



9 PM

Compilation

17th to 22nd April, 2023

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General Studies Paper – 1

General Studies - 1

1. [The story of khayal shows how attempts to remove the imprint of Muslim rule will impoverish Indian culture](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**The story of khayal shows how attempts to remove the imprint of Muslim rule will impoverish Indian culture**” published in **The Indian Express** on 17th April 2023.

Syllabus: GS 1 – Art and Culture

Relevance: About khayal style of music

News: NCERT has recently deleted chapters on the Mughal Empire from its Standard 12 history textbooks. However, deleting chapters will not delete the association of Mughal Empire from the Indian culture.

The Mughal Empire had association with India in varied forms such as tangible heritage, monuments, culture, clothes, food, language and music. One of the famous music from the Mughal era that still exists is khayal.

How did khayal music develop with time?

The early form of khayal emerged in the **late 16th century when Sufi musicians based in the region between Delhi and Jaunpur adapted the *cutkula* form**. This form used a Hindi dialect. There were also devotional forms such as the **Persian *qaul* and *tarana*** sung in Sufi communities from Amir Khusro’s (1253-1325) tradition.

The ***cutkula* was a regional form of khayal** used during the reign of Sultan Hussain Shah Sharqi of Jaunpur, who ruled from 1458 to 1505 and was a great music lover.

The earliest version of khayal evolved **into today’s *drut bandish***. It is the fast composition, also called the ***chhota khayal***, which is meant to be sung in a spritely tempo.

The members who played this style had close relationships with **Vaishnava sects**.

Later, **Niyamat Khan Sadarang** (1670-1748), a famous dhrupad singer played a key role in developing khayal.

He began creating khayal compositions with some melodic movements from dhrupad, setting many of these compositions in a slow tempo. **His both slow and fast compositions are widely sung to this day.**

By the end of the 19th century, hereditary khayal musicians, who were largely Muslim started to teach the genre to people outside their respective families, including Hindus.

This eventually gave rise to celebrated Hindu musicians such as Bhimsen Joshi, Kishori Amonkar, Kumar Gandharva, etc.

Today, **khayal is sung by both Hindu and Muslim groups** and deleting chapters on Mughal from the textbook will not delete rooted culture from the society.

Must Read: [Changes to the NCERT syllabus and associated issues – Explained](#)

General Studies Paper – 2

General Studies - 2

1. [Diplomacy, with a change in terms of reference](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Diplomacy, with a change in terms of reference**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **17th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- International relations

News- Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China announced that an agreement has been reached between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

What are the important points about the agreement?

It covers a **resumption of diplomatic relations** between them and a **re-opening of their embassies and missions** within a period not exceeding two months.

Read More – [Saudi-Iranian normalisation and implications for India – Explained, pointwise](#)

The agreement affirmed their **respect for the sovereignty of states, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states**.

What are the implications of increasing closeness between Saudi Arabia and Iran?

China brought Saudi Arabia together with Iran when Israel was thinking that the United States would bring it together with Saudi Arabia.

There is a **substantial change in the strategic situation** in the Middle East. The Saudis are now **balancing their security** by playing off the U.S. against China.’

USA’s influence and credibility in the region has diminished. A new type of **international regional alignment** is taking place. It has **empowered** and has given both Russia and China **newfound influence and status**.

What are the background events that led to thaw in ties between Saudi and Iran?

Bilateral efforts have been underway since early 2016 to ease tensions that had developed specifically between Tehran, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The Emir of Kuwait and the Sultan of Oman initiated steps that were responded to by Iran.

Talks were also held in Baghdad and during **Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi’s visit to China** in February.

All were worried about the **attacks on shipping and energy facilities** in Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates and the **longer term implications of the regional conflicts** that were underway.

During China’s President Xi Jinping visit to Saudi Arabia in December 2022, he attended the first **China-Arab States Summit and the China-GCC Summit**.

What were the important developments during the Chinese President’s visit to Saudi Arabia?

Jinping’s speech laid stress on **five priority areas: energy cooperation; finance and investment cooperation, innovation, science and technology, aerospace cooperation and Chinese language and cultural cooperation**.

Following are some of the initiatives launched

Global Security Initiative

A comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement

The statement stressed the importance of **deepening joint cooperation with regard to the BRI** and on attracting Chinese expertise in Saudi megaprojects.

The two sides signed ‘**a harmonising plan**’ between the **KSA’s Vision 2030 and the BRI**.

What is the importance of west Asia for India and Its policy towards this region?

Apart from **historical linkages**, the region is in India's **proximate neighbourhood** and within its **security parameters**. It is the principal **source of hydrocarbon imports, and investments**. It is also an **important destination for manpower exports** apart from being a **major trading partner** including projects.

India's reaction to this development has been **restrained**. The official policy has focused on bilateral relations and **avoidance of involvement in bilateral and regional disputes**.

India has consciously **refrained from participation in alternate security architectures**. The region should not be **viewed in competition with China**. India should not consider itself a **surrogate for western powers** in power games.

2. [Shaking Up The Rule Of Lawyers – Bar Council's nod to entry of foreign law firms, even if the scope is restricted, will likely drain large Indian law firms of both talent & clients](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **“Shaking Up The Rule Of Lawyers – Bar Council's nod to entry of foreign law firms, even if the scope is restricted, will likely drain large Indian law firms of both talent & clients”** published in **The Times of India** on **17th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 2: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.

Relevance: About BCI's decision to permit foreign law firms.

News: The Bar Council of India (BCI) recently permitted foreign lawyers and law firms to practice in India.

About the BCI decision to permit foreign law firms

Read here: [Foreign lawyers, firms can operate in India: BCI](#)

What are the advantages of BCI's decision to permit foreign law firms?

Not impact majority of Indian lawyers: The regulations do not adversely affect more than 99% of the 20 lakh strong Indian lawyer population.

Permitted Limited Liability: Indian law firms (ILFs) are not allowed to be Limited Liability Partnerships. Instead, they can only do partnership firms with unlimited liability. This was a major roadblock for foreign law firms to set up offices in India. But the new regulations have permitted FLFs to be constituted as LLPs.

Enlarge FLFs in India: MNCs always prefer to use the same law firms worldwide. Hence, MNC clients in India will migrate as soon as such FLFs set up in India. This will compel FLFs to rethink having a presence in India.

Further, Fees charged by ILFs are likely to come down.

What are the challenges in BCI's decision to permit foreign law firms?

Increase surrogacy of FLFs: Some FLFs that had set up offices in India were compelled to exit, following adverse court judgments. Some of them have established surrogate models in India. Such a surrogate firm would be manned only by Indian lawyers and satisfy the criteria for being classified as an Indian firm. Under the new BCI regulations, this surrogacy may proliferate.

Brain drain from ILFs: In most ILFs, only about 50-plus attorneys constitute the A-team or the super performers, who are the most precious asset of the firm. FLFs will target these A-teams, with substantial increase in tax-efficient remuneration; opportunities to move to foreign offices; participation in the international profit pool, etc.

Impact ILFs: Corporate India will be willing to pay high fees if the service is excellent. Many such corporates will therefore move to foreign firms to avail a better quality of service. Many large Indian transactional law firms are likely to lose both their star players and their star clients.

Read more: [Global law, local practice – BCI's move recognises India's corporate globalisation](#)

3. [Reforming multilateral lenders is an uphill task](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Reforming multilateral lenders is an uphill task**” published in the **Livemint** on **17th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About reforming MDGs (multilateral development banks).

News: The G20 expert group, co-chaired by N.K. Singh and Larry Summers, are on the view of reforming multilateral development banks (MDBs), such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. But the group said that reforming MDBs would need a closer look at both geopolitics and the domestic political dynamics of the world's leading nations.

About the G20 expert group on strengthening multilateral development banks(MDBs)

A nine-member G20 expert group, under the aegis of India's Presidency, has been set up to suggest ways to strengthen multilateral development banks (MDBs) like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Read here: [G20 expert group on strengthening multilateral development banks\(MDBs\)](#)

What are the challenges in reforming MDBs?

– The indebtedness of poor countries escalated during the pandemic and became unmanageable after the Russia-Ukraine war. For example, Zambia defaulted on its external debt.

– **Chinese challenge:** China's negotiating strategy and its role as a significant creditor country. According to 2020 data, the Chinese state and its subsidiaries have lent over \$1.5 trillion—over 5% of global GDP—to about 150 nations worldwide. China's bargaining tactics on the restructuring of loans have all the hallmarks of the sovereign commercial debt crisis of the 1980s. With sovereign debt defaults now a reality, there were demands for China to take hair-cuts and provide some concessions to indebted countries. But China demands MDBs to take hair-cuts.

–The nature of partisan and combative domestic politics in the US. This is because any change in the MDGs will require US Congress approval.

Why Chinese argument on reforming MDGs is flawed?

a) MDG loans are concessional in nature and are earmarked for nations in trouble with no other borrowing option. On the other hand, Chinese loans are essentially commercial, with market-linked coupons and repossession clauses.

b) It is an unfair comparison for China to put itself on the same pedestal as MDBs.

4. [Chinese shenanigans on Arunachal Pradesh](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Chinese shenanigans on Arunachal Pradesh**” Published in **The Hindu** on **18th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Bilateral groupings and agreements

Relevance: India and China bilateral relations

News- Recently, China renamed 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh.

What are other examples of renaming of places in a line territories by China?

China also named **several under-sea features in the Indian Ocean**, using the names of Chinese musical instruments.

In 2017, China had '**renamed**' **six places that lie in Arunachal Pradesh**. It had also 'standardised' the names of 15 places in 2021.

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In 2020, China gave names to **80 geographical features in the Paracels and Spratlys** in the South China Sea. In 1983, it had named 287 geographical features in the South China Sea. It began using the **term “Diaoyutai” for the Senkaku Islands** in the East China Sea in the 1950s, even before raking up the Senkaku issue with Japan.

What are the reasons behind the renaming exercise by China?

The **Chinese modus operandi** is to lay the groundwork through fictional renaming of alien territories. It uses them as a **basis for “historical” claims**. These are then pursued using the **“three warfares” strategy — of waging propaganda, psychological and legal warfare**.

What are measures taken by China in recent times that can deteriorate relations with India?

China enacted a **new Coast Guard Law** to take necessary measures, including the use of force, to **safeguard “sovereignty”**.

China also passed a **new law on the protection and exploitation** of the country’s land border areas. This can convert the boundary dispute with India into a sovereignty issue.

From 2017 onwards, China launched the **construction of dual-purpose villages** in areas adjacent to the border with India, from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. These are called **Xiaokang villages**.

Why is China’s claim on Arunachal Pradesh bogus?

Qing presence in Tibet began to emerge around 1720, after Chinese intervention in the **internecine succession struggle** following the death of the Sixth Dalai Lama.

There is absolutely **no basis to the Chinese claim over Tawang** on the grounds that it is the birthplace of the Sixth Dalai Lama. China had **no locus standi** in Tibet at the time.

Why are the basis of India’s historical claim on Arunachal Pradesh strong?

Arunachal Pradesh is **home to various tribes**. They have historically been a part of **India’s civilisational heritage**.

Most of its populace has been **historically oriented towards the Assam plains**. The tribes there were in regular contact with the **Ahom power in Assam**.

Some tribes such as the Monpas, have **professed Buddhism**. Others follow **animistic practices**. Some tribes practise a **form of Vaishnavism**.

The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Kalika Purana, the Vishnu Purana, the Yogini Purana, and Kalidasa’s Raghuvamsa have references that give a clear indication of the inclusion of these tribal tracts in the **collective consciousness and cultural moorings** of ancient India.

These sources have indications about the **boundaries of the kingdoms of Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa**. Their limits appeared to include the whole of Arunachal Pradesh.

The **Shiva Linga in Ziro, Parshuram Kund, and the temple ruins of Malinithan** show an **ancient Hindu influence** in the region. Some Mishmi tribes consider themselves to be the descendants of **King Bhishmaka**. Some Aka tribes claim their descent from **King Bhaluka**.

Archaeological finds have unearthed **silver coins and inscriptions in the Arabic script at Bhalukpong**. These are linked to a Muslim ruler of Bengal.

The architecture of **forts like Bhalukpong, Ita and Bhismaknaga** is heavily influenced by the **architectural principles of fort construction** found in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and Arthashastra.

5. [A culture of cohesion to save young lives on campuses](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**A culture of cohesion to save young lives on campuses**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **18th April 2023**.

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

Relevance– Campus suicides and distress among students

News– The newspaper reports about young students ending their lives is disturbing.

What are some facts and statistics about students ending their lives on campuses of higher education institutions?

During the 2018-23, **61 students passed away**. During 2014-21, there were **122 cases in various higher education institutions**.

Most students were from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). Marginalisation and deprivation are factors, but one also finds a wide spectrum of students.

What are the reasons for student distress at institutions of higher education?

Campuses have become **large and impersonal spaces**. **Family support** is reducing. There are more **nuclear families** now with working parents. They are unable to provide the kind of **parenting and mentoring** that joint families provide.

Individualism is pervasive in society. Early signs of emotional distress go **unnoticed, unrecognized, and unaddressed**.

Generally, institutions are in **denial mode**. They expect the situation to be dealt with by the parents. Students in emotional distress are advised to spend time with their families.

In higher education institutions, there is hardly any **free and fair communication** between students, their seniors, teachers, and the administration. **Classroom interactions** are confined to academics. It adds to the stress emotionally distressed students are already under.

Teachers don't have the **time, inclination and expertise** to address any disturbing traits among their students. A highly **formalised, standardised and hierarchical structure** can never be conducive to promoting a **congenial environment**.

What are factors responsible for campus suicides?

Most campus suicides are attributed to **academic pressure, family circumstances, personal reasons, different kinds of stress, financial distress, caste-based discrimination, and different forms of harassment**.

Many of the sources of distress lie **outside the purview of higher education institutions**. They have genesis in the **larger economic and societal contexts**.

What is the contrast between counselling support for students in the USA and India?

Universities in the United States have **dedicated counselling centres** with a range of psychological services. They are accredited by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services.

They are manned by licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical therapists, mental health workers and social workers. The **counsellor-to-student ratio** is carefully established through careful analysis.

In contrast, the **psychological counselling services** in Indian campuses are limited to providing some physical space in a corner of the institution. They have a limited number of professionally trained psychologists and psychotherapists. There are **hardly any standards**.

What is the way forward to overcome the stress faced by students at campuses?

There is a need for **counselling and therapies as curative measures** for distressed students. It may be easy to strengthen and streamline.

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It is critical to create an **assimilative culture of cohesion and promote respect for academic and socio-economic diversity**. Institutions must deter and curb all forms of discrimination. There is a need to evolve a **code of campus ethics prescribing standards and protocols** of what can and cannot be discussed even in informal social settings. **Social, economic, and cultural diversity** on campuses add value. But, it should be **sensitively nurtured and carefully harnessed**.

6. [Replacing 'western knowledge' with 'Indian knowledge' could result in intellectual disaster](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **"Replacing 'western knowledge' with 'Indian knowledge' could result in intellectual disaster"** published in **The Indian Express** on **18th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues associated with education

News: The article explains the evolution of Indian knowledge system and concerns with replacing it with the Western knowledge system.

How is Indian knowledge different from the western knowledge?

The western system thinks of knowledge as **"logos"**, meaning knowledge based upon reasoning. In contrast, **Indian traditions of thought looked at knowledge as an experience, as knowing**. The two Sanskrit words vidya and gnyana, represent the basic difference between the two traditions.

Vidya admits proof and evidence and attempts to develop methods of bringing perception into the form of a logical statement, while **gnyana rests upon testimony and the truth of the word**.

How has the Indian knowledge system developed with time?

In Indian traditions of learning, **memory had been a central interest** from the earliest times. It is described by the term **smriti**, which means remembering.

As per **the Bhagavad Gita**, weakening of smriti may lead to destruction of the intellect.

In ancient Indian society, **special care was taken to aid and facilitate easy remembering of the text by introducing various accessible mnemonic tools**.

This helped in preserving texts through memorization with a very high standard of accuracy.

The Indian idea of knowledge brought intellect closer to intuition, together with the use of memory for the reproduction of texts from the past.

This resulted in the most favoured mode of receiving and giving education not only in medicine, chemistry, sculpture, etc. but also in philosophy, poetry, mathematics and astronomy.

However, **the social division that** began to develop in Indian civilization more than 2,000 years ago made it difficult to produce any true "universal knowledge".

The access to memorisation technique was restricted by the social status of a person.

This kind of **schooling changed after paper became available for use** in India during the 13th century. The **oral as well as written format coexisted** in an interdependent manner in the Indian system of knowledge.

Therefore, **manuscripts existed in both writings as well as in oral form** and this continued in Indian history for centuries.

After the arrival of **print technology in India**, languages were chosen for printing in India not for their literary qualities but for their convenience.

Thus, the traditions of knowledge that had oral as well as written presentation continued to remain cut off from those knowledge traditions that had only the oral form.

As a result, the divide between social classes that had easy access to letters and those who did not was widened during India's transition from medieval to modern periods.

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What will happen if Indian knowledge system is replaced with the Western?

It will make **Indians ignorant of the past and learners may even start negating the presence of the social divide** that existed in the Indian knowledge system.

It will **produce a generation of students who may grow up thinking that all knowledge developed in ancient India lies hidden in some manuscript archive.**

Hence, trying to take India forward to the past will make India a continent of ignorance.

7. [Same-sex marriage: The only natural and just way forward](#)

Source: The post is based on the following articles

“Same-sex marriage: The only natural and just way forward” published in the **Indian Express** on **18th April 2023**.

“Same-sex marriage is a ‘mere urban elitist view’: Government to SC” published in **The Hindu** on **18th April 2023**

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

Relevance– Issues related to same-sex marriages

News: The Supreme Court received petitions to allow same-sex marriage under the Special Marriage Act.

About the case and Centre’s affidavit on legalising Same-sex marriages in India

Read here: [Same-sex marriages can rock societal values: Centre](#)

What are the arguments in support of the centre position against same-sex marriages?

Government argued that if the court allows same sex marriage, it would amount to the “judicial creation of a social institution called ‘marriage’ of a different kind than contemplated in the existing law”.

Moreover, fundamental rights like the right to choose one’s sexual orientation as well as the right to privacy have already been protected under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

Hence, any further creation of rights, recognition of relationships and giving legal sanctity to such relationships can be done only by the competent legislature and not by judicial adjudication.

Read more: [Same-sex marriages: A matter for Parliament](#)

What are the issues in the centre’s affidavit on legalising same-sex marriages?

Read here: [About legalising same-sex marriages: Inaction and intervention: On the handling of social issues](#)

What is the stand of different organizations on same sex marriage?

The Delhi Commission For Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) has supported the petition saying that same-sex family units are “normal” and that the government should intervene in taking steps to encourage such family units.

Recently, the Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS) came in support of the same-sex family units arguing it would promote their inclusion in society. IPS stance that homosexuality is not an illness – had played a key role in the 2018 judgment that decriminalized homosexuality.

What are the misconceptions and reality about raising children with LGBTQIA+ couple families?

Misconceptions: Children growing up in families of same-sex unions will become confused about societal norms and are much more likely to become gay themselves.

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Reality: a) The whopping majority of gay people grow up in families of heterosexual parents, and often in conservative households, **b)** Private research on children growing up with same-sex couples found no social difficulties or specific mental health problems among children, **c)** Another research found that most gay couples were more mindful and sensitive to their children's needs and were willing to walk the extra mile as parents.

What should be done?

Legalising same-sex marriage may pave the way for generations to come and become a big step towards reclaiming the diverse, multicultural, and inclusive civilisation of India.

Must read: [Legalising Same-sex marriages in India and associated challenges - Explained, pointwise](#)

8. [For Many Dollars More – Reforming multilateral lenders depends on China signing off on it. And China wants more power](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**For Many Dollars More – Reforming multilateral lenders depends on China signing off on it. And China wants more power**” published in **The Times of India** on **18th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About reforming MDGs (multilateral development banks).

News: The G20 expert group, co-chaired by N.K. Singh and Larry Summers, are on the view of reforming multilateral development banks (MDBs). This expert group report should be read with another report submitted last year to G20, an independent review of MDBs' capital adequacy framework.

About the G20 expert group on strengthening multilateral development banks(MDBs) and what are MDBs?

Read here: [G20 expert group on strengthening multilateral development banks\(MDBs\)](#)

What is the need for MDBs reforms?

There are nine major MDBs, of which the World Bank is the most prominent. Collectively, MDBs hold about \$500 billion in shareholder equity, which is used to raise more resources for concessional lending. But this available shareholder capital is not being put to optimum use.

The review of the G20 expert group concluded that MDBs can raise more resources without asking shareholders to increase their capital. This can be done by **a)** leveraging the callable capital (Callable capital represents a guarantee by the shareholders to backstop the institutions in case of shocks), **b)** Leveraging the guarantees.

What are the challenges in reforming MDBs?

The demand of China: China is the second-biggest economy in the world and generally holds the third-largest voting rights in key MDBs after the US and Japan. China wants MDBs to be a part of any debt restructuring solution. China also wants more power to control MDBs like the US and Europe gained in the past.

Read more: [Reforming multilateral lenders is an uphill task](#)

Unless China gets what it thinks all committees on MDBs will produce good research, but little reform.

9. [Our new digital rules must ensure online child safety](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Our new digital rules must ensure online child safety**” published in **Live Mint** on **19th April 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 2 – Issues Related to Children**

Relevance: **concerns associated online child abuse and measures required**

News: The article discusses the threats associated with the use of the internet to children and measures needed to address those.

How are children vulnerable to the internet?

Over the last few years and especially post-pandemic, access to the internet for children has increased for education, learning, and entertainment.

Due to which, **online sexual abuse of children has increased by 400 times**.

Therefore, the government is trying to revamp India’s **Information Technology Act, 2000** and provide safe harbour to child safety.

Why is a safe harbour important for child safety?

Safe harbour ensures that users can benefit from an open, free and safe internet, and protects people from the dangers of mass censorship by intermediaries.

The current IT Act provides safe harbour protection to online intermediaries whereby platforms are liable to take down user-generated content on receiving ‘actual knowledge’ of its illegality through a court or government order.

Therefore, increasing the accountability of online intermediaries is important.

However, overarching restrictions on civil rights and dilution of safe harbour can impact user safety, as seen in the case of **SESTA-FOSTA legislations of the US**.

Five years after its enactment, numerous reports came up suggesting that these laws had endangered the lives of sex workers. It made it difficult to gather evidence to investigate and prosecute traffickers.

Therefore, the IT Act should be amended in such a way that it serves the purpose.

What changes can be made to the IT Act 2000?

Adopting Tech-Based Solutions: The new IT Act must focus on expanding affirmative technology-based solutions to tackle child sexual abuse material (**CSAM**) and establish community hotlines for swift remedial measures. The Supreme Court of India also recommended these measures in the **Prajwala case of 2018**.

Moreover, **public-private partnerships** to incentivize the growth of privacy-enabling technologies must be encouraged.

Tech companies must use cutting-edge technologies, adopt global best practices such as end-to-end encryption and build new ways to identify and take action against perpetrators.

Greater responsibility sharing and capacity enhancement: The new law should focus on deploying **streamlined grievance redressal processes** that intermediaries must adopt to efficiently respond to online harm.

A process should be adopted for grading grievances **according to the degree of harm** and those related to **CSAM proliferation** should be addressed on an immediate basis.

Intermediaries should also make their terms of service easily comprehensible for children and create easily accessible mechanisms for them to lodge complaints.

Furthermore, improving **law enforcement authorities’ capacity** to conduct efficient investigations and prompt prosecutions.

Sensitization and collaboration: Children should be included as equal participants in the fight against online child abuse. **For instance, the Australian government** is instituting a **Youth**

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Advisory Council, which will provide the administration feedback on online safety issues and measures to counter cyber-harm.

Many countries are also making efforts through their engagement of school systems to raise public awareness on the issue. **It could be helpful to adapt such practices to Indian educational systems as well.**

10. [India @75, Looking at 100: Accessibility is for everyone](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**India @75, Looking at 100: Accessibility is for everyone**” published in **The Indian Express** on **19th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Vulnerable Sections of the Society

Relevance: concerns of accessibility with the disadvantaged groups

News: The article discusses issues of accessibility with the disadvantaged group and measures needed to address those.

What is accessibility and why is it needed?

Accessibility is a fundamental human right, but it’s often overlooked in our daily lives. Therefore, there is a need to see beyond physical differences and treat everyone with empathy and respect.

This includes learning how to interact with people with reduced mobility and understanding their needs. **For instance**, not misusing parking or sitting areas or using toilets designated for people with reduced mobility.

There is also a need to prioritize accessibility to the needy such as wheelchair users, pregnant women, or children, and help make public spaces more accessible for all.

When people have the freedom to choose how they want to live their lives, **they become more productive and contribute more to society and the economy.**

What are some of the concerns with accessibility in India?

The **proportion of elderly** (over 60 years old) people in India is expected to **increase from 8.6 per cent in 2011 to 12.5 per cent by 2030 and almost 20 per cent by 2050.**

Currently, **due to inadequate infrastructure**, elderly individuals who expect to enjoy their lifelong savings are unable to do so. They are unable to enjoy themselves due to unexpected challenges like temporary injuries, etc.

However, as India turns 100 in 2047, it could proactively address accessibility issues.

How can India address the accessibility issues by 2047?

Making India accessible by 2047 for everyone **requires collective effort.**

India should **prioritise accessibility in its infrastructure development, transport and policies.** This will provide equal opportunities for all and ensure full participation in society.

India is the world’s largest democracy, and **it has a unique opportunity to lead the world in making accessibility a fundamental human right and position itself to become a superpower.**

11. [A judgement that upholds the Constitution](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**A judgement that upholds the Constitution**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **19th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Judiciary

Relevance: Issues related to working of the judiciary

Context- The Supreme Court (SC) judgement in the Media One case requires a political reading and not merely a legal one.

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What is the importance of the judgement?

It is a landmark judgement on the **freedom of expression**. It endorses the citizen's right to question the state by distinguishing the government from the nation.

What are recent criticisms against SC?

It has **postponed hearings on important cases** such as electoral bonds and the dilution of Article 370. It has also upheld the draconian provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

SC has taken a stand against **constitutionally guaranteed freedoms**. It stayed the Bombay High Court order that directed the release of physically challenged activist G.N. Saibaba.

How is SC going for course correction?

In Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India, SC took away the **power of appointment of Election Commissioners** from the **sole domain of the executive**. It directed the constitution of a committee to select them.

Media **One judgment** has underlined the **institutional capacity of the court** to uphold the rights in troubled political times.

How is the media one judgement different from other judgements that uphold the important constitutional principles?

In the **Bommai case**, it holds that **federalism and secularism** are the basic features of the Constitution. However, it failed to address the real issue of dissolution of a few State governments, as elections were held in those States subsequently.

In the **Puttaswamy case**, the Supreme Court only provided details of the **idea of privacy** and related concepts at a doctrinal level. It did not go for a **direct and immediate encounter** with the executive.

On the other hand, in the Media One case, the court directly confronted the Centre.

It directed it to **renew the licence of the media house**. It considered all the **major doctrinal issues** such as the **right to fair hearing, proportionality standard and public interest claims** and issued directives to the Centre in concrete terms.

What are the challenges faced by the judiciary across the world?

Populist autocracies try to crush the judiciary with their **majoritarian impulse**.

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tried to interfere with the **independence of the judiciary**.

In Bolivia, judges have been arbitrarily dismissed in the last few years.

Poland lowered the retirement age of judges. The regime sent out older judges and inducted new persons who are loyalists of the government.

The executive in India delays making judicial appointments as suggested by the collegium. There is sometimes even public criticism of the judiciary by the executive in India.

How has the Supreme Court balanced its judgments?

It shows the judiciary's effort to **resist majoritarian overtones**. However, it has also distanced itself from the role that the Opposition is supposed to play.

It is because the task before the court is not to **uphold the Opposition's politics**, even when it might be legitimate.

Therefore, recently, the apex court rightly dismissed a plea by Opposition parties, which alleged arbitrary use of central probe agencies against them. The grievance is genuine. But the issue needed a **political solution**, not an **adjudicatory resolution**.

This is how the court's constitutional duties vary from the Opposition's politics. It cannot pose a **political check**, which can only happen by way of **mass movements or electoral decisions**.

12. [The future of India's civil society organizations](#)

Source- The post is based on the article “The future of India’s civil society organizations” published in “The Hindu” on 19th April 2023.

Syllabus: GS2- Development Processes and the Development Industry

News- The article deals with changing landscape of civil society in India.

What are the challenges faced by civil society in current times?

CSOs lobbying for greater constitutional and civic freedoms are facing many challenges. The access of funds to CSOs has been restricted by cancelling Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act clearances, revoking licenses, imposing retrospective taxes, and pressuring private companies and philanthropists to redirect funding.

Civil society is being vilified as disruptive to India’s development trajectory — and therefore anti-national.

Some specific CSOs are the primary recipient of government patronage and also the principal beneficiary of Corporate Social Responsibility funds.

What are the issues with the working of CSOs?

Instead of reorientation of their operational methodologies, CSOs still follow outdated tactics whose overall utility is fast diminishing. For example, sanctioned protests at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, Town Hall in Bengaluru or Azad Maidan are not useful in the present scenario.

Similarly, articles, speeches at think tanks/conferences, and petitions/open letters do not shame governments into any substantive course correction.

Even lobbying legislators to raise issues is ineffective as it has become easy to hinder or ignore Parliamentary functions.

Progressive CSOs fail to blend socio-cultural values with welfare/constructive work or calls to protect constitutional values. They are unable to reshape hearts and minds, and guide mass consciousness.

Vast sections of society have been radicalized. This is a major shortcoming of progressive civil society.

Evidence from various States suggests that local communities secure benefits from progressive CSOs, but ideologically align with the ruling government. This dichotomy has resulted in psychological fatigue among key activists.

What are the options for civil society?

CSOs need some financial sustenance because of financial constraints. Without sustained support, CSOs cannot mould public discourse.

Young activists could be inducted into political parties, either within the party organisation or in an aligned body. This could create an institutionalised moral force within the parties. This would afford parties a layered systemic approach to thorny issues.

Currently, many parties consciously avoid direct exposure to difficult issues that could adversely impact them electorally. This includes communal disturbances, atrocities against Dalits and women, and advocating for Adivasi rights or civic and political freedoms.

If an aligned civil society organisation took up such issues, it would ensure that a party remains connected to genuine community problems. There is a precedent to this, when the Congress Movement complemented the Congress system.

What is the way forward for CSOs?

CSOs will need to urgently collaborate with other progressive stakeholders. They will need to shed their studied aversion to each other and political parties.

We need to find structural solutions to structural problems. This is our historic responsibility.

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Private philanthropies and companies need to realise that they are the only lifeline for progressive CSOs today. It is infinitely easier to support organisations that work on 'soft' issues that may not invite the wrath of the powers. But inaction today will directly contribute to the extinction of civil society.

Conscientious Indians must find the courage to work together and silently devise new methods of collaboration.

13. A message for the planners in dealing with the Dragon

Source- The post is based on the article "A message for the planners in dealing with the Dragon" published in "The Hindu" on 19th April 2023.

Syllabus: GS2- Bilateral groupings and agreements

Relevance- India and China bilateral relationship

News- Recently, China remanded 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh. There was also denial of visas to some Indian media personnel who the Chinese consider to be 'unhelpful' in their reporting.

Why does China need to be taken seriously?

Some experts consider China's President Xi Jinping as less of a **Sun Tzu follower**. He is close to Mao who believes in **power flowing through the barrel of a gun**.

Some experts argue that Xi Jinping should be taken seriously when he says that he is **preparing China for war**.

He has called for **working together, dare to fight, break out of dependence on foreign technologies and** rally behind the People's Liberation Army to make China great again.

There have been border talks with China and post-talks statement of 'working together to maintain peace'. Such long drawn out negotiations appear to be **purely tactical positions**. But it needs to be viewed through a **strategic prism**.

What are the issues with the capability of the Indian armed forces?

The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, in its March 2023** report has shown the shortcomings in defence hardware and equipments with Indian armed forces

The committee has commented adversely on the **slow production rate of the Tejas fighter** by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. It noted that the IAF's urgent need to make up its **dwindling squadron numbers** through the 114 Multi Role Fighter Aircraft project.

Similar observations have been made for **hardware procurement for the Indian Army**. The committee has acknowledged that **funds are scarce**. It has recommended that allocation for defence should be 3% of GDP to maintain India's deterrent posture.

The ongoing one-year-plus **Russia-Ukraine conflict** has shown that power is not just about **possessing capability** but also about the **capacity-to-last-the-distance too**. India's acquisition plans must be oriented accordingly.

14. IITs need to make science empathetic and inclusive

Source- The post is based on the article "IITs need to make science empathetic and inclusive" published in "The Indian Express" on 19th April 2023.

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

Relevance- Issues faced by institutions of higher education in India

News- The IITs are in the news again for a spate of suicides.

What are the reasons for differences across various social groups at IITs?

There exists a **gap in capabilities**. For JEE Advanced 2022, the cut-off for admission for general category candidates was much higher compared to SC candidates. The median score of eligible SC candidates was very low.

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There are **many cultural reasons and some material ones**. The Census 2011 data for Maharashtra tells us that 76% of the general population had had **latrines at home** in comparison to 57% of SC families. The fraction of SC households with a scooter was 14% while that for the general category it was 24%

This **inequality persists in other basic amenities** as well. Thus, reaching school or college or even finding time for it is harder for SC students.

But this inequality is not only about social class. There are inequities in the **access to water** too.

What is the best approach to learning at academic institutions?

The material inequality in society should be intensely studied by universities. Students of all disciplines should conduct **field and community studies** to understand its causes and provide insights.

Engineers can **design robust solutions** and social scientists would ensure that these indeed work.

Professors would transmit this knowledge to government agencies and companies so that this inequality reduces.

For students, such **interdisciplinary field work** will bring a **shared experience of the realities** of their society. They will engage in an **open and honest discussion** about its problems.

This will help students to develop **mutual respect, empathy and a collective understanding** of how the state and the market work. Such a **constructive engagement** by the university can make higher education empathetic.

Diversity is important in this scheme. Only a diverse student and faculty body will be able to uncover facts and design more **effective and sustainable solutions**. More **equitable societies** will produce **better professionals** and citizens and a **diverse set of role models**.

How will this approach be helpful for IITs?

The above approach can easily bring change for the IITs. Faculty members can work with district administrations to address these issues and involve both IIT and local college students.

This will prepare an **ecosystem of higher education** that satisfies its **institutional as well as cultural roles**.

For the IITs, such an approach will certainly improve the **social environment** within the student body. It will reduce **competitive stress and increase collaboration and teamwork**.

Students will also appreciate the **great diversity of backgrounds** and understand the adversities many among them have had to face. It will show them that for **most real-life problems**, unlike the JEE.

It will inculcate in them the **true spirit of science of empathy, exploration and teamwork** — where the laboratory is the wide world outside.

What are other issues with academic institutions in India?

The socio-economic problems require the **sustained engagement** of the smartest people and the most innovative companies and enterprises. Elite institutions have failed to convert our problems into **opportunities and solutions**.

That has resulted in a **shortage of jobs and the lottery of competitive exams**. The IITs now are **merely the marketplace** for the few good jobs.

What is the way forward for more inclusive learning in higher educational institutions?

It is also time for the students from IIT to reject this **market-based approach**.

Sustainability is now the core concern of state agencies and national and international companies. They need a science which is free, a science which probes and explores **all issues of knowledge and society**.

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There is a need for training in this **science of empathy and diversity**. Indian science needs to become **more democratic**. Then universities will become **more empathetic** and society **more equal and prosperous**.

15. [Tweak The Tech – MNREGA’s process change to reduce corruption is hurting those who need jobs. GoI must have a relook](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Tweak The Tech – MNREGA’s process change to reduce corruption is hurting those who need jobs. GoI must have a relook**” published in **The Times of India** on **19th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 2: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

Relevance: About the process ‘improvements’ in MGNREGA.

News: The app-based attendance and Aadhaar-enabled payments were introduced in MGNREGA. But these process ‘improvements’ in MGNREGA have hampered the interface for the poor and deterred people from seeking work.

About the process ‘improvements’ in MGNREGA

Last year, the government introduced a national mobile monitoring software. The software can record attendance in real-time, with geotags and photographs. The move was intended to minimise corruption and provide oversight. But, the software has also made the MGNREGA work inaccessible to many poor households.

Must read: [MGNREGA: Issues and Significance – Explained, pointwise](#)

How do process ‘improvements’ in MGNREGA hamper access to the poor?

a) wage payments are delayed, **b)** only 43% of MNREGA workers qualified for the new Aadhaar-based payment system. This is because they have not been able to fill in their details, **c)** workers losing wages because of errors in the attendance system, **d)** worksite supervisors having to buy smartphones to use the app, **d)** connectivity and app errors are also associated with the system.

Read more: [What could be the govt’s calculations behind the slashing of the MGNREGA budget](#)

What should be done?

Digitisation has been one of India’s success stories. But, when it comes to using tech in public services proper alternatives should be provided.

16. [Express View: A campus that is safe and free](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**A campus that is safe and free**” published in the **Indian Express** on **19th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About DU’s advisory for students.

News: Recently, the University of Delhi has issued a 17-point advisory to be implemented by colleges and departments when organising festivals and other events. These include mandatory NOC from the police, concertina wires on boundary walls. CCTVs at all gates, etc. The advisory has come in the wake of alleged security lapses in a college event.

What is the rationale behind DU’s advisory?

Security lapses have occurred in colleges in the past. Apart from the recent instance, three women’s campuses have also faced security lapses in recent times. Hence, there is a need for greater safety of students. This makes it more necessary for authorities to issue this advisory.

What are the concerns associated with DU's advisory?

a) Cameras in classrooms and police permission to organise routine events encroach on the privacy of students, b) Enable censuring of students and hamper students exploring new ways of being, c) Hampers study and socialisation of students in an enabling environment.

What should be done?

The need for greater safety should not be achieved at the cost of students' freedom. Securitisation and surveillance in the name of students' safety should be tolerated. The college should talk to the students, sensitise them to the challenges and support them in critical times. It is the only way to ensure that security does not mean having to step back from freedom.

17. [India-UAE cooperation to sow regional food security](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**India-UAE cooperation to sow regional food security**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Bilateral groupings and agreements

Relevance: India and UAE relationship

News- The article explains the cooperation in areas of food security between India and UAE.

What is the importance of India from the perspective on food security?

India is a **global Agri export powerhouse** with a large and growing food production and processing sector.

India has, in recent years, acted as a **humanitarian provider** of food to developing countries. It has demonstrated its evolving role in advancing **regional and global food security**.

India has also made **major budgetary outlays** towards setting up massive food parks, with due emphasis on **modern supply chain management**.

India **Public Distribution System** is the world's largest food subsidy programme. It provides nearly 800 million citizens with subsidized grains. **India's POSHAN Abhiyaan** is the world's largest nutrition programme for children and women.

As a part of its G-20 presidency, India is promoting the consumption and farming of millets — **nutritious, drought resistant, sustainable, crops**. It demonstrates the **resilience focus** that India offers to the **global food security dialogue**.

India's G-20 presidency seeks to address the three Cs of “**Covid, Conflict, and Climate**” issues. These are important for food **security** in India and across the globe.

What are the areas of cooperation between India and UAE in the food sector?

India has vast food sector experience and the ability to **operationalize the world's largest food supply chains**. It will strengthen the **India--UAE food security partnership** in a variety of ways. During the India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States summit last year, the UAE committed **\$2 billion in investment towards constructing food parks in India**.

There was signing of a **food security corridor** on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement sidelines. It has taken forward India's presence on the **global food value chain**, beyond the UAE.

The corridor could commence a **route for foods** made and processed in India. These products will begin their journey on the Indian coast of the Arabian Sea, passing through the UAE, and towards major international markets.

The corridor will emerge as a **world class template of successful Agri trade** for India. It will unlock **greater productivity, efficiency and growth** for its millions of workers and employees. For the UAE, the benefits go beyond **maintaining and diversifying** its food reserves. **Trade linkages** could enable the UAE to **leverage its strategic location** between Asia and Europe to serve as India's food export gateway to West Asia and the Africa region.

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The Dubai Multi Commodities Centre launched **Agriota, an Agri trading and commodity platform** to link Indian farmers to food companies in the UAE. It gives millions of Indian farmers the opportunity to directly reach out to the entirety of the UAE's food ecosystem.

A consortium of UAE-based entities are investing up to \$7 billion in mega food parks, contract farming and the sourcing of agro commodities in India.

Those projects will generate **lakhs of non farm agri jobs**. It will enable farmers to discover better prices for their products. Bolstered by the **UAE's infrastructural capabilities**, India's agricultural products will have **more resilient and diversified place** in global marketplace.

18. [It is a new assault on India's liberty](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **“It is a new assault on India's liberty”** published in **“The Hindu”** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Polity

Relevance– Issues related to free speech

News– The Union government introduced a new set of measures for dealing with fake news and misinformation on the Internet. These introductions came through an amendment made to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, or IT Rules.

What are important provisions of amended IT rules?

The amendment gives power to the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology for creating a **“fact check unit”**. It will identify **false or misleading online content** that is related to the central government's business in any manner.

If social media intermediaries fail to prevent users from hosting information that has been identified as false by the fact check unit, they will lose their **“safe harbour” immunity**.

What are some facts about IT rules?

The Union government gets power to decide what information is bogus. It can exercise **wide ranging powers of censorship** by compelling intermediaries to take down posts deemed fake or false.

The IT Rules derive their authority from the Information Technology Act, 2000 meant to provide **“legal recognition” for electronic commerce**.

Section 79 of the Act provides a **“safe harbour”**. It does it by granting immunity to intermediaries, if they observe **“due diligence”** in discharging their duties and follow other guidelines prescribed by the state.

An intermediary under the law refers to any person who **receives, stores, or transmits electronic records**. It would include Internet service providers, search engines, and social media platforms.

IT Rules were introduced in 2021, are divided into two distinct parts. The rules regulate intermediaries through MeitY. Digital news media, including over-the-top (OTT) media services are regulated through the Union Ministry for Information and Broadcasting.

The IT Rules imposed a **series of obligations**. A breach of these could result in a **loss of safe harbour**.

The rules required social media platforms to provide **technological solutions** to identify the first originator of any information on their service, where demanded by government, or mandated by an order of court.

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What are the issues with amendments in IT rules?

The Union government gets power to decide what information is bogus. It can exercise **wide ranging powers of censorship** by compelling intermediaries to take down posts deemed fake or false.

The amendments introduced are a **threat to liberty**. Misinformation or fake news is rampant on the Internet. But all problems are not capable of **easy legislative solutions**. **Thoughtless censorship** is never an answer.

The **rights of the press, and common person**, to question authority, to **speak truth to power**, will be diminished.

Restrictions have not been imposed through **legislation, but through executive orders**. This is against the **substantive constitutional guarantees**.

Article 19(1)(a) grants every citizen a right to **freedom of speech and expression**. That right can only be limited through **reasonable restrictions** made by law on grounds stipulated in Article 19(2). Fake news and misinformation are not grounds on which speech can be limited.

The amendments made to the IT Rules do not put **limits on restraints imposed**. Instead, they confer on the Fact Check Unit limitless powers to decide what information is false and compel social media intermediaries to act based on these findings.

In **Shreya Singhal vs Union of India judgement**, the Supreme Court held that a law that limits speech can **neither be vague nor over-broad**. The amendment to the IT Rules suffers on both accounts.

First, the notification **fails to define fake news**. **Second**, it allows the government's fact Check unit to verify any news **"in respect of any business"** that involves the state.

There are **uses of open ended and undefined words**, especially the use of the **phrase "any business"**. It indicates that the government will have the power to decide what each of us can see, hear, and read on the Internet.

What is the way forward for the government to act against fake news?

There is a need for **comprehensive parliamentary legislation** on the fake news and misinformation. And legislation emanating out of such a process would put limitations on speech subjected to grounds stipulated in Article 19(2).

The government cannot act as an **arbiter of its own cause**. In France, where legislation exists to counter the spread of misinformation during elections, the declaration is made not by the government but by an independent judge.

A directive to remove misinformation is not the only solution to fake news. There are other, less **restrictive alternatives available**.

19. [For civil services, HR lessons from the military](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **"For civil services, HR lessons from the military"** published in **"The Indian Express"** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Role of civil services in a democracy

Relevance– Reform in civil services

News– The article explains the need for adopting HR practices from the military to reform civil services.

What are the national goals and strategy of India?

There are **no poor people, only people in poor places**. The war on poverty is won by raising the **productivity of five physical places** — states, cities, sectors, firms, and skills.

The strategy is to replace **high employed poverty with high-paying jobs** through urbanisation, formalisation, industrialisation, financialisation and human capital.

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What are the HR practices in armed forces that should be adopted by civil services?

Tenure: The Agniveer revamp will reduce an average soldier's age, **ensure motivation** for continuing in service, and gradually **raise military capital expenditure**.

This allows organisations to **renew themselves** without complications, court cases or a huge pool of promotable but not postable.

The government must hire all new civil servants for a **fixed 10-year tenure**. The rollover percentages should be decided by a **hard-coded organisational structure**.

Specialisation: In a democracy's generalists are politicians. Civil servants are **technocrats** whose mandate is **assisting in governance**.

The ideal administrator is not the gifted layman who frequently moves from job to job within service and can take a **practical view** of any problem.

Young military recruits pick an **area of expertise** early. Our civil services must replicate this.

Structure: The **"on-paper" performance management systems** in civil services have collapsed. Only a few civil servants don't get to the top positions through indiscriminate promotions.

Top heaviness also undermines organisational effectiveness. The pyramid has become a cylinder.

Uttar Pradesh has roughly 80 DGs and additional DGs for around 2.5 lakh policemen, while the army has about 175 lieutenant generals for about 12 lakh soldiers. **Organisational structures** should be the Eiffel Towers because more work doesn't mean more bosses.

The best solution for **differentiation in civil services** is **honest appraisals**. So organisational structure should be changed to restrict the secretary rank population in New [Delhi](#) to 25, chief secretary/DG rank in states to two.

There is a need to **introduce differential retirement ages** based on rank and **shrink the number of ministries and departments**.

[20. The GeM In What Govt Buys](#)

Source- The post is based on the article **"The GeM In What Govt Buys"** published in **"The Times of India"** on **20h April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Government policies and interventions

Relevance- Issues related to government procurement

News- The [Government e Marketplace](#) (GeM) crossed a historic milestone at the end of 2022-23: Government agencies purchased goods and services worth more than Rs 2 lakh crore through more than five million online transactions in a single financial year.

What are some facts about Government e Marketplace?

The portal was launched to **align public procurement** of goods and services with **the government's mission of 'Minimum Government and Maximum Governance'** and his strategy of using technology to make government systems **honest, effective and accessible to all**.

The journey began with business worth Rs 422 crore in 2016-17.

GeM has grown spectacularly since it was set up in August 2016. The total value of transactions on the portal almost **doubled in 2022-23 to Rs 2. 01 lakh crore from Rs 1. 07 lakh crore in the previous fiscal**.

What is the difference between the earlier system and the new system of procurement?

Earlier the system was riddled with **inefficiencies and corruption**. Government procurement used to be **opaque, time-consuming, cumbersome, and prone to corruption and cartelization**.

Only a **privileged few** could break through huge entry barriers.

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Buyers had no choice but to purchase **sub-standard goods at high, non-negotiable rates** from the privileged suppliers.

Potential sellers were completely at the **mercy of the facilitating agency**, to get empaneled, and then to get timely payments.

In the new system, there is **hardly any human interface** in vendor registration, order placement and payment processing. At every step, SMS and e-mail notifications are sent to the buyer, the head of her organisation, paying authorities and sellers.

The **paperless, cashless and faceless** GeM gives buyers the **freedom to buy goods and services** directly from unlimited sellers at competitive rates.

What shows the success of the GeM portal?

An **independent study conducted by the World Bank and IIM Lucknow** estimated an average 10% savings from the median price. The World Bank noted that with the addition of every new bidder, savings increased by 0.55%.

A **study by Boston Consulting Group (BCG)** showed that annual cost savings in 2021-22 were in the range of 8%-11%.

The portal is home to more than **11,500 product categories**. It has over **3.2 million listed products**. It has over **280 service categories** with more than **2.8 lakh service offerings**.

GeM is catering to diverse procurement needs of more than 67,000 government buyer organizations, which have together saved about Rs 40,000 crore. It gives **equal opportunity to all buyers and sellers**.

About 60% of orders by value from states have gone to **micro and small enterprises**. States have also placed orders worth Rs 1,109 crore on startups. It demonstrates the ease of access for the relatively underprivileged business people.

21. A dispute lost – on WTO's ruling against India

Source: This post is created based on the article **"A dispute lost"**, published in **Business Standard** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus Topic – GS Paper 2 – International Institutions

Context: Recently, WTO has ruled against India's Tariff rates, on the complaint filed by EU.

World Trade Organization (WTO) has ruled against India in a case brought by several of its trading partners. The issue was high Customs duties imposed by the Indian government on the import of telecommunications equipment, including mobile phone handset.

Initially, India was taken to the dispute resolution panel of the WTO by the European Union (EU). It was later joined by Other major partners and participants in the supply chain, including Japan and Taiwan.

In this case, WTO tribunal determined that the ordinary Customs duties were above those provided in India's WTO Schedule".

What are the positive impacts of high tariff rates?

From the view of the nation's interest, these tariffs have directly led to an increase in investment and the growth of the electronics manufacturing sector.

Mobile phone production and exports have grown in recent years. However, its exports have not outpaced its imports.

What are the issues associated with high tariff policy?

Value addition in the mobile industry in India has been low, barely crossing the 10 per cent level. Therefore, the electronics sector continues to be a major component of India's trade deficit.

Growth, wage level and job creation in the sector will remain below India's competitors unless it introduces more open policies that do not rely on tariffs and protectionism.

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Tariffs are a tax paid by Indian consumers. They will have to purchase mobile phones and other electronics equipment at a higher price.

In Digital India, imported equipment are also input into basic economic value addition by many Indians.

Tariffs reduce the welfare of the people and make India high-cost and uncompetitive economy. There are geo-political implications of high tariffs. It can result in alienating its closest economic and geopolitical partners.

What should be done?

Instead of relying on tariffs, **Efficiency improvements, and coherent policies** should be prioritized.

The electronics sector is **not an infant industry in India** that must be protected. Instead, it should be given the right competitive pressure and policy environment to become world-class.

The government will definitely appeal against this ruling. However, WTO appellate body has been rendered dysfunctional by the United States' decision to veto any nominees.

22. [Beware Dr Hustle – on social media influencers](#)

Source: This post is created based on the article “**beware dr hustle**”, published in **Times of India** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus Topic – GS Paper 2 – Government policies for various sectors

Context: Recently, a viral video on a chocolate drink created a controversy

India's influencer economy – the business of using social media as a marketing and advisory tool – is expected to host 100 million influencers by end-2023.

Advertising Standards Council of India finds that 79% of respondents trust social media influencers.

Therefore, implications of influencer's videos on health are huge.

What are the implications of social media influencer's videos on health?

The influencers, who are '**doctors without degrees**', can be harmful for the health of the people. Some of the harmful effects can be reversible, but some can be irreversible such as prescribing anabolic steroid, suggesting pills for high blood sugar and even cancer.

Similarly, if a person is suffering from mental health problems, he can go online and see the videos suggesting deep breathing, which can be a short-term treatment. However, the root of the problem of that person might go undiagnosed and untreated.

Therefore, there should be light regulations for influencers. The government's list of dos and don'ts as well as a requirement that qualifications be displayed is a good idea.

23. [The caste imperative: On the subject of an updated caste census](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**The caste imperative: On the subject of an updated caste census**” published in **The Hindu** on **20th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About the demand for an updated caste census.

News: Recently, various political parties are demanding an updated caste census. This highlights an emerging consensus among the political parties on the need for a caste census.

Must read: [Caste based census in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the rationale behind the demand for an updated caste census?

Various reasons for demanding an updated caste census include,

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-The recent expansion of reservation benefits to economically weaker sections among “forward” castes using income criteria,

–**Outdated data is used:** The Mandal Commission report of 1980 was based on caste census data of 1931. But that is still remaining as the basis for identifying backwardness and determining the extent of the reservation to the Other Backward Classes,

-There is a need for a comprehensive census that provides data to support, or evaluate existing reservation quotas, or assess demands for reservation policies,

-Such updated data will serve as a legal imperative and allow the government to answer the Supreme Court’s call for quantifiable data.

Must read: [Why a Caste Census is needed and why it may not see light of the day](#)

What are the challenges associated with the Socio-Economic and Caste Census in 2011?

-Issues in defining castes: The criteria government described in 2011 created many concerns associated with the data.

-Recorded data of 46 lakh different castes, sub-castes, caste/clan surnames require adequate breakdown before being used for proper enumeration.

-The survey was conducted without utilising the Census Commissioners and the Office of the Registrar General properly.

Read more: [Socio-Economic and Caste Census: A Need for reforms](#)

What are the challenges in creating an updated caste census?

a) The government has already postponed the long-delayed 2021 Census. This raises the question about the government’s present capacity to conduct an effective caste census, **b)** There is a risk of objectification of caste identities even though the Constitution seeks to build a casteless society.

What should be done?

An adequate consolidation of caste/sub-caste names into social groups along with the synonymy of the self-identified group names should be done prior to conducting the survey. Enlisting these groups against the OBC/Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes lists for each State. But addressing socioeconomic inequities through reservation quotas might not make advancement to a truly casteless society.

24. [Old friends: on Russia-India bilateral ties and the Ukraine issue](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Old friends: on Russia-India bilateral ties and the Ukraine issue**” published in **The Hindu** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 2: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests..

Relevance: About the visit of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister.

News: Recently, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister visited India and participated in the India-Russia Inter-governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation meeting.

What are the key discussions held during the recent visit of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister?

-Bilateral trade went up by 2.6 times in the past year and surpassed the 2025 target.

-Both countries demanded more market access and the use of “national currencies” to circumvent sanctions.

-Russia demanded that Indian companies could increase exports in road construction and pharmaceuticals.

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-They also referred to progress in negotiations for an FTA between India and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Both countries acknowledged that India-Russia ties are among the “steadiest of the major relationships of the world”.

Read more: [India, Russia agree to deepen trade and economic relations](#)

About India-Russia ties during the Russia-Ukraine crisis

Since Russia’s war in Ukraine began, western sanctions have drastically cut Russian exports. Hence, Russia has increasingly joined with countries like India and China which do not join the sanctions to export resources. For example, India’s oil imports from Russia have jumped from a negligible 0.2% since the war to a massive 28% of India’s total oil intake. This gave a rise to Western accusations that India is “benefitting from the war”.

Read more: [China – Russia relations and its implications on India – Explained, pointwise](#)

What should be done?

India must make its stand against the war clear. India can go behind the original reason for the current turmoil and its global economic impact.

25. Why LGBTQIA+ couples should be allowed to adopt

Source: The post is based on the article “**Why LGBTQIA+ couples should be allowed to adopt**” published in the **Indian Express** on **20th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About the process of adoption by LGBTQIA+ couples.

News: Recently, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) opposed the granting of adoption rights to same-sex couples and said that the move will endanger the children. On the other hand, the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) supported the conferral of adoption and succession rights on same-sex couples.

About adoption principles in India

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act), allows heterosexual married couples, and single and divorced persons to adopt.

The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 (HAMA) permits any male or female Hindu of sound mind to adopt, and for couples to adopt with the consent of their spouse.

Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) permits applications from adoptive parents in live-in relationships, which it examines on a case-to-case basis.

Note: Several countries around the world, including Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, South Africa, the UK and the US have legal provisions to allow unmarried same-sex couples to adopt.

How do adoption principles hamper the adoption by LGBTQIA+ couples?

-Both the HAMA and the JJ Act envisage a forthcoming adoptive couple to be heterosexual and married.

-In a situation where one partner in a non-heterosexual relationship adopts a child as a single parent, the other partner is deprived of legal recognition as an adoptive parent.

Read more: [Challenges associated with laws that govern adoption in India](#)

What are the various opinions supporting the adoption by LGBTQIA+ couples?

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice emphasised the need for uniform and comprehensive legislation on adoption applicable to all, irrespective of religion, that should also cover the LGBTQI community.

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In **Deepika Singh v. Central Administrative Services, (2022)** case the Supreme Court observed that “familial relationships may take the form of domestic, unmarried partnerships or queer relationships”. These units equally deserve protection and benefits under the law.

Must read: [Legalising Same-sex marriages in India and associated challenges – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the debates regarding the “best interest of the child”?

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 requires the best interest of the child to be the primary consideration. Both the JJ Act and the Adoption rules aims to fulfil the best interest of the child. Indian courts have applied the principle of “the welfare of the child” in the context of adoption, custody, and guardianship cases and arrived at decisions on a case-to-case basis.

In **Suzanne Du Toit Anna-Marié De Vos v. Minister for Welfare and Population Development and Others, (2002)** case, the Constitutional Court of South Africa held that the exclusion of unmarried same-sex couples who are otherwise suitable to adopt, from jointly adopting children violated the principle of the paramountcy of the best interest of the child.

Read more: [Same-sex marriages: A matter for Parliament](#)

What should be done regarding the adoption by LGBTQIA+ couples?

Relax the criteria: Sexual orientation or marital status cannot be the sole basis for the exclusion of same-sex couples from jointly adopting as long as they meet the suitability criteria and can ensure the best interest of the child.

Remove discrimination: An adopted child being raised by a same-sex couple through single parent adoption should not be discriminated against and deprived of the rights available to an adopted child raised by a heterosexual married couple.

Both the Parliament and the Supreme Court should consider the best interest of children, as well as the fundamental right to equality and non-discrimination of children and couples identifying as LGBTQI while examining the matter.

[26. Be Smart, Be Humane – As more flee to Mizoram from Myanmar, New Delhi must understand costs of not having a refugee policy](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Be Smart, Be Humane – As more flee to Mizoram from Myanmar, New Delhi must understand costs of not having a refugee policy**” published in **The Times of India** on **20th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About India’s refugee influx

News: Military operations in Myanmar have sent more refugees across the border to Mizoram.

About refugees in Mizoram

Ever since the military coup in Myanmar in 2021, the state hosts more than 40,000 refugees from Myanmar. Many refugees are from Myanmar’s Chin community. They share ethnic kinship ties with Mizos. So, the Mizoram government is expressing a tolerant attitude.

The influx of Kuki-Chin refugees from Bangladesh into the state has also been witnessed since last year after an operation by Bangladeshi security forces.

About India’s past refugee influx

India is neither a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention nor its 1967 protocol.

India has hosted some of the largest flows of refugees of all time and **follows the principle of nonrefoulement**. This includes hosting Tibetan refugees, millions of displaced individuals during Bangladesh’s 1971 liberation war and Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing the civil war.

Must read: [Refugee Problem in India – Explained, Pointwise](#)

What are the concerns associated with India's approach to refugees?

- India is unprepared for a large flow of refugees. The current system is neither able to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees nor give them a clear path forward, including translocation to a third country. This gives an opportunity for local resentment against refugees.
- An increase in Myanmar refugees led to increased criminal activities, smuggling and drug trafficking in border areas.
- Not having a refugee policy might lead to ad-hoc policy decisions. For example, India did not provide shelter to adequate numbers of Afghan refugees who worked with India and the India-friendly former Afghan government.

Read more: [Afghan immigrants and India's refugee policy – Explained, pointwise](#)

What should be done?

India needs to have a clear refugee framework. Instead of a patchwork of rules and Acts the government should work on a national law on refugees. India being a fast-growing major economy and an aspiring major global player must undertake a comprehensive review of its refugee management mechanism.

[27. A new edge to the fight against tuberculosis](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “A new edge to the fight against tuberculosis” published in “The Hindu” on 21st April 2023.

Syllabus: GS 2- Issues related to development and management of health

News – At the One World TB Summit in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi instilled fresh energy to global tuberculosis (TB) elimination response and reiterated India's commitment to spearhead this effort.

What is the progress of India in fighting against TB?

India's National Tuberculosis Control Program has introduced several measures to **find, notify and treat TB cases**.

Case notifications have risen from 15.6 lakh in 2014 to over 24 lakh in 2022. This reflects the program's **expanded reach and improved detection measures**.

Novel approaches have been introduced to fight TB. It includes **engagement with the private sector**, launch of **social support provisions** and introduction of **diagnostic tools and new drug regimens**. It has improved **TB management**.

What are challenges in the fight against TB?

There is a lack of **widespread awareness** about the disease and **lack of access to quality care**. The recent **National TB Prevalence Survey** found that 64% of people with infectious TB did not seek care.

National-level estimates suggest that for every person notified with TB, it misses detecting almost two more cases.

What is the way forward for elimination of TB in India?

There is a need to introduce **disruptive approaches** and new tools to change the way for **preventing, diagnosing, and treating TB**.

Vaccines– For any infectious disease, a vaccine is what makes elimination possible. The **BCG vaccine** for TB does not adequately protect adolescents and adults. There is a need to prioritise and pick up the pace to find an **effective TB vaccine**.

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There are currently over 15 TB vaccine candidates in the pipeline. There is a need to ensure that their clinical trials are **prioritised to assess their efficacy** in various community settings and for different target groups.

Testing– Testing for, and diagnosing TB needs to become **more accessible and affordable**. **Point-of-Care Tests** such as home-based tests for COVID allow **decentralised, rapid and low-cost diagnostics** to provide results within minutes. New innovations such as **nasal and tongue swab-based tests** for TB can be a game changer.

Further, **handheld digital x-ray machines** can now be taken to villages and urban settlements to screen large numbers of high-risk individuals, safely and conveniently.

Drugs– The development and introduction of **new therapeutic molecules** can play a crucial role in the long run. There is a need to scale up **newer and more effective regimens** and **repurpose existing drugs** for TB.

Shorter, safer, and more effective regimens do exist. It includes the 1HP regimen for latent TB infections, the four-month regimen for drug-susceptible TB, and the six-month regimen for drug-resistant TB. These need to be scaled up.

Policy framework– There is a need to create **regulatory and policy frameworks** for smooth rollout of proven tools to reach people with little delay.

This requires greater **collaboration between policymakers, scientists, product developers, clinical researchers and governments**.

Harmonization of standards and regulatory processes between countries is important. It can enable **mutual recognition of evidence-based standards and licenses**.

[28. Bring government closer to people](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Bring government closer to people**” published in **Business Standard** on 21st April 2023.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Governance

Relevance: concerns associated with local government.

News: India is preparing to become an advanced economy in the next 25 years.

What are the features of advanced economies?

A distinguishing feature of advanced economies is their **significant allocation of revenues and responsibilities at the local government level**.

These include primary education, health care, basic law and order, and civic infrastructure — sewage, water supply, road maintenance and local zoning and regulations.

How much does India currently spend at the state and local level of government?

India’s share of sub-national (state plus local) spending is at 60 percent of total spend, which is **very high at its level of development**.

Other large federal states spend less. **For example**, Brazil spends around 50 percent while the United States around 40 per cent. **Only Canada and China spend more than 70 per cent at the subnational level**.

What are the concerns with this devolution of money?

This devolution of money was proposed by the 14th Commission and was accepted by the 15th Finance Commission.

However, simply shifting resources from the Centre to the states will not be of great help unless it reaches the lower levels of government.

For genuine devolution, the focus must shift to looking at ways to ensure more resources flow to local institutions, such as panchayats and mayors.

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This is because many smart city projects are hampered by the inability of city mayors to deliver on their components of the scheme.

Further, the cost of delivering services at the same time improves and is made more effective and monitorable.

What are the concerns with the local government?

India's local government spend is less than 4 percent of total government spending. This share is much smaller than in most advanced economies.

For example, spending by the local government in China exceeds 50 percent of total spending by the government.

Hence, India must prepare a road map for greater devolution from state-level spending to local governments and raise more local government revenues.

How can the revenues of local government be increased?

The best way to allow local governments to raise their own resources is an **increase in property taxes and higher user fees**.

Objections to higher property taxes from elderly owners can be handled through different means such as grandfathering clauses that exempt them during their lifetime.

At present, India has a very low property tax rate, accounting for around 0.5 percent of its total tax revenue and only a little over 0.1 percent of GDP.

Whereas **the OECD countries** on average collect about 5.6 percent of total tax revenue in property taxes and the US, UK and Canada at over 11- 12 per cent at the highest levels.

What can be the way ahead?

The 15th Finance Commission provided grants to states subject to them updating their property tax rates and improving collection.

This route could be used to discuss raising rates by the **upcoming 16th Finance Commission to increase local government resources**.

[29. We require reliable data on caste to meet our aims of social justice](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **“We require reliable data on caste to meet our aims of social justice”** published in the **Livemint** on **21st April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About the demand including caste in the census.

News: Recently, many political parties are demanding to include caste in India's census.

Must read: [Caste based census in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

Does the present form of the census collect any caste-based data?

Yes, the Census of India is enumerating caste-based data and publishes regular detailed tables based on that. These are available for Schedule Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs) alone. But not for Other Backward Classes (OBC) and the residual category of 'Others'.

What is the rationale behind the demands for including caste in the census?

-For the SC and ST social groups, the percentage of seats reserved is proportional to the share of these groups in the country's population. However, this is not the case for the OBC group. The OBC groups are demanding a proportionate share of the reservation

-At present, Central and State governments have gone to the extent of extending reservations to various communities to fulfil political favouritism. A reliable estimate on caste will remove such political favouritism.

Read here: [The caste imperative: On the subject of an updated caste census](#)

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About the previous demands for including caste in the census

-The Mandal Commission requested the home ministry to include caste in the 1981 Census.

-Caste as a category was enumerated as part of a nationwide [Socio-Economic Caste Census \(SECC\)](#) in 2011-12 to identify beneficiaries for various government programmes. The SECC has since been adopted by most government programmes, including for the identification of beneficiaries under the [National Food Security Act](#). As part of the SECC data on caste was collected but was kept apart from other socioeconomic indicators.

-A Supreme Court judgement in 2022 made empirical estimates of different castes conditional for reservation in local bodies.

-The government set up a committee to analyse the data on caste from the SECC under the chairpersonship of Arvind Panagariya. But there has been little progress since then and the data has not been released.

-Karnataka conducted its own caste census in 2017. However, even the results of that census have not been released. Another caste census is currently underway in Bihar.

Why should be done?

Data from an all-India caste enumeration might create pressure from OBC representatives for a larger chunk of reservations as pressure groups arise from within this vast social group.

The government must use the existing SECC data on caste. Since caste does not change over the years, India's SECC data is still reliable. This will allow a better understanding of the socio-economic status of various castes.

Must read: [Why a Caste Census is needed and why it may not see light of the day](#)

30. [Express View on delay of Consumption Expenditure Surveys, census: Let data flow](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **“Express View on delay of Consumption Expenditure Surveys, census: Let data flow”** published in the **Indian Express** on **21st April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS-2: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.

Relevance: About the implications of delaying surveys.

News: India's own census enumeration exercise which was meant to take place in 2021 has now been postponed to 2024-25. Similarly, results of the National Statistical Office's consumption expenditure survey 2022-23 may now be released only after the general elections in 2024.

Note: *The 2017-18 consumption expenditure survey was junked by the government due to “quality issues”.*

What are the implications of delaying surveys?

Absence of credible data: The major utility of the consumption expenditure data is estimating poverty and inequality. With no recent consumption expenditure survey, there is little consensus on the trends in poverty and inequality. Further, several economists will put forth their estimates based on different data sources and present differing assessments. For instance, the “State of Working India 2021” report estimated a sharp increase in poverty during the pandemic. On the other hand, few other experts estimated reduction in poverty.

Reliance on other datasets increases: The utility of the consumption expenditure data is not limited to estimating poverty and inequality. These surveys are also used for rebasing GDP and CPI. In the absence of such surveys, reliance on other datasets only increases.

Limit the policymaker's option: The absence of credible data affects the ability of policymakers to make well-judged choices.

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What should be done?

Data that is accurate and timely forms the bedrock of policy-making. Hence, measures need to be taken to strengthen the statistical system and safeguard its independence in situations such as pandemics and elections.

31. [The missing Muslim woman in the workforce](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**The missing Muslim woman in the workforce**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **22nd April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Vulnerable actions of the population. GS1- social empowerment

Relevance: Issues related to women’s empowerment.

News: The article deals with the issues of the employment status of Muslim women.

What are the statistics about Muslims in higher education?

AISHE 2021 data on higher education enrolment in the country showed that there were more women than men from the Muslim community in undergraduate courses. Out of 1,000 Muslim students in higher education, 503 are women.

But, there has been an **absolute decrease in Muslims in higher education**. The number of students from the community in higher education decreased to 19.21 lakh in 2020-21 from 21 lakhs in 2019-20.

What are three disturbing trends shown by PLFS related to the employment status of women?

The **female labour force participation (FLFP) rate** has stagnated at very low levels in our country. Women’s employment is seen as a **supplemental source of income**.

The share of women employed in **unpaid labour** has increased even for highly educated women. In 2017-18, 6.2% of women with graduate or higher levels of education worked as unpaid helpers. By 2021-22, this share had increased to 11.2 per cent.

What are the issues with the employment status of Muslim women?

Muslim women are absent from the workforce.

The **female labour force participation rate of Muslim women** in the country is 15%, as compared to 26.1% for Hindu women.

Over the past three years, Muslim women have had the **lowest LFP rate** amongst all religious groups in the country.

Only 12.4% of working Muslim women **are salaried** as compared to 16.2% of Hindu women.

What is the way forward to have more Muslim women in workplaces?

Employers need to ensure **women’s inclusion** in the workplace. They should also take an **intersectional approach**.

Research shows that Muslim women face **significant discrimination in hiring** at entry-level roles. There is a need to **incorporate mechanisms** to address **biases in hiring**.

There is a need to **avoid faith stereotyping, and design inclusive networking opportunities and company events**. It is necessary to promote **cultural awareness**, create an **inclusive schedule for employees with faith-related needs**. Women should be **offered compassion and support**.

Government and policymakers need to make those jobs available that women want. They need to **create ecosystems** that are supportive of employed women. This involves creating space for women from all communities in **policy conversations**.

Families and society need to prioritise women’s employment so that women can have **agency, express themselves, and expand their sources of happiness**.

The stereotype of men being the **sole breadwinner** of the family puts a lot of pressure on them. Women can be brought in to **share this burden**.

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32. [The LoC agreement of 2007 deserves a relook](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **“The LoC agreement of 2007 deserves a relook”** published in **“The Hindu”** on **22nd April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 2- Bilateral groupings and agreements

Relevance: India – Pakistan bilateral issues

News: A former Special Envoy has confirmed in his book that the agreement on the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, was ready to be signed by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President General Musharraf. But, the stand-off in Pakistan with the judiciary and the 26/11 attacks in 2008 has halted its progress.

What are some facts about the proposed agreement on LoC?

The agreement proposed a **“4-point solution”** and a **“14 -point set of guidelines”** for any settlement between the two countries. It includes **free flow of trade, ending cross border terrorism, respect for human rights, and bringing down military presence** on both sides of the LoC

The Line of Control has to be **respected like a normal border** between the two countries.

What is the current situation of the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan?

A **series of terror attacks**, from Mumbai to Pathankot and Pulwama has spoiled the relationship. **The reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir** in August 2019, and the **amendment to Article 370** have made it difficult for any Pakistani leader to propose a **restoration of ties**.

There are **no political contacts** at any level, **no trade, no direct travel links and no High Commissioners** in each other’s countries.

What are the steps taken by the current government for the normalisation of relations with Pakistan?

Prime Minister continued to seek engagement with Islamabad even after the several setbacks, **Back-channel talks** are believed to run between National Security Adviser and Pakistani intelligence. It focuses on **preventing hostilities**. The LoC ceasefire agreement of 2021 was the result of it.

The two sides have also discussed measures that would lead to the **restoration of statehood** and elections in J&K, the **reappointment of High Commissioners** and the **restoration of visas and people-to-people ties**.

These include initiatives such as the **Kartarpur Corridor** and the proposed **Sharda Peeth Corridor** across the temple in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir’s Neelum Valley.

The next step would be to revisit the **nearly ready agreement** of 15 years ago.

Do the recent moves by the Indian government on J&K have an impact on relations between India and Pakistan?

New Delhi’s moves to revoke J&K’s special status and Statehood did not change the **basis for a settlement** of the J&K dispute. Article 370 was always a **temporary provision**, and diluted over the decades. It was never recognised by Pakistan. Article 35(A) has had little to no effect in **changing demography** thus far.

The **move on gender parity** in property inheritance had already been implemented in 2002. The move related to **downgrading the State to a Union Territory** will be reversed.

What is the way forward for India in its relationship with Pakistan?

Unjust arrests and a continuing **security crackdown on politicians and civil society** in J&K should be stopped. There is a need to relook at measures like **internet bans and a stringent lockdown, targeting of journalists and human rights violations**.

There is a need to end **cross-border terrorism** from Pakistan that the people of J&K, have suffered from for decades.

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Despite the precarious situation within J&K, the LoC has been **more or less stable** for more than half a century. Any military operation by either India or Pakistan to reclaim the other side is unlikely to make much headway.

Pakistan is **facing internal crises**. **China at the Line of Actual Control** is a bigger challenge for India. So, India needs a more **stable Line of Control**.

Revisiting the agreement on LoC about a decade -and -a half ago is eventually the only way forward.

33. Botanical Gardens and life on Earth

Source: The post is based on the article **“Botanical gardens and life on earth”** published in **“The Hindu”** on **22nd April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS2- Environment and ecology

Relevance: In-situ conservation of ecology.

News: The Tamil Nadu government has decided to establish a large botanical garden (the Chengalpattu Botanical Garden) in the State.

What is the importance of gardens?

Plants form the **basis of civilization**. Humanity has had a **long association with gardens**. The tradition of home gardens has been noted in ancient texts and depicted in cave paintings.

Gardens **capture a part of the earth’s biodiversity** for our enjoyment. Modern academic gardens often have hundreds and thousands of dried plant specimens for research.

Rulers, from ancient civilisations to modern ones owned botanical gardens rich in native plants and plants collected from distant places. A beautiful garden was an **important metric of one’s prosperity and administration**.

Between the 15th to 17th centuries, European explorations led to the establishment of several academic botanical gardens. The oldest of these, **Orto Botanico di Padova in Italy**, was founded in 1545.

The most well-known, the **Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew near London**, was formally consolidated in 1840.

What are some facts about botanical gardens in India?

The oldest of the Indian Botanic gardens called the **Acharya Jagadish Chandra (AJC) Bose Indian Botanic Garden**, in Howrah was established in 1787. The Garden is spread over 109 hectares.

Kolkata is also the headquarters of the **Botanical Survey of India**. It is the country’s major research centre in botanical surveys and documentation.

The exact number of botanical gardens in India is not known. The published number ranges from **between 10 to 35**.

What are the issues with India’s approach to botanical gardens?

Globally, botanical gardens are **important centres for plant exploration, discovery and research, and biodiversity outreach**.

Indian botanical gardens have often lacked this **wider perspective**. Only a few botanical gardens have **plant exploration and education programmes**.

India is among the countries with a high diversity of plants and animals, with an estimated 18,000 to 20,000 plant species. Yet, our knowledge of our **vast botanical heritage** is **extremely limited**.

Our scientific and educational institutions have neglected many **aspects of plant biology: taxonomy, ecology, evolution, population ecology and stress biology**.

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What are some facts about the proposed botanical garden in Tamil Nadu?

The ₹300 crores Chengalpattu Botanical Garden is being planned across 138 hectares. It will be **India's largest botanical garden.**

The CBG has the potential to become a **major centre for the exploration and discovery** of India's plant wealth. It will be a **centre of research, education, citizen science, and outreach** in plant biology. It will be a **forceful voice in conservation.**

The Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew has been chosen as a **key partner for technical expertise** on what plants to use and how to maintain them.

What measures can be taken for the success of the proposed botanical garden?

Many institutions and individuals in India also have **relevant and appropriate expertise** in the design and development of gardens. It can be used.

In the past two decades, the botanical gardens in Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, have set **new standards in their research and outreach programmes.** **Collaboration** with such gardens could be immensely beneficial.

General Studies Paper – 3

General Studies - 3

1. [How food inflation can be managed keeping El Nino in mind](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**How food inflation can be managed keeping El Nino in mind**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **17th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Economy

Relevance– Inflation related issues

News– Reserve Bank of India Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) paused the raising repo rates in its last meeting.

RBI is not blindly following the US Fed in raising interest rates to tame inflation. It reflects RBI's confidence in containing inflation below 6 per cent.

What are the recent numbers on inflation in India?

The CPI data of March 2023 reveals that inflation has dropped to 5.66%. It is below the **upper limit of 6%**.

This drop in inflation has been significantly brought about by **food inflation**.

However, even in food, inflationary concerns remain high in case of **cereals, milk and milk products**.

What is the future scenario of inflation in India?

Milk and milk products have the **highest weight in CPI**. Milk production in the country suddenly came to a halt in FY23.

This has been attributed to **lumpy skin disease**. Although the growth in milk production is gaining momentum, it will take time to cool down milk prices.

The **only logical option** in the short term to contain milk prices seems to be reducing import duties on skimmed milk powder and butter to about 15%.

In the medium to long run, the GoI should **augment good quality fodder supplies** and **raise productivity of milch animals**.

Wheat inflation is still roaring at about 20%. It is likely to come down in the next two months as harvesting and procurement picks up in Punjab-Haryana belt. The **unseasonal rains in March** has created uncertainty about the wheat output.

In this situation, the government can **lower import duties** on wheat and allow imports. There should be ample supplies in the country to avoid any distressed situation.

The **prospect of El Nino** has created a new uncertainty about kharif crops. Several crops could be under stress. However, **rice stocks** in the country are more than three times the buffer stock norms. So, there is no need to panic on that front.

Edible oil prices are already collapsing due to **cheaper global prices of palm and other oils**. So, there is no need to worry on that account as well.

But pulses, especially tur and urad, can create problems. So, imports of 2 to 3 mt of kharif pulses by NAFED or through private trade cannot be ruled out.

What is the way forward for inflation management in India?

Knee jerk reaction when prices go up does more harm than good. A good idea is **developing commodity futures markets**.

India needs to invest in **building trust in futures markets**. There is a need to **improve their efficiency with information symmetry**. **Bringing transparency** through **better technologies and regulatory institutions** needs to be a priority.

The RBI and Centre jointly need to **enhance their tool kit** to contain inflation below 5%.

2. On democratising tiger conservation

Source– The post is based on the article “On democratising tiger conservation” published in “The Hindu” on 15th April 2023.

Syllabus: GS3- Environment

Relevance– Conservation and protection of species

News– The tiger number was recently released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is the minimum estimate based on the tigers photographed during the survey.

What are issues faced in conserving the tigers in India?

India is now losing tigers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, the Eastern ghats and from the Northeastern forests. **Genetic diversity unique to these geographical regions** is lost. It is not good for maintaining **long-term population viability and natural recovery**.

A tool that is being used to overcome this reduction in tiger numbers is to **reintroduce tigers from central Indian forests**. However, if this is done too often, re-introduction will **homogenise tiger genetic structure** across the country. This needs to be looked at more seriously.

Why does the current approach to tiger conservation in India need to have a relook?

The tiger was considered an “**umbrella species**”. Saving the tiger meant saving the entire ecosystem. Habitats that have the highest tiger numbers are typically those with a **high prey abundance**.

But in the absence of **proper scientific oversight**, the focus stayed on **boosting tiger numbers** rather than their habitat. The most common interventions were to **manipulate ecosystems** to support high densities of the tiger’s principal prey species.

In most cases, this involved **improving habitat for the cheetal**. It also required provisioning water. This has resulted in the “**cheetalification**” of tiger reserves.

For example, in the Kanha Tiger Reserve, the explosion in the cheetal population resulted in the habitat becoming **unsuitable for the endangered barasingha**, which depends on tall grass. Managers then had to create **enclosures free of cheetal** so that the barasingha could reproduce and their numbers recover.

In other parks, the excessive provisioning of water during the dry season led to **reduced natural, climate driven variations** in populations of wildlife. This is likely to have unknown and unintended consequences for these habitats in the long-term.

What are issues related to the policy framework for conservation of species in India?

Conservation in India depends entirely on a **network of Protected Areas**. This is an **exclusive conservation model** and suffers from a “**sarkaar**” complex. Ordinary Indians, especially those living closest to wildlife have very little say in conservation.

The WLPA is a **restrictive law**. It describes in great detail what you can’t do. However, the law and associated policies have done very little to **enable conservation**.

There is **no policy framework and incentive** for ordinary citizens to aid in conservation. As a result, conservation has not **reached beyond these PAs**.

In other countries, natural lands are owned or managed by individuals, communities, farmers, ranchers, corporates, charities, and the government. Each one of them is **incentivised to conserve** these lands according to their interests.

As a result, **several conservation models** operate simultaneously. But in India, all natural habitats are managed by one agency. The approach to conservation is **singular, and exclusive**.

What is the way forward for species conservation in India?

India needs to **have frameworks** that allow local communities, citizens, scientists, non-governmental organisations, and businesses to **participate meaningfully in conservation**.

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Large tracts of forest land are “Reserved Forests” under the jurisdiction of State Forest Departments. Such areas can be **co-managed with an inclusive approach**. It also provides economic benefits for local communities.

In many landscapes, degraded agricultural lands adjoining these forest areas can be restored to **enhance connectivity between Protected Areas**.

3. [The Indian economy, across sectors, is dominated by duopolies](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**The Indian economy, across sectors, is dominated by duopolies**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **17th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Economy

Relevance– Structure of the economy

News– The article discusses the issues of monopoly in Indian markets.

What is the nature of market concentration in the manufacturing sector?

Automobile sector- It in India is **dominated by Maruti Suzuki and Hyundai**. Both are foreign-owned. Together, they account for **six out of every 10 cars sold** in the country.

If Tata Motors is added, these three players control almost **70% of the total car market**. It is the third largest player. Mahindra which ranks fourth in terms of market share

Two-wheelers segment. Three players — Hero MotoCorp, Honda and TVS Motor — account for nearly **three-fourths of the total market**. Two of these – Hero and TVS – are Indian-owned and Honda is a subsidiary of a Japanese firm.

Gadgets segment– The **mobile phone market** in India is dominated by the Chinese brands Xiaomi, Vivo and Realme, and Samsung.

Vivo, Realme, Oneplus and Oppo are reportedly linked to the same Chinese company. Together these companies controlled roughly **70% of the market in 2022**.

The **smart TV market** is similarly dominated by the likes of Xiaomi, Samsung and LG.

Similar patterns can be observed in other **consumer appliance markets** as well as in various segments of the **FMCG market**.

Core infrastructure- Indian players exercise more control here. **In steel**, the four biggest companies — JSW Steel, SAIL, Tata Steel and JSPL — control **more than half the market**. Three of these are domestic private-sector firms, while one is a public-sector enterprise.

Similarly, the **four biggest Indian cement firms** command **half of the market share** in the country.

Other areas- Such examples of market concentration can also be seen in other segments, especially in **certain commodities and related segments**.

The **lines of demarcation between foreign and domestic players** across markets are not exactly clear. There are examples of companies such as Asian Paints, Amul and Pidilite who hold a commanding position in markets where foreign competition is limited.

There are **state-sanctioned monopolies** in the **provision of utilities** such as electricity and water. These markets are largely the preserve of the public sector.

What is the nature of concentration of ownership in the service sector?

Similar patterns of market concentration can be observed here. **Online markets** tend to be dominated by foreign players or by firms heavily financed by foreign funds. **Other service segments** are more tilted towards domestic players.

The telecom sector is dominated by two large players called Jio and Airtel and a weak third player. Together, Jio and Airtel account for more than two-thirds of the market. Both are controlled by Indian promoters.

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The airline industry is also now dominated by two players — Indigo and Tata. The two airline groups accounted for more than **80% of the domestic market share** in the current year. In the **private banking space**, HDFC, ICICI and AXIS account for a significant share. All of them have **sizable foreign ownership**. Concentration is also evident in airports and ports. Similar patterns can be observed in **online markets** as well. The **retail market** is dominated by Amazon and Flipkart. The **payments market** has been cornered by PhonePe and Google Pay. **Food delivery** is split between Zomato and Swiggy; and **transportation** between Ola and Uber. Most of these companies are either foreign-owned or majorly backed by foreign players.

What are the impacts of market monopolies?

The concentration of ownership in the hands of a few big firms has been linked to **higher prices for consumers, a declining share of labour income and rising wage inequality**.

There is also the possibility of the more dominant firms **influencing government policy** to restrict **competition**. This can be done by **high entry barriers and distorting the playing field to the disadvantage of their competitors**.

This can be achieved by **raising import duties, tight regulations or licensing requirements, changing the rules of the game to restrict competitors or even making it difficult to sign beneficial free trade agreements**.

4. [Blink, It's Not Gone – Ecommerce labour protests speak to the larger problem of not enough regular non-farm jobs](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Blink, It's Not Gone – Ecommerce labour protests speak to the larger problem of not enough regular non-farm jobs**” published in **The Times of India** on 17th April 2023.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Growth and Development

Relevance: concerns associated with gig platforms

News: The delivery executive of Blinkit has gone on strike in the National Capital Region. The strike is over Blinkit's revised rates and benefits that drastically reduce minimum earnings on orders.

What are the issues with tech-driven commerce platforms?

Most of the commerce platforms **aren't profitable and depend on investor capital**.

When investors demand profits or cash runs thin, these companies cut pay and benefits for their delivery executives. This ultimately affects the earnings of delivery agents and makes gig jobs less attractive.

Why are gig jobs preferred in India?

People often prefer gig platforms due to **the lack of steady non-farm jobs**.

As per **Periodic Labour Force Survey 2021-22**, most additional jobs in the country are being created in the self-employed category. **This implies that there are not enough salaried jobs**.

Hence, the young workforce in India is left with the choice between accepting low-paying gig work with poor working conditions or returning to their villages for unproductive farm work.

What can be the way ahead?

The **economy needs to create many more regular jobs for the burgeoning workforce, especially in the manufacturing and services sectors**. This will provide better working conditions for the young workforce.

5. [Dealing with extreme heat](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**Dealing with extreme heat**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **17th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Disaster and disaster management

Relevance– Heat waves and stress

News– The article explains the increasing heat distress in India.

What are some data and facts associated with heat stress in India?

Around 350 million Indians were exposed to strong heat stress between April and May 2022. Between 1990 and 2019, summer temperatures **on average rose by 0.5-0.9°C** across districts in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. Around **54% of India’s districts** have also seen a similar rise in winter temperatures.

Between 2021 and 2050, it is expected that the **maximum temperature will rise by 2-3.5°C** in 100 districts and by **1.5– 2°C** in around 455 districts. Similarly, winter temperatures will **rise between 1°C and 1.5°C** in around 485 districts.

Indian cities are impacted by **urban heat island effect**. Temperatures are **4-12°C higher** than rural outlying areas. Humidity has exacerbated the felt temperature.

More recently, Northern India has seen significant **variability in the weather**. Cold weather in January was followed by a heat wave in February and early March, and hailstorm and heavy rain in the past few weeks.

What are the impacts of heat stress?

Weather variability has **consequences for agriculture**. For example, 90% of India’s cumin production is from Gujarat and Rajasthan. The recent weather variability has destroyed the majority of the cumin crop in Rajasthan.

Rising temperatures have also led to **unliveable cities**. For labourers, **heat exposure** leads to a loss of 162 hours per year, as per one study.

A rise in temperatures directly **impacts labour productivity**. About 50% of India’s workforce is estimated to be exposed to heat during their working hours. This includes marginal farmers, labourers at construction sites and street vendors and gig economy workers.

What is the way forward to mitigate the challenges related to heat waves distress?

Greening could help mitigate part of the problem. Ideally, for every urban citizen in India, there should be **at least seven trees in the urban landscape**.

Development plans for Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities should increase **urban surface area that is permeable**. The push should be on **increasing the density and area of urban forests**.

Expanding wetlands and restoring dead and decaying lakes may also help ensure **ecological functioning** along with reducing urban heat.

There is a need to reduce the **urban heat island effect**. This will require a push for **greater usage of permeable materials** in civic infrastructure and residential construction.

Urban layouts such as **brick jalis for ventilation and terracotta tiles** to allow hot air to escape may be considered. Curbing **anthropogenic heat emissions** from vehicles and factories will be helpful.

Urban building standards should be upgraded to avoid usage of **heat-absorbent galvanised iron and metal roof sheets**. Using **cleaner cooking fuels** will reduce indoor air pollution. It may also help reduce urban heat. **Streets with low ventilation** may need further expansion.

Other measures can also be considered. These are embracing **public transportation, reducing personal vehicle usage and reducing the size of landfills**.

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Methane production from mountainous landfills may lead to fires. It increases the **urban heat and weather variability** in our cities. **Waste segregation**, along with **solid waste management** at source, can be helpful.

There is a need to **improve forecasting ability**. It includes the potential impact of heat on food production.

Current econometric models associated with food inflation primarily look at the **variability in the monsoon, minimum support prices and vegetable prices**. **Local heat trends** need to be added, given their impact of heat on food production, storage and sale.

There is a need for **detailed policies and guidelines on weather variability and urban heat management** at the State, district, city and municipality ward levels.

The **urban design of Chandigarh** is an example. It considers climate responsiveness as a key factor. A large green belt of mango trees was also planted around the city to reduce urban sprawl and to serve as a **buffer between the residential city and the industrial suburbs**.

Sukhna lake was constructed to help in cooling the city, while small water bodies were developed near large buildings. Parks were planned out in every sector, along with tree plantations alongside all the major roads. **Large forest areas** were also reserved.

6. [How coastal species are living on plastic debris in the ocean](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**How coastal species are living on plastic debris in the ocean**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **18th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Environment

Relevance– Issues related to marine life and marine pollution

News– Recently, a study published by researchers from Canada, the Netherlands, and the U.S. have reported that coastal lifeforms have colonised plastic items in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

What are some facts about the Anthropocene epoch?

This is the name some scientists have proposed for a **new period in history**. It is characterized by the **influence of Homo sapiens** on the **planet’s geology and ecosystems**.

Scientists are still not clear when this **epoch really began**. Some candidates include the **first nuclear weapon test and rapid industrialisation after the Second World War**.

Some link it with the **creation of plastic trash** which is abundant in our urban refuse, rivers, and forests.

What are some facts about the great pacific garbage patch?

There are some water currents in the ocean that form loops. These are **called gyres**.

The **North Pacific Subtropical Gyre** is located just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean. It consists of the **Kuroshio, North Pacific, California, and North Equatorial currents** and moves in a clockwise direction.

These currents flow **adjacent to 51 Pacific Rim countries**. Any trash that enters one of these currents, from any of these countries, could become part of the gyre.

Inside this gyre lies a **long east-west strip**. Here, some of the debris in these currents has collected over the years. The eastern part of this is the **Great Pacific Garbage Patch**. It is estimated to be **1.6 million sq. km big and more than 50 years old**.

It contains an **estimated 45,000-1,29,000 metric tonnes of plastic**. It is predominantly **in the form of microplastics**. The more visible objects that haven’t yet broken down into smaller particles accounted for **92% of the plastics in 2018**.

What are the findings of the study?

The **tsunami off the Japanese coast in 2011** contributed to the debris in this garbage patch. Researchers had found debris on the West coast of North America containing live life forms originally found in Japan.

From November 2018 to January 2019, researchers collected 105 pieces of plastic debris from the eastern part of the NPSG. Based on the study, *98% of the debris* items had **invertebrate organisms**.

They also found that **pelagic species (species of the open ocean)** were present on 94.3% of them and **coastal species** on 70.5%.

They found organisms belonging to **46 taxa**. While 37 of them were coastal, the rest were pelagic. Among both **coastal and pelagic organisms, crustaceans** were the most common.

The coastal species were most commonly found on fishing nets whereas the pelagic species on crates.

Nearly all taxa were of **Northwest Pacific origin**, including Japan. Most debris items (85.7%) did not have **identifiable markings** linked to origin, such as manufacture locations or company/brand names.

The researchers also found that 68% of the coastal taxa and 33% of the pelagic taxa **reproduced asexually**. There was evidence of **sexual reproduction** among the hydroids and the crustaceans. They reported a strong **positive correlation between reproduction and mobility**.

What is the relevance of the findings of the study?

The introduction of species on plastic items has given rise to a **new kind of standing coastal community** in the open ocean. Researchers have named it the **neopelagic community**.

The **neopelagic community** is not misplaced from other areas of the oceans but lives on plastic items in the garbage patch, including reproducing there.

As per another study **polyethylene films** had chemically bonded with rocks in China. This is reminiscent of the **“anthropoquinas” of Brazil** (sedimentary rocks embedded with plastic earrings) and the **“plastiglomerates” of Hawaii** (beach sediment + organic debris + basaltic lava + melted plastic).

[7. There are fresh signs that power distribution has turned a corner](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **“There are fresh signs that power distribution has turned a corner”** published in **Mint** on **18th April 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 3 – Infrastructure**

Relevance: **About the condition of Discoms**

News: The article explains the problems faced by the Discoms and measures that have improved their conditions.

What are the problems faced by India’s power distribution sector?

India’s power distribution sector has faced **multiple structural problems**.

Most distribution utilities (discoms) have suffered from increasing aggregate technical and commercial (**AT&C**) losses, **widening financial losses** and **growing debt burdens**.

Tariff revision in several states has lagged behind the increase in electricity prices, ultimately **leading to growing disparities between supply costs and income**.

This has made discoms unable to make timely payments to generation and transmission companies, and lagging investments in long-term infrastructure.

However, **the 11th Integrated Ratings and Ranking report** on discoms released by the Union Power Ministry suggests that conditions of discoms are improving.

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What are the findings of the 11th Integrated Ratings report?

Despite an 8% increase in total gross input energy, the gap between expenditure and income on a cash-adjusted basis (**ACS-ARR Gap**) **reduced substantially** to ₹53,000 crore in 2021-22 compared to ₹97,000 crore in 2019-20.

Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal were the major contributing states.

The sector wide cash-adjusted **ACS-ARR gap per unit has improved** to 40 paise, down from 79 paise in 2019-20 and 89 paise in 2020-21.

AT&C losses reduced to 16.5% in 2021-22, lower than 19.5% in 2019-20 and 21.5% in 2020-21. Bill collection efficiency increased by over 3% to reach 96% in 2021-22.

While the **sector's debt level is high, the rate of increasing debt is reducing**. The average debt service coverage ratio for the sector also turned positive.

What has led to this improvement?

This is because of the **Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS)**.

Further, several state governments have also taken proactive actions. They have provided close to ₹56,000 crore of equity, via **capital grants for loan takeovers**, in the past three years.

State governments paid out 100% of the tariff subsidy amount for 2021-22, as well as clearing certain backlogs.

Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab are the states that have shown most improvement in subsidy disbursement.

Discoms have also taken significant steps by replacing physical bill generation and payment with digital billing and online payments to ease collections.

The majority have shifted to **Ind-AS accounting standards**.

What more can be done to improve the condition of discoms?

Adopting certain rules and practices: Reforms like the **Late Payment Surcharge Rules 2022** and the requirement for **energy accounting and auditing** may be crucial in resolving AT&C losses and paying off transmission company debt.

Efforts by Discoms: Discoms must adopt improved accounting practices like adopt Ind-AS, prepare quarterly accounts, and conduct energy audits. They also need **enhanced data analytics capabilities** to leverage smart infrastructure and identify opportunities to reduce AT&C losses.

It is also important to expedite capital projects for a wider smart-meter rollout, and to strengthen the system utilizing RDSS funds.

Efforts by State Govt.: **State governments must disburse full tariff subsidy amounