cities, such as urban slums which are usually located next to garbage dumping sites and landfills.

Urban dogs are believed to have a distinct set of traits as compared to rural dogs. They have learnt to develop **survival techniques** in hostile urban environments.

What are some statistics about stray dog population and dog bites in India?

Cities have witnessed a sharp increase in the **stray dog population**. As per the **official 2019 livestock census**, it stood at **1.5 crore**. However, independent estimates peg the number to be **around 6.2 crore**.

The **number of dog bites** has simultaneously doubled between 2012 and 2020. India has the highest rabies burden in the world. It accounts for a **third of global deaths** caused due to the disease.

How unplanned urbanisation is linked to the stray dogs problem?

In 2015, a study conducted in 10 Indian metro cities found a **strong link** between human population, the amount of municipal and food waste generated, and the number of stray dogs in the cities.

It argued that the **present mode of urbanisation and paradigm of development** promotes urban sprawls, slums, and disparity. With the development of cities, **managing solid waste** has become a daunting challenge. It is aiding the **proliferation of stray dogs**.

There may be a **correlation between urbanisation and solid waste production**. **Weak animal birth control programmes, insufficient rescue centres, and poor waste management**, result in a proliferation of street animals in India.

Most **landfills and dumping sites** are located on the peripheries of cities, next to slums and settlement colonies. Thus, the disproportionate burden of dog bites may also fall on people in urban slums.

A study published in 2016 found that the prevalence of dog bites was **higher in urban slums than rural slums**.

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4. [Economic pact between India and EFTA states will further boost trade, investment](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Economic pact between India and EFTA states will further boost trade, investment**” published in **The Indian Express** on 1st May 2023.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Growth & Development

Relevance: **benefits of Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) for India.**

News: High-level delegations from the European Free Trade Association (**EFTA**) states and India met in New Delhi to consider the possibility of beginning discussions on a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (**TEPA**).

About European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

European Free Trade Association (EFTA) include four countries – **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland**. It is a regional trade organization.

These are small countries. However, their economy is strong enough that makes them the 10th largest merchandise traders and eighth largest services traders worldwide.

Today, **the four nations rank among the highest in the world in** innovation, competitiveness, wealth creation per inhabitant, life expectancy, and quality of life.

EFTA companies are also world leaders in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, machinery manufacturing, R&D-driven technology products, geothermal-related technologies and many more.

EFTA has a track record of negotiating mutually beneficial trade agreements, with a total of 29 free trade agreements (FTAs) with 40 partner nations. Nearly 22 percent of EFTA states’ imports come from these FTA partners.

Therefore, a TEPA between EFTA states and India will benefit both the parties.

How will the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with EFTA states benefit both the parties?

First, The EFTA nations can complement and support India’s economic development and leadership in the development of green technology by fostering trade and investment ties.

A trade agreement would benefit both sides by promoting technology and knowledge transfer, facilitating R&D and innovation, and encouraging business collaboration across different areas. Furthermore, **improved market access for goods will boost India’s export potential to EFTA markets.**

Second, EFTA states have contributed investments of over \$35 billion in India. These investments are done across sectors such as machinery, electrical engineering and metals, etc.

Hence, a trade pact is estimated to increase investments in India.

Third, EFTA and India have a mutually beneficial relationship in skilled labour. **For instance,** the EFTA states gain from the highly skilled Indian workforce in the services sector, while India benefits from over 400 companies established by EFTA states, generating more than 150,000 jobs.

India also consistently ranks first in terms of work permits issued to non-EU citizens in Switzerland.

Therefore, a trade agreement between EFTA and India would increase predictability in the services sector, **creating more business opportunities for skilled Indian service providers.**

Fourth, EFTA states and India can collaborate on green growth. India aims to meet 50 percent of its energy needs with renewables by 2030. Therefore, EFTA states can contribute to India’s green growth aspirations by scaling up projects and cooperation in solar, wind, hydro and geothermal power.

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5. Ration shops as nourishing centres

Source: The post is based on the article “Ration shops as nourishing centres” published in **The Indian Express** on **1st May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Agriculture – Public Distribution System (PDS)

Relevance: measures needed to improve PDS system.

News: The Food Corporation of India (FCI) wheat procurement has crossed 20 million tonnes (MT), a notch higher than last year. However, there are concerns over procurement and production of wheat.

What are the concerns with the procurement and production of wheat?

Procurement: In the beginning of the season, it was estimated that FCI would procure 34 MT of wheat. However, the FCI hopes to procure 25 MT of wheat due to loss caused by unseasonal rains. FCI also relaxed its quality parameters to accommodate lustre loss or shrivelled grain, etc. for procurement.

This amount would be sufficient for FCI's Public Distribution System (PDS) needs and there are also enough rice stocks available with the FCI to substitute wheat, if needs arise.

Production: There has been uncertainty over the wheat production this year due to unseasonal rains. Earlier, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) had estimated 112 MT of wheat production. But after unseasonal rains, the revised estimate is yet to come.

However, despite unseasonal rains, it is estimated that production of wheat this year is higher than last year, especially in Punjab.

In Punjab, **farmers who had done zero tillage and had mulched paddy straw at the time of sowing wheat** through smart happy seeders have not suffered much due to unseasonal rains while others are expecting much lower yields.

Moreover, it is also important to promote nutritious crops in the PDS along with their cultivation, acting as alternative to wheat or rice.

How can PDS be used to offer more nutritious food and support climate-resilient agriculture?

Nutritious Food Hubs (NFHs): At least 10 percent of five lakh odd fair price shops should be declared as Nutritious Food Hubs (NFHs). These **NFHs will have fortified as well as bio-fortified rice and wheat, millets, pulses**, oilseeds, fortified milk and edible oils, eggs, etc.

Further, **the consumers of PDS list may be given electronic vouchers** (like an e-food coupon) that can be charged by the government three or four times a year.

This amount can be loaded on e-vouchers of targeted beneficiaries. It would create a demand for more diversified and nutritious food from the masses.

Climate-resilient agriculture: Rice procurement may be limited by promoting other climate resilient crops in the PDS, starting with those areas where the water table has been drastically decreasing.

Farmers in these areas may be provided incentives to cultivate millets, pulses, oilseeds, and other crops that require less water and fertiliser. **Thus, reducing their reliance on electricity and fertiliser subsidies.**

The Centre and the states need to join hands to give a special package for carbon credits for growing such crops.

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6. Roadmap to energy justice

Source: The post is based on the article “Roadmap to energy justice” published in **The Indian Express** on **2nd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Infrastructure – Energy

Relevance: measures taken by India to cater its rising energy demand.

News: India’s energy demand is growing. **As per the BP energy outlook and IEA estimates**, India will account for approximately 25 percent of global energy demand growth between 2020-2040.

The article discusses India’s position on various energy requirements and measures taken by India to check rising crude prices.

How has India been able to manage the rising prices of crude oil?

Prices of diesel in India have gone down in the last one year at a time when petrol and diesel prices went up by **35-40 per cent in the US, Canada, Spain and the UK**.

India, despite being a major importer of crude oil and natural gas, has been able to control the prices of petrol and diesel.

This was made possible by – a) massive cuts in excise duty and VAT rates by several states, **b) Oil PSUs absorbing huge losses** to ensure that the rising prices of crude oil and natural gas in the international market were not passed on to Indian consumers, **c)** increasing subsidised APM gas for city gas distribution sector, **d) imposing an export cess on petrol, diesel and ATF and windfall tax** on domestically produced petroleum products, **d)** expanding its network of crude oil suppliers to Russia and the US to prevent supply disruptions, **e)** expanding refining capacity, **f)** purchasing petroleum products from certain nations has helped in keeping oil prices in check in the global value chain.

Note: India’s refining capacity is the fourth largest in the world after the US, China, and Russia.

What are other efforts being taken by India for its energy requirements?

Gas based economy: India is accelerating its efforts to move towards a **gas-based economy** by **increasing the share of gas from the current 6.3 percent to 15 percent by 2030**. The number of CNG stations in India has gone up from 938 in 2014 to 4,900 in 2023.

Since 2014, India has also increased the length of its gas pipeline network from 14,700 kms to 22,000 kms in 2023.

Biofuel: India has launched **E20 (20 percent ethanol blended gasoline)** which will be rolled out in 15 cities and expanded across the country in the next two years. India’s ethanol blending gasoline **has grown from 1.53 percent in 2013-14 to 10.17 percent in 2023**.

India is also setting up five second generation ethanol plants, which can convert agricultural waste into biofuel.

Green Hydrogen: The **National Green Hydrogen Mission** has been launched to develop the entire green hydrogen ecosystem in the country and accelerate **India’s efforts towards 4 MT of annual green hydrogen production**. India is poised to realise its full potential to create a green hydrogen ecosystem by 2030.

Electric vehicles: India is supporting electric vehicles through a production linked incentive scheme to make advanced chemistry cells of 50 GW hours and has announced viability gap funding and customs duty exemptions for the sector.

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7. [Labour laws' fairness challenge](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Labour laws' fairness challenge**” published in **Business Standard** on **2nd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Employment

Relevance: concerns associated with amendments made in labour laws by some states.

News: Some states have amended their labour laws and have brought changes.

What are the changes brought by the states in their labour laws?

Karnataka has allowed 12-hour work shifts instead of eight or nine. It has increased overtime from 75 hours to 145 hours in three months, and allowed **women to work in the night shift**. These work hours are, however, capped at 48 hours per week or 4 days a week.

Similar changes in working hours have been brought **by Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh**.

These changes have been brought up on the request of several global contract manufacturing firms.

What are the concerns with these amendments?

The concerns with these amendments are whether these changes **improve labour productivity** and are efficient in creating new jobs **or it leads to worse working conditions and labour exploitation**.

It is argued that the flexibility to institute a 12-hour workday will improve productivity and will make **India competitive with its counterparts in countries like China or Taiwan or Korea**. Some studies have also found that longer hours improve productivity because workers need to settle down in a shift before his/her productivity hits its peak.

However, **a large number of studies have found that a longer number of working hours decreases productivity due to fatigue**.

Newer studies have also suggested that rather than the number of working hours, other factors such as **conditions at work, attribute of labour and work schedule play a much bigger role in increasing productivity**.

Climate change and geographical locations may also affect the productivity of workers.

In terms of labour exploitation, it is hard to argue whether a 12-hour work shift coupled with four days will lead to labour exploitation. However, if the total number of hours per week changes, then it might lead to labour exploitation.

What can be the way ahead?

Factors such as **protections for workers** (wages, hiring and firing practices, insurance, etc.) and **workplace conditions** (safety norms, proper facilities and training etc.) **are more important for workers rather than long working hours**.

These factors should be taken into account **because today factories tend to hire more contract workers**, and often the terms and conditions for these workers are lower than those who are in the company's roles.

Hence, these are the issues that the government should be most worried about, and they should be closely regulated and monitored.

8. [The death of another Nehruvian idea – on closure of Vigyan Prasara](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**The death of another Nehruvian idea**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **2nd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Science and Technology

Relevance: Government policies to promote science and technology

News- An official press release of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) cryptically announced discontinuance of Vigyan Prasara, an autonomous body under its purview.

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What are some facts about Vigyan Prashar?

Vigyan Prasar started functioning in 1989. It was a **Nehruvian idea of science communication and scientific awareness**.

It has been a part of an unbroken chain of **government institutions and policies** for promoting **scientific temper** since 1947.

Vigyan Prasar prepared content on scientific temper and disseminated it widely via radio and TV in the 1990s.

It also commissioned filmmakers to produce documentaries about leading scientists, the history of science and similar subjects.

One notable outreach project was **ECLIPSE-95**. It was a year-long programme to generate awareness and create safe viewing opportunities of the total solar eclipse of 1995.

What were the steps taken by the government to improve science communication and scientific awareness?

For Jawaharlal Nehru, science and technology were essential for **nation-building projects**. This was reflected in the creation of national laboratories, higher education institutions, large dams, and so on.

To fight irrationality, Nehru supported a scheme to open '**Vigyan Mandirs**'. These science centres popularised scientific ideas in rural populations.

In the 1960s, **science communication** through **All India Radio** and '**Krishi Vigyan Kendras**' played an important role in the adoption of new, high-yielding crop varieties. It powered the **Green Revolution**.

The DST formed an agency to **promote public debate** on science and technology to tackle superstitious beliefs. It was the **National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC)** established in 1982.

It supported several **voluntary groups and grassroots science movements**. One of its major contributions was the '**Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha**' (BJVJ) movement. It gave birth to a network of voluntary organisations. This took the shape of the **All India People's Science Network**.

All these events culminated in the idea of a **national institute of science and technology communication**. This was **Vigyan Prasar**.

What were the issues faced by Vigyan Prashar in recent times?

Vigyan Prasar deviated from its **original mandate**. New projects were launched without **adequate preparation and coordination**.

The agency started 'DD Science' in collaboration with Doordarshan as a one-hour daily programme for science, but it started rehashing documentaries telecast earlier.

This was followed by an **OTT channel called 'IndiaScience.in**. But The OTT science channel converted into a political message **platform**. It covered routine events such as the Prime Minister's Republic Day speech and 'Pariksha Pe Charcha'.

9. [The de-dollarisation debate](#)

Source: The post is based on the article "**The de-dollarisation debate**" published in the **Business Standard** on **2nd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Relevance: About the de-dollarisation debate.

News: There are evidences that countries are trying to break away from the USD through de-dollarisation.

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How dominant is US Dollar in global trade?

While the US accounts for about 25% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), its true economic power is driven by global dependence on the USD. For example,

a) The USD accounts for approximately 90% of all Forex transactions. That means that the dollar was on one side or the other in nine out of 10 global foreign exchange transactions, **b)** The dollar also accounts for 85 per cent of all currency forward and swap markets, **c)** Almost half of all cross-border loans and international debt securities are also denominated in USD. This is despite the fact that non-US entities are the borrower/issuer in 88% of all international debt issuance, **d)** The dollar is also used for about 50% of all trade invoicing despite the US only accounting for about 12% of global trade and **e)** The USD comprise 60% of global Forex reserves.

Note: Most central banks do not have more than 10% of gold in their Forex mix (except Russia and Turkey). This is because it provides no yield, and if all major central banks tried to boost their gold holdings, it would have a serious price impact.

What is de-dollarisation, what are the global efforts towards the De-dollarisation of trade, and How is India pursuing the de-dollarisation of trade?

Must read: [De-dollarisation of trade: Opportunities and challenges – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the negative impacts of de-dollarisation?

Not easy to de-dollarise: The top 20 countries ranked by quantum of Forex reserves, except for China/Hong Kong, the rest are political allies of the US or have some form of cooperation. Hence, the only countries that may try to move away from the USD would be China, HK and Saudi Arabia.

Of these, HK and Saudi Arabia run a USD peg of their own currencies, and thus cannot move away from dollar easily.

Read here: [The possible implications of de-dollarisation of global trade](#)

Hence, the USD is unlikely to lose the reserve currency status.

10. [How should humans respond to advancing artificial intelligence?](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**How should humans respond to advancing artificial intelligence?**” published in the **Livemint** on **2nd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Relevance: About the concerns of AI.

News: Within months of [ChatGPT](#)’s launch, besides its mass adoption, there are intense documentation of its superhuman uses.

What is Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI?

Must Read: [Generative AI \(Artificial Intelligence\): Benefits and Challenges – Explained, pointwise](#) and [\[Yojana June Summary\] Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning – Explained, pointwise](#)

How ChatGPT has evolved so far?

–The AI has breached the ability of humans to skim through thousands of written words to produce an original formulation. Now it is performing market analysis, decryption of ‘Fedspeak’ and sentiment analysis to book summaries, financial planning, website building, economics research, etc.

–Words, music and art are all made by humans and learnt by AI. Now, the AI also have a winning entry in the Sony world photography contest.

Thereby promoting it as a quick-fix panacea to various problems.

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Read more: [India must prepare its workforce to assume global leadership of AI](#)

What will be the potential concerns of AI's rapid development?

The use of machines freed humans to pursue more 'thoughtful' ideas. But that is associated with some potential consequences such as,

a) AI can decide for itself and self-propagate, which can lead to catastrophic consequences in the absence of judgment, **b)** Rapid development of AI might lead to the absence of a human creativity-facilitative ecosystem. Thereby, AI will be learning from AI to decide what is good for humans, **c)** Humans and accountability have an interesting relationship. But AI does not have such connection. For instance, to "improve firm profitability" instruction, the AI sub-tasks the termination of 50 employees, **d)** Apart from that, the AI is also opaque and data-corruptible, and **e)** The AI itself answered that "lack of creativity and intuition", and "ethical concerns" are the key disadvantages of AI.

Overall, AI is a great tool so long as humans with a conscience are its master. Further, Universal basic income will have to become a reality as some jobs turn obsolete due to the intervention of AI.

11. [Nuh Place, Old Tricks – A Haryana district is the latest cybercrime hotspot. This threat is set to grow as digital transition accelerates](#)

Source: The post is based on the article "Nuh Place, Old Tricks – A Haryana district is the latest cybercrime hotspot. This threat is set to grow as digital transition accelerates" published in **The Times of India** on **2nd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – basics of cyber security.

Relevance: About cybercrime attacks in India.

News: Recently, over 5,000 policemen raided 300 locations in 14 villages in search of hackers in Nuh district, Haryana. Though the police made multiple arrests, many of them were school dropouts, they are still searching for the mastermind.

Note: Nuh's geographical location helped it to become a base of operations because "black spots" make it difficult to trace calls.

Must read: [Cyber attacks and Cyber Security in India – Explained Pointwise](#)

About cybercrime attacks in recent times

Cybercrime attacks in the world: In 2022, Interpol surveyed police forces among its member states to publish the first-ever global report on crime trends.

-Police forces across countries identified financial and cybercrime as among the world's leading crime threats.

-In particular, phishing and online scams were rated as high or very high threats.

Cybercrime attacks in India: The government's cybercrime portal receives over 3,500 complaints a day. This is a gross underestimate as not all victims know how to file a complaint or even want to file one.

In India, phishing and dubious online platforms offering financial products are the most potent threats.

Read more: [Cybercrime went up by 500% during pandemic: Chief of Defence Staff](#)

What are the challenges in restricting Cybercrime attacks?

a) Digital business models offer convenience for cyber attacks, **b)** India's huge mobile phone user base made it easier to perpetrate crimes on a large scale from geographically distant locations, **c)** Regulators are often playing catch-up. For instance, the centre and RBI have cracked down

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on dubious online loan apps only after they mushroomed, **d)** India's chronic underemployment problem creates conditions for young people to try and make money by digital fraud.

Must read: [Cyber Attacks in India and Institutional arrangements for Cybersecurity](#)

What should be done?

Regulators and states need to invest far more in enhancing financial awareness to help people be vigilant. Jobs and smart policing are the answer.

12. [Why are Blinkit workers protesting?](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Why are Blinkit workers protesting?**” published in **The Hindu** on **3rd May 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 3 – Growth, Development and employment**

Relevance: **concern associated with gig workers**

News: The strike by Blinkit delivery agents has highlighted the situation of gig workers India. The article discusses the issues concerning gig workers.

Who is a gig worker?

[Click Here to Read](#)

What is the problem with the recognition of gig workers?

In India, **employees are entitled to benefits under the** Minimum Wages Act, 1948, Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 (EPFA), and the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965.

Similarly, **contract laborers are governed under the** Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, and are also entitled to benefits such as provident funds.

However, **gig workers exhibit characteristics of both employees and independent contractors, and thus do not clearly fit into any rigid categorization.**

To resolve the issue of categorization, the Ministry of Labour and Employment introduced the **Code on Social Security, 2020**, which brings gig workers within the ambit of labor laws for the first time.

What is the proposed law of Code on Social Security, 2020?

Under section 2(35) of the Code on Social Security, 2020, a 'gig worker' is defined as 'a person who performs work in a work arrangement and earns from such activities outside of a traditional employer-employee relationship'.

The Code guides the central and state governments to frame suitable social security schemes for gig workers on matters relating to health and maternity benefits, provident funds and accident benefits among others.

The Code also mandates the compulsory registration of all gig workers and platform workers to avail themselves of the benefits under these schemes.

What are some of the concerns with the proposed law?

Gig work finds reference only in the Code on Social Security out of the four new labour codes proposed. **This keeps gig workers excluded from benefits and protections offered** by other Codes such as minimum wage, occupational safety etc.

They also **cannot create legally recognised unions and remain excluded from accessing the redressal mechanism under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947.**

Gig workers do not have the right to collective bargaining which is a fundamental principle of modern labour law.

Moreover, despite receiving the assent of the President, the Labour Codes are still awaiting implementation due to the delay in framing of rules by the States.

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What has been the stand of the court on the issue of gig workers?

A PIL was filed in the Supreme Court that demanded gig workers be declared as ‘unorganised workers’.

Thus, allowing them to come under the purview of the **Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act, 2008 (UWSS Act)** and be provided with statutory protection in the form of social security benefits.

The petitioner argued that the exclusion of ‘wage workers’ under Sections 2(m) and 2(n) of the UWSS Act is **violating their fundamental rights under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution** and **denying social benefits amounts to exploitation through forced labour, within the meaning of Article 23.**

The Supreme Court sought response from the Centre regarding the issue in December 2021. However, the Centre has not yet responded.

13. India’s gas policy has protected the consumer from global price volatility

Source- The post is based on the article “India’s gas policy has protected the consumer from global price volatility” published in “The Indian Express” on 3rd May 2023.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Energy

News- The article explains the recently introduced APM pricing reforms.

What are the major goals of these reforms?

First, to protect Indians from extreme price volatility and to provide clarity for planned capex investments in gas-based sectors.

Second, to promote more innovation and investments in exploration and production (E&P).

What were the issues with the Domestic Gas Pricing Guidelines, 2014?

It determined APM prices based on the **volume-weighted average price** of gas at **four international hubs**. The transmission of these prices came with a **significant time lag** of 6 to 9 months. It contained **high volatility**.

For instance, the APM price between October 2020 and September 2021 remained at \$1.79/MMBTU. It was below the marginal cost of production of \$3.5/MMBTU for nomination fields.

However, the same APM prices jumped to \$8.57/MMBTU in October 2022 due to a 400% price surge in international hub prices after the Russia-Ukraine crisis. It brought **tremendous distress** to the fertiliser, power and city gas distribution (CGD) sectors.

What are some facts about the APM pricing reforms and its associated benefits?

After the APM reforms, the **average cost of cooking fuel** for households has been reduced by about 10%. CNG vehicle owners have seen a 6-7% reduction in prices. There will be the **reduction in fertiliser subsidies**, expected to be more than Rs 2,000 crore each year.

These reforms will also help **incentivise investment in the E&P sector** by providing a floor price for mature fields of nomination. It will also incentivise new wells of nomination fields which will receive 20% higher prices.

The **ceiling on production from ONGC and OIL** will remain the same for the first two years. It will then increase by \$0.25/MMBTU every year, to adjust for any cost inflation.

The reforms will not impact private operators of **New Exploration Licensing Policy fields or High Pressure, High Temperature (HP-HT) fields**. They will continue to have **marketing and pricing freedom**.

What are arguments against the criticism of APM price reforms?

Domestic consumers would have benefitted from the **recent decrease in the US-based Henry Hub prices and Russian gas prices** without these reforms.

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But, current prices would have **impacted APM prices** only in the next pricing cycle of October 2023-March 2024. The recent change in formula ensures that the benefit to the consumers is passed on **without a time lag** as the price will now be determined on a **monthly rather than half-yearly basis**.

Some critics say that current high wellhead prices for domestic gas ensure a continued high price for LNG exports to India except for Qatar LNG. But, domestic gas prices have nothing to do with long-term LNG contracts or even spot purchases of LNG.

What are steps taken by the government for development of the gas sector?

India is aggressively **expanding infrastructure for oil and gas operations**. It is executing policy reforms to **balance the interests of both consumers and producers**.

Since 2014, India has increased the length of its **gas pipeline network** from 14,700 km to 22,000 km in 2023.

The **number of domestic connections** has increased from 22.28 lakh in 2014 to over 1.03 crore in 2023.

The number of **CGD-covered districts** in India has increased from 66 in 2014 to 630 in 2023 while CNG stations have gone up from 938 in 2014 to 5,283 in 2023.

India's **LNG terminal regasification capacity** has increased from 21.7 MTPA in 2014 to 42.7 MTPA in 2023, with another 20 MTPA capacity under construction.

14. [Outlawing India's tech tariffs](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Outlawing India's tech tariffs**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **3rd May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy – International Trade

News- World Trade Organization dispute settlement panels have found India's tariffs on certain information and communication technology products such as mobile phones inconsistent with India's WTO obligations.

What are WTO provisions regarding the imposing of tariffs by countries?

WTO member countries are under a **legal obligation** not to impose tariff rates more than their maximum tariff rates committed in their **Goods Schedule**. The **Goods Schedules** are based on the **World Customs Organization's classification system**.

World Customs Organization's classification system catalogues traded products with specific names and numbers. This is also known as the **Harmonized System of Nomenclature (HSN)**. Due to the continuous emergence of new products owing to technological innovations, the HSN system is **regularly updated** to reflect new products. It is known as ‘**transposition**’.

What is the reasoning by the panel on arguments represented by India in its favour?

First, India argued that its binding tariff commitments on ICT products are contained in the **WTO Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products (ITA Agreement)**.

The ITA Agreement is an arrangement through which select WTO member countries agree to **eliminate duties on IT products**.

However, as per the panel, Commitments under the ITA **become binding** on a country under **Articles II of GATT** only if they are incorporated in the **Goods Schedule**. India's Goods Schedule, not the ITA, is the source of India's **legal obligations on tariffs**, including on products covered by the ITA.

Second, India argued that an error was committed during the **transposition of its Goods Schedule** from the **HSN 2002 edition to the HSN 2007 edition**. Therefore, an error in a treaty would **invalidate a state's consent, as per Article 48 of the Vienna Convention on Law of Treaties**.

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However, WTO has also denied accepting this argument based on few technicalities.

What are the options for India?

It is unlikely that India **will comply**. Compliance would remove the **high protective tariff** imposed by India to boost domestic manufacturing of ICT products.

India is likely to appeal against the panel ruling. However, the **Appellate Body** that hears appeals has ceased to exist since 2019 because the United States has been **blocking the appointment** of the body's members.

Thus, India's appeal will **go into the void**. Legally, India will not be required to comply with the panel rulings till the time its appeal is heard.

What are options before the EU?

Under the WTO law, the EU cannot **cannot impose sanctions**. The WTO law does not allow countries to impose trade sanctions when an **appeal is pending**. **Retaliatory action** in the form of trade sanctions can be imposed only after the **authorisation of the Dispute Settlement Body**.

The EU and a few other WTO member countries have created an **alternative appellate mechanism** — the **Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA)**. However, India is not a party to this and will not use it to resolve this dispute.

15. [De-dollarisation: the race to attain the status of global reserve currency](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**De-dollarisation: the race to attain the status of global reserve currency**” published in **The Hindu** on **3rd May 2023**

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Relevance: About the de-dollarisation debate.

News: There are evidences that countries are trying to break away from the USD through de-dollarisation.

How dominant is US Dollar in global trade?

The majority of international transactions are carried out in the U.S. dollar. These transactions are cleared by American banks, which gives the U.S. government significant power to oversee and control these transactions.

Since USD is a fiat currency of the US which enjoys reserve currency status, it gives the US the power to purchase goods and other assets from the rest of the world by simply creating fresh currency.

Read more: [The de-dollarisation debate](#)

What is de-dollarisation, what are the global efforts towards the De-dollarisation of trade, and How is India pursuing the de-dollarisation of trade?

Must read: [De-dollarisation of trade: Opportunities and challenges – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the negative impacts of de-dollarisation?

Not easy to de-dollarise: Other currencies that tried to compete against the U.S. dollar are not popular and face challenges in carrying out international transactions.

For example, the recent attempt by India and Russia to carry out trade between the two countries in Indian rupees rather than in U.S. dollars has hit a roadblock. This is because the value of India's imports from Russia far outweighs its exports to the country.

This left Russia with excess rupees in hand. But with that rupee, Russia was unwilling to spend on Indian goods or assets. So, now Russian demands for the settlement of bilateral trade in U.S. dollars. Instead of rupee.

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Read here: [The possible implications of de-dollarisation of global trade](#)

Can the Chinese Yuan replace the US Dollar?

The U.S. has been running a persistent trade deficit for decades now. The excess dollars that other countries accumulate due to the U.S.'s trade deficit has been invested back in U.S. assets such as in debt securities issued by the US government.

The major reason for such investment is due to **a)** The high level of trust among global investors in the U.S. financial markets, and **b)** the 'rule of law' in the U.S.

Note: *The last time the U.S. ran a trade surplus was way back in 1975.*

Currently, the Chinese yuan is seen as the primary alternative to the USD owing to China's rising economic power. However, restrictions placed by the Chinese government on foreign access to China's financial markets and doubts over the 'rule of law' in China have adversely affected global demand for the yuan.

16. The financial inclusion of women is set for a tech leap

Source: The post is based on the article "**The financial inclusion of women is set for a tech leap**" published in the **Livemint** on **3rd May 2023**

Syllabus: GS 3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Relevance: About the financial inclusion of women.

News: 56% of all these new bank accounts opened under [Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana \(PMJDY\)](#) are owned by women. This highlights the remarkable financial inclusion of women.

What are the findings of analysis of women's bank accounts under PMJDY?

According to a report by Women's World Banking, **a)** most women only access their PMJDY accounts to withdraw the benefit transfers that they receive in them from the various government initiatives that they are eligible for, **b)** most of them do not use these accounts for savings, to build a credit history, or avail of any financial products such as insurance and loans.

This highlights the need for women to actively engage in the formal financial industry.

Read more: [About improving financial inclusion: Breaking barriers, building inclusion](#)

What are the challenges faced by women while entering the formal financial industry?

-Most women tend to work and shop within a four-kilometre radius of their homes. This means the majority of the industries are beyond the reach of most women, particularly in the rural hinterland.

-Women tend to have concerns around privacy and confidentiality and as a result, they hesitate to discuss personal financial matters with strangers.

-Even though women tend to live longer, they have higher medical expenses. This renders traditional retirement planning poorly suited to the needs of the average woman.

Read more: [Financial inclusion is integral to holistic development](#)

What can be done to facilitate women's participation in the formal financial industry?

Promote the use of digital payments among women: This will reduce physical and financial risks for women associated with travelling to the bank branch. Thereby, reducing the time and effort required to manage their finances. Further, they offer a level of privacy, confidentiality and a sense of control over women's financial information.

Design dedicated services to address the needs of women: A private research has found that the women-specific financial services industry is worth roughly \$700 billion. This represents roughly 5-20% of the total revenue of the industry. This amount far exceeds the annual revenue of most of the world's leading financial institutions.

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So, fintech firms and financial institutions need to make a concerted effort to address the challenges faced by women while using formal finances. They need to bring a gendered approach in each stage of the product delivery cycle to make sure that they are serving the genuine concerns around limited mobility and access to information.

Nurture the ecosystem of business correspondents in rural areas: To ensure women have digital and financial capabilities, India should nurture the ecosystem of business correspondents in rural areas. The correspondents should offer a broader range of services than just plain banking. Such as overdrafts for emergencies, micro-insurance, micro-pension and other similar products.

17. [India's CAG writes: Blueprint for a blue economy](#)

Source- The post is based on the article **“India's CAG writes: Blueprint for a blue economy”** published in **“The Indian Express”** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Economy. GS1- Geography

Relevance: Blue economy

News- The Comptroller & Auditor General of India will chair SAI20, the Engagement Group for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) of G20 countries in Goa in June. Two priority areas have been selected for SAI20 deliberations — blue economy and responsible Artificial Intelligence.

What is the recent contribution of the UN for the blue economy?

In 2018, the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** had for the first time laid out the **Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles**. It is a framework that investors can use to fund **ocean-based industries**.

Financiers can use it as a reference point to see how marine investment can impact **livelihood and poverty eradication**.

What are issues with measurement of the blue economy?

The blue economy encompasses an **array of coastal activities**, including fishing and tourism. The measurement of the blue economy is challenging due to **conflicting definitions** and issues related to **classifying different sectors and sub-sectors**.

Existing international economic classifications are unable to **properly differentiate** between land-based and ocean-based activities. Even the **System of National Accounts (NAS)** does not provide a clear understanding of the blue economy.

A **new accounting framework** is needed that can objectively **identify production, trade, and services** related to the various segments of the blue economy.

What are the contributions of CAG towards the blue economy?

Last year, the CAG released the **first-ever country-wide Compendium of Asset Accounts of Natural Resources**. It is prepared in line with the **UN system of Environmental and Economic Accounts**.

Setting compliance standards and a **national accounting framework for the blue economy** is a long-term priority for the CAG.

In August last year, the CAG tabled its **Conservation of Coastal Ecosystem report** in Parliament. It contained its observations on how the **Coastal Regulation Zone notification** for 2011 and 2019 have been implemented between 2015 and 2019.

It looked at the **underlining efficiency** of development drivers such as project clearances, construction activity, institutional capacity to curb land and forest violations, community livelihood support mechanisms, and mitigation management plans to conserve biodiversity such as mangroves.

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What are challenges for the coastal ecosystem in India?

Sea-level rise, water temperature, storm surges and wave conditions are some of the signs of climate change. Unbridled **land use changes, sand mining and deforestation** has impacted the coastal ecosystem.

Studies indicate that **hazards of cyclones and sea-level rise** are likely to be higher in the coastal regions.

GIS maps from the European Space Agency indicate that 15% of India's coastal areas have witnessed changes between 1992 and 2018 due to agriculture, depleting forest cover and urbanisation.

Besides that, the population living along the country's coastal areas is expected to **rise from 64 million in 2000 to 216 million by 2060.**

What is the importance of the blue economy for India?

Blue economy has been marked by the government as **one of the 10 core sectors** for national growth. The **National Blue Economy Policy** aims to harness maritime resources while preserving the country's rich marine biodiversity.

What is the way forward for proper management of coastal areas for disasters?

Disaster-resilient infrastructure along coasts that can withstand the impacts of hurricanes, typhoons, and tsunamis is the need of the hour. This is particularly important for coastal communities.

There is a need for **adequate infrastructure, especially ICT hubs for early warning systems.**

[18. Maoist challenge needs political understanding, not over reliance on security](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Maoist challenge needs political understanding, not over reliance on security**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **3rd May 2023.**

Syllabus: GS3- Security

Relevance– Maoism

News– The article is a critical review of the editorial ‘**Maoist reminder**’ in Indian Express. The article talks about the use of more security forces and development in areas impacted by Maoism to tackle Maoism.

Is the use of more force enough to tackle the challenge of Maoism?

State forces claim that Maoist presence is declining and the **use of more force** will finish its influence. This includes specially-trained forces such as the **Greyhounds and extra-judicial experiments** involving civilians such as the Salwa Judum,

The use of more force only helped the Maoists **recruit from the local tribal population.** The Maoist movement moved from the leadership of outsiders to that of local tribals. It often led to **local support** among the tribals in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

The efficacy of the movement needs to be gauged in terms of its **declining social base**, not based on how many violent incidents occur. The **wrong assessment** could also lead to lapses on the part of the security forces.

Is the narrative of development to tackle Maoism a right strategy?

Some people advocate the role of **state reach, governance, welfare and development** to make the Maoists irrelevant. It borrows from the **dominant narrative of development.**

The **D Bandyopadhyay Committee**, set up by the Planning Commission in 2006, stated in its report that **land alienation and poverty** among Scheduled Tribes and Dalits, and **lack of access to basic forest resources** contributed to the growth of Naxalism.

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The **state's model of development** has resulted in the displacement of tribals. The **adverse impact of "development"** also led to peaceful protests such as the **Pathalgarhi movement** in Jharkhand, where the tribals proclaimed sovereignty over resources.

Most governments, irrespective of the political party in power, have a similar approach of imposing a **certain idea of development** that may not be liked by tribals.

The problem gets further complicated because the Maoists do not have solutions to the **new aspirations and generational shifts**. Sections of tribals desire **modern development**, including access to modern infrastructure, roads, transport, schools and hospitals.

Development being seen as a **zero-sum game** by either side leads to a stalemate.

What should be the strategy for managing the threat of Maoism?

The **social question of exclusion** cannot be understood either through the **securitisation paradigm** or through a singular focus on violence and overthrow of state power.

There is a need to address **multiple and sometimes contradictory demands of subaltern groups** that cannot be brought together under a **single idea of development or even welfare**.

19. Go First files for voluntary insolvency: What led to the crisis?

Source– The post is based on the article **"Go First files for voluntary insolvency: What led to the crisis?"** published in **"The Indian Express"** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Economy

News– Go Airlines (India) Ltd (Go First), is filing for voluntary insolvency proceedings with the National Company Law Tribunal.

What has Go First said?

The airline said it was forced to apply to the NCLT after the increasing number of **failing engines supplied by Pratt & Whitney's International Aero Engines**. It led to the grounding of 25 aircraft, and major financial stress.

Go First said P&W had failed to meet **contractual obligations** and refused to comply with an **arbitration award** from the **Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC)**.

According to the airline, SIAC had directed P&W to dispatch spare leased engines per month. But it did not comply.

How has Pratt & Whitney responded?

P&W denied Go First's allegations. It said that the airline has a lengthy history of missing its **financial obligations** to P&W. It denied Go First's allegation that it was not complying with **SIAC's directions**.

Which creditors have exposure to Go First, and how much?

Go First has told NCLT that it owes Rs 6,521 crore to **financial creditors**. It has informed the NCLT that given its current financial position, defaults are imminent.

It has already defaulted on payments to **operational creditors**, including Rs 1,202 crore to vendors and Rs 2,660 crore to aircraft lessors.

According to the Reuters report, the NCLT filing lists public sector lenders Central Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, and IDBI Bank, and private sector players Axis Bank and Deutsche Bank among Go First's financial creditors.

Go First had also borrowed Rs 1,292 crore under the **government's Emergency Credit Scheme**. Its **total liabilities** to all creditors are Rs 11,463 crore.

How will this episode impact the creditors and lessors?

Operational creditors will likely be affected more by Go First's bankruptcy than **financial creditors**. Financial creditors are accorded a **higher priority** than operational creditors under the IBC.

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It would have **extreme ramifications for lessors and financiers** whose aircraft are currently in the possession of the Go First.

Upon admission of an application for the corporate insolvency resolution process, a **complete moratorium** comes into play. It prohibits **recovery of any property** by an owner or lessor where such property is in the possession of the corporate debtor.

Any **lease agreements** on the date of admission of the application may also be impacted by the moratorium.

What does this mean for Go First's competitors?

Go First absence from the skies could **create an opportunity** for other domestic carriers.

In March, Go First's **domestic market share by passengers** carried for the Jan-Mar quarter was 7.8%. For Jan-Mar, Go First was the **third largest domestic airline** by market share. It carried almost 9 lakh fliers in March.

If Go First does not return to the skies soon, its passenger load and market share will be available for other players in the **civil aviation market**.

How will passengers be impacted?

Fares are already high due to **resurgent air travel**. Go First's insolvency will likely raise them further, at least in the immediate-to-near term. Other carriers are unlikely to be able to **immediately deploy additional capacity** to completely fill the demand.

Some **additional capacity deployment and network adjustments** by other carriers is expected **almost immediately**. But, these are **unlikely to fully offset** the impact of Go First's absence.

[20. India Has Lithium. But Who'll End Up Benefiting From It?](#)

Source: The post is based on the article "**India Has Lithium. But Who'll End Up Benefiting From It?**" published in **The Times of India** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 3 – Issues Related to Mobilization of Resources**

Relevance: **concerns associated with inferred lithium.**

News: The Geological Survey of India has inferred **lithium resources** of 5.9 million tonnes in Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir.

This might help in establishing domestic manufacturing industry of lithium batteries in India. However, there are also concerns associated with it.

What are the concerns with the finding of inferred lithium?

Overall global demand for minerals which help in green transition has increased. This includes minerals like lithium, nickel, cobalt including Rare Earth Elements.

Today, developed countries are looking for various routes including certain provisions in their trade agreements in order to secure the supplies of these scarce minerals.

Therefore, **India should also expect to face such demands in the FTA negotiation with the EU and the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Partnership Framework** for Prosperity (IPEF).

Why are developed countries looking to secure the supplies of scarce minerals?

First, developed countries want to ensure that resource-rich developing countries remain exporters of primary commodities and they do not get involved themselves into downstream processing activities. **This would eliminate competition from developing countries.**

Second, trade agreements also make natural resources available to the developed countries **at relatively lower prices.**

These two objectives are achieved through FTA commitments by prohibiting FTA partner countries from imposing export restrictions.

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Why do developed nations forbid FTA partners from putting export restrictions, and what are the concerns with certain FTA provisions?

Export restrictions: Export restrictions allow developing nations to increase domestic availability of natural resources for downstream processing rather than exporting them to the developed countries.

Therefore, if trade agreements forbid developing nations from imposing export restrictions, such as export taxes, then they would be forced to stay at the end of the value chain and only export raw materials.

Foreign Trade Agreements (FTA): One set of provisions commits FTA partners to open up their mining sector and treat foreign companies from other FTA partners on par with their domestic companies.

Further, **environment-related provisions in EU's FTAs require FTA partners** to establish high standards of environmental protection for mining operations, promote the values of responsible sourcing and mining, etc.

Hence, such kinds of provision in FTAs would benefit developed countries to get access to minerals of the developing countries.

This is because mining firms based in developed countries have access to the latest technology and would be able to comply with high standards of environmental protection than mining firms of the developing countries.

Thus, **environmental conditionalities contained in FTAs could give advantages for firms from developed countries to explore and exploit the natural resources in developing countries.**

What can be the way ahead?

Resources led the way for colonization in the past. This means that the rich countries today, instead of fighting, might adopt other means of controlling the developed countries.

It also presents concerns over acquiring data and digital sequencing information (DSI) of genetic material in the arena of biotechnology.

Hence, **India as the voice of the Global South, should take up this issue forcefully and prevent a tragic repeat of history.**

21. India's growth rate: Aiming for the high road

Source: The post is based on the article **"Aiming for the high road"** published in the **Business Standard** on **4th May 2023**.

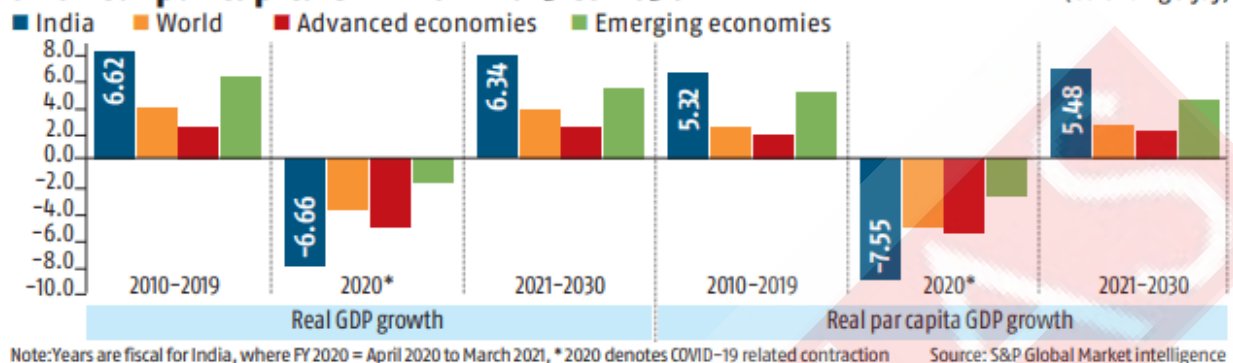
Syllabus: GS – 3: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Relevance: About India's growth rate.

News: The investors who put substantial capital into China in its early growth phase are finding similar patterns mirrored in India that encourage their investment. These investors are looking to limit or reduce new investments in China and invest such funds in emerging markets such as India.

What are the challenges affecting India's growth rate?

India will continue to outpace global average growth rates of real GDP and real per capita GDP from 2023 to 2030



Source: Business Standard

The issue with government spending: India has lost opportunities and made misplaced choices with **growth coming from government spending**. Instead of focusing on structural changes to provide lower-cost infrastructure and efficient governance, the government chose corporate tax cuts.

This has led to **a)** a constrained, uncompetitive private sector hindered by disabling regulations, **b)** inadequate and unreliable infrastructure, **c)** limited capital access, **d)** tariff barriers, **e)** an inappropriate and ineffective educational approach for employability and improving skills, and **f)** impoverishment among much of the population.

Project delays and rapid deterioration of roads: Infrastructure project delays as of March 2023 were reportedly the highest since 2004. These include nearly 57% of projects over ~150 crores. Thus resulting in a cost escalation of over 20%, amounting to half this year's capital expenditure budget.

Heavy rains aggravate the problem of the deterioration of roads. Countries with equally severe weather variations build and maintain better roads.

What should be done to improve India's growth rate?

India's policy towards logistics and digital transformation has started yielding results. Despite the drawbacks, India is still in a sweet spot because of its economic resilience, momentum, favourable demographics and improving productivity. India should utilise these better. Such as, -India should begin with policies that **a)** provide a reliable infrastructure that is affordable, **b)** improve capital access, and **c)** eliminate "tax terrorism".

-India should enable more people, including more women and young people, to participate and contribute to the economy.

-The government should also assure a sense of security with law and order for private firms, enhance access to meaningful education and skill building, make deep changes to make "extensive" agriculture into an intensive, informed approach.

-Facilitate productivity revolution: If people got access to fast, reliable 4G-level connectivity countrywide, then, there would likely be a productivity revolution. Widespread fibre-to-the-home is unrealistic because of the cost. So, India needs enabling policies for these. India should also build shared neutral host networks (NHNs), which are the most efficient, and reduces active sharing by operators costs 70% less per user.

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22. [Real risk of AI – Goes beyond adapting to evolving technologies](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Real risk of AI – Goes beyond adapting to evolving technologies**” published in the **Business Standard** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Relevance: About the concerns of AI.

News: Within months of **ChatGPT**’s launch, besides its mass adoption, there is intense documentation of its superhuman uses. On the other hand, Geoffrey Hinton, nicknamed “the Godfather of AI”, recently ended his decadelong stint at Google, citing concern over the future of generative AIs. He said that he was worried that generative AI services would lead to the dissemination of fake information, photos, and videos across the internet.

What is Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI?

Must Read: [Generative AI \(Artificial Intelligence\): Benefits and Challenges – Explained, pointwise](#) and [\[Yojana June Summary\] Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning – Explained, pointwise](#)

What will be the potential concerns of AI’s rapid development?

Language is the very foundation of human culture and history. Most jobs are rooted in the use of language. In the case of TV and film writers, they try to translate an entire time-space (recreate the speaking patterns, language usage, and mannerisms of personalities from the era they want) on to the screen.

Generative AIs work with human language — verbal, visual, and auditory. Generative AIs have shown a remarkable capability to replicate not just the form but these textual layers as well.

As the code for these AIs becomes more accurate and proficient in learning the very core of human culture, they would absorb biases, phobias, and layers of cultural history. They first categorise and then deploy these with mathematical precision. So, the world needs to beware of the non-human writer of human histories.

Read here: [How should humans respond to advancing artificial intelligence?](#)

23. [Does nuclear power have a role in our climate change strategy](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Does nuclear power have a role in our climate change strategy?**” published in the **Livemint** on **4th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 3: Energy.

Relevance: About developing nuclear energy.

News: The threat of climate change has prompted much-needed action to expand capacity in renewable energy (RE) generation. This includes not only wind and solar but also from nuclear.

What is Nuclear Energy, and What is the scenario of Nuclear Energy in India?

Must Read: [Nuclear Energy: Status, Advantages and Concerns – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the advantages of nuclear power?

a) It neither emits CO₂ nor creates air pollution, **b)** Unlike other RE which is intermittent, presenting challenges for grid management, nuclear power provides a steady supply.

What are the challenges in developing nuclear energy?

Firstly, **safety and high costs** are one of the big concerns. For instance,

-The Central Electricity Authority recently estimated the capital cost of nuclear power plants at 2.5 times that of coal-based plants.

Note: *Coal-based power appears relatively cheaper if one disregards its high social costs on account of CO₂ emissions and also air pollution. The International Monetary Fund recommends a*

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minimum of \$25 per tonne CO₂ tax. This would raise the costs of coal-based power in India by at least 50%.

–Introducing storage batteries at grid scale would at least double the cost of RE in the foreseeable future. The storage costs will decline as grid-scale batteries get cheaper.

Secondly, nuclear power stations in India **can only be run by public sector undertakings (PSUs)**. This gives Nuclear Power Corp of India Ltd (NPCIL) a monopoly and its record on meeting targets is poor.

Read more: [Should India consider phasing out nuclear power?](#)

What should be done to develop nuclear energy?

Increase the target: The UK, South Korea and even Japan—the site of the 2011 Fukushima accident—are planning to increase the share of nuclear power in their electricity mix. China is targeting a 10% share of nuclear power in its energy mix by 2035. So, India should scale up nuclear power beyond its current 3% share (6.8GW today) of total electricity in India. India's current target is only to have 22.5GW capacity by 2031, this should be expanded to at least 10%.

Allow competition: India should end the monopoly of NPCIL and allow new entrants, with new capabilities and management cultures. This could help reduce implementation times and thereby also lower costs.

Recently, the government announced that National Thermal Power Corp (NTPC) and NPCIL will set up 4.2GW of combined nuclear power capacity at two sites in India by 2035. This is a welcome move. This should be expanded to private players also along with strong institutional arrangements and the establishment of independent regulatory authority.

Private participation depends largely on policy stability and regulatory transparency. Initially, the government might allow both NPCIL and NTPC to form Joint Ventures with private companies including foreign companies. This will allow us to explore the possible involvement of French and Japanese firms like South Korea partnered with US firms and commercialized [small modular reactors \(SMRs\)](#).

Increase access to credit and loans: Increasing nuclear capacity will require substantial additional financing from a combination of bilateral official credit and loans from sovereign wealth funds. This can be done through classifying nuclear power as “green”, or at least zero-carbon.

Amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010: The Act is not in line with the current international practice where the liability is strictly limited to the operator and can be covered by insurance (or a public backstop). A review of this legislation is highly desirable before permitting the private players in the nuclear energy sector.

India needs a comprehensive rethink of domestic policy constraints that prevent India from participating fully in nuclear energy sector.

24. [A boost for science, a wider window to the universe](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**A boost for science, a wider window to the universe**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Awareness in the field of space

News- Indian government recently announced \$320 million investment in LIGO-India.

What are some facts about LIGO?

LIGO is the **world's largest gravitational wave observatory**, a scientific collaboration. It consists of two facilities in the United States, one in the **Pacific Northwest at Hanford, Washington**, and another near the **Gulf of Mexico in Livingston, Louisiana**.

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LIGO uses lasers to detect **ripples in space-time** through a method called **interferometry**. As gravitational waves pass by, they cause space itself to **stretch and squeeze**. Scientists can measure through changes in the beams of the LIGO lasers.

In 2015, physicists observed the gravitational waves emanating from two **merging black holes**, 1.3 million light years from earth. It was accomplished by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, known as LIGO

The data LIGO collects have **far-reaching implications** in many areas of physics. LIGO has provided new clues about **merging black holes**, the existence of **neutron stars** and the **origin of the universe**. It has opened an entirely new way of observing the universe.

What are some facts about LIGO-India?

LIGO-India is a **collaboration** between the LIGO Laboratory operated by Caltech and MIT. It is funded by the National Science Foundation and India's RRCAT, the Institute for Plasma Research (IPR), the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, and the Department of Atomic Energy.

LIGO-India will create **new opportunities** in Maharashtra's Hingoli district. Projects such as LIGO-India can **create jobs across the technical workforce**.

They open **new avenues for scientific talent** and inspire the next generation of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) leaders.

The construction of LIGO-India is a major milestone for **gravitational wave science** and for the **universal progress of science**. The observatory will help to answer some of the **most fundamental questions** about the cosmos.

25. Greenwashing, ESG backlash and transitions

Source– The post is based on the article “**Greenwashing, ESG backlash and transitions**” published in the “**Business Standard**” on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Environment

Relevance– Climate change related issues

News– The article explains the increasing focus on green transition and phasing out of fossil fuels across the world and India.

How is there increasing focus on phasing out of fossil fuels across the world?

In New York, Governor Kathy Hochul announced the first **state-wide ban** on the **use of natural gas in new buildings** for heating or cooking this week.

The **financial industry** is also gradually moving away from **fossil fuel financing**. Analysis by **BloombergNEF** shows that the **ratio of financing between low carbon energy and fossil fuels** should be at least **4:1 by 2030** to meet the 1.5°C climate goal.

Bank financing for energy supply totalled **\$1.9 trillion in 2021**. Of that, **\$842 billion** went to low-carbon energy projects and companies, and **\$1.038 trillion** went to fossil fuels.

The ratio is likely to improve. A host of banks publicly announcing their **climate transition plans**. Banks that have unveiled plans in 2023 include Citigroup, Spain's Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria and NatWest Group in the UK. HSBC intends to do so later this year.

How are the measures to phase fossil fuels facing backlash in the US?

There is backlash against as many as 11 large financial institutions that **boycott the oil and gas industry** in some states of the USA. As per a recent bill, Florida's public or state-controlled funds can no longer invest their money based on **environmental, social and governance factors**.

The law broadly directs all Florida pension funds to prioritise returns without **considering factors in investment decisions**.

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Over a dozen states in the US have enacted **anti-ESG-related bills or policies**, while many have similar proposals in discussion.

What is the way forward for green energy transition in India?

India's CO₂ emission level may rise from **2.7 gigatonnes to 3.9 gigatonnes by 2030**.

India's **green transition** would require a **multi-pronged action plan**, the Reserve Bank of India said in its report on currency and finance released earlier this week.

A **number of policy actions** are required. It comprises a **carbon tax** of rupee equivalent to \$25 per tonne, increasing the **share of non-fossil fuel in the energy mix**.

There is a need for **more production and use of EVs, electric vehicles and green hydrogen, and regulatory measures** to incentivise resource allocation for green projects.

What are some regulatory actions taken in India for green transition?

Securities and Exchange Board of India mandates **ESG disclosures** for the top 1,000 companies. It has raised concerns about making **false, misleading, unsubstantiated, or incomplete claims** about the **sustainability of a product, service, or business operation**.

It asked issuers of **green debt** to ensure that funds mobilised are used for the stated purpose, and the **negative externalities** associated with usage of the funds are quantified.

A **consultation paper on ESG disclosures, ratings and investing** has subsequently been issued.

[26. We shouldn't let Indian poverty turn into a great eternal mystery](#)

Source: The post is based on the article "**We shouldn't let Indian poverty turn into a great eternal mystery**" published in **Live Mint** on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Poverty

Relevance: concerns associated with estimation of poverty.

News: There have been many private estimates on poverty in India but there has been no official estimate since 2011-12. Due to which, there is a wide variation in the estimates of poverty by private entities.

What are some of the differences or variations in the private estimates on poverty?

For measuring poverty, except the World Bank, all others use some estimate of consumption expenditure from the National Statistical Office (**NSO**).

Out of those using consumption expenditure from the NSO, only the poverty estimates by S. Subramanian of 2017-18 is comparable to the 2011-12 official poverty estimates.

As per the estimates, **it suggests a rise in poverty level between 2011-12 and 2017-18**.

On the other hand, Bhalla uses a modified version of consumption expenditure adjusted to national accounts, which leads them to conclude that poverty has declined.

Like these there are variations in measuring poverty because private estimators are using different data for measuring.

Must Read: [There is no debate: There has been a persistent decline in poverty in India](#)

What are other concerns with measuring poverty?

India has been a pioneer in poverty measurement and has a model for several other developing countries. However, this perception has changed because **there are no official poverty estimates available after 2011-12**.

Moreover, the government conducted consumption expenditure in 2017-18. This was the only comparable data set by which poverty could have been estimated **but the survey was discarded without giving any particular reason**.

However, **the probable reason for discarding might be** that it showed a rise in the poverty level.

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A similar problem is with the poverty line estimation. Even this has not yet been decided by the government.

However, there is a consumption expenditure survey being undertaken for updating the national accounts and inflation indices.

What is the concern with the consumption expenditure survey?

The methodology that has been adopted in the survey for measuring poverty is new and has not been used elsewhere.

The survey may provide fresh estimates of consumption expenditure. However, the absence of a comparable survey means it won't help answer what happened to poverty after 2011-12.

Moreover, in such a scenario where comparable data is not available, carrying out a new survey is **always preceded by pilot surveys and their results are released for public discussion.**

However, there is no information on whether a pilot survey was conducted in this case.

What is the way ahead?

Official poverty estimates and poverty lines from the government have been crucial in highlighting the living conditions of the poor and the effectiveness of government policy.

Poverty estimates were key to designing interventions, allocating resources across states and analysing their effectiveness.

Therefore, the government not conducting a survey is a setback to the scholarly work on the measurement and determinants of poverty and also for policymaking.

27. Findings of PLFS on FLPR: Bitter-Half Of Working Story

Source: The post is based on the article “**Bitter-Half Of Working Story**” published in **The Times of India** on **5th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Inclusive growth and issues arising from it..

Relevance: About the findings of PLFS on FLPR.

News: According to the recent Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report, female labour force participation rate (FLPR) (current weekly status) has increased from 16% in 2017-18 to 21% in 2021-22, while the unemployment rate has declined from 4% to 2%.

It means around 22.5 million more women have joined the workforce or are actively seeking work, despite the impact of Covid-19 on women and young girls.

What are some key findings of the recent PLFS on FLPR?

Self-Employed & Unpaid: Women in casual labour and in regular/wage employment have declined by 6% and 4% respectively. On the other hand, the share of self-employed women drastically increased by 10% to stand at 62%.

The majority of self-employed women work as part-time or full-time helpers in their household enterprises and are without pay (60%), while a lower percentage are employers and own-account workers (40%).

Rural vs urban FLPR: Rural women's workforce participation emerged as the key driver of women's employment. When compared to pre-pandemic levels, this increased by almost 22% vis-à-vis the 2% for urban women.

Decrease in salary workers: There is a simultaneous decrease in salaried, wage and casual labour work.

Gender-wage inequality has also increased: For the self-employed, men have gone from earning 2.2 times more than women in 2017-18 to 2.6 times in 2020-21.

Read more: [The financial inclusion of women is set for a tech leap](#)

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What are the key observations from the PLFS findings on FLPR?

a) Agriculture remains the most ubiquitous employment, **b)** Increasing feminisation in agriculture. For instance, women's participation increased from 57% in 2017-18 to 63% in 2021-22, **c)** There is a high increase in informalisation of women's work, **d)** The distribution of women's labour force has changed since the pandemic, and **e)** These shifts in FLPR are deeply gendered, underpinned by existing and new Covid-19-induced gendered expectations and norms.

Note: Evidence suggests women were hit worse by Covid-19 in terms of loss of jobs, economic distress, and an increased burden of household work, up by as much as 30%, when compared to men.

Read more: [In politics and bureaucracy, women are severely under-represented](#)

What should be done to improve quality in FLPR?

–**Transition must be made** out of low-paying low-productivity roles into work that offers sustainable livelihood.

Structural reforms are required. Such as, **a)** providing greater access to opportunities in lucrative sectors such as manufacturing, and job roles, and **b)** supporting women to move up in the agricultural value chain, such as providing market access.

Greater access to gender-responsive opportunities so that women can balance domestic roles with paid work. These include facilitating flexible work, part-time roles, and hyper-local opportunities.

Empower women with skill-sets such as quality and demand-driven technical, vocational skills and soft skills and **resources** such as safe and affordable transport, mentorship etc so that they can take on more remunerative jobs.

Read more: [Nari shakti' offers G20 nations a women's empowerment model](#)

28. [What critics of the govt miss: Not much is lost if the PLI scheme fails](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**What critics of the govt miss: Not much is lost if the PLI scheme fails**” published in **Business Standard** on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Growth and Development

Relevance: issues with Production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and regional free trade arrangements.

News: The government is often criticized for staying away from regional free trade arrangements and for the introduction of a **Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI)** for the manufacturing sector.

What are the reasons behind these criticisms?

It is argued that staying away from regional free trade agreements will make **India stay away from regional production and supply chain** and **PLI would make an uncompetitive manufacturing sector**.

The manufacturing sector that thrives only with the help of subsidies is not good for long term industrial growth.

Furthermore, **no economy has sustained rapid economic growth without a strong and growing export sector**.

Therefore, India should get into those regional trade arrangements, and bring required changes to gain profit from becoming a part of international supply chains.

Moreover, India's export sector has evolved with the time and critics usually miss this point.

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How has India's export sector evolved?

Merchandise exports, which is Asia's regional trade agreements have been mostly about, **are no longer the primary driver of India's export growth.**

The role has been taken over by services exports, which have grown more rapidly.

The critics want India to follow the **East Asian model of export-led growth** that focused on low-value, low-margin, labour-intensive exports of products like garments.

However, the operative conditions in India are different from those in East Asia and hard to change.

Labour-intensive exports can succeed in India only in those sectors where – **a)** the labour cost is a small part of the product price such as the assembly of products and **b)** the domestic market provides an incentive for localising such as mobile phones and other electronic goods.

However, the rest of manufactured goods exports is mostly capital-or knowledge-intensive such as refined petroleum products, engineering goods, etc.

How are service exports beneficial for India?

The more the services sector produces a trade surplus, the stronger the rupee will be. Hence, India's biggest comparative advantage lies in its educated, low-cost, white-collar workforce.

Service exports accounted last year for 42 percent of total export earnings. If the similar trend continues, the figure could climb to 50 percent in a few years, and then overtake merchandise exports.

Why is the criticism over PLI not a big concern?

There is not much concern over PLI because if PLI fails, there is a little to lose. **The incentives under PLI are very small in a macro-economic context.**

For instance, the total PLI payout is to be under 2 trillion, over five years. This is one-tenth of 1 percent of expected GDP over that period, which is affordable.

However, if PLI succeeds, it will result in investments of 3 trillion in the five-year period, which is just 1 percent of the current year's GDP.

The success of PLI is supposed to trigger a hike in the share of manufacturing in overall capex, achieve substantial import substitution, boost exports, and create six million jobs.

Therefore, in the case of PLI, there is much to gain and very little to lose.

29. [Symptomatic stall – The aviation industry needs policy changes and regulatory overhaul](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Symptomatic stall – The aviation industry needs policy changes and regulatory overhaul**” published in **The Hindu** on **6th May 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Relevance: About the challenges faced by Indian commercial aircraft operations.

News: The Go Airlines, a low-cost carrier, became India's first domestic airline since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to go into a mid-air stall and seek bankruptcy protection.

What are the reasons behind Go Air's insolvency?

Must read: [Indian aviation industry: Potential and challenges – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the challenges faced by Indian commercial aircraft operations?

India's **pandemic lockdown**, the increase in **crude oil prices** due to the **Russia-Ukraine war** and the **rupee's depreciation** against the dollar increased aviation turbine fuel (ATF) costs for domestic carriers.

India's commercial air transport industry has **high capital and operational costs**. So, they operate with wafer-thin profit margins.

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For more than a decade, India's budget airline sector's rivals adopted **highly aggressive pricing strategies** to gain market share. That **stretched balance sheets** and made companies more vulnerable to shocks.

India's **tax structure** keeps ATF costs prohibitive and a **regulatory apparatus** is outdated.

What are the government initiatives to boost India's aviation industry?

Must read: [Aviation Sector in India: Status, Opportunities and Challenges - Explained, pointwise](#)

The government should find long-term policy solutions if it wants India's struggling airlines to be recovered.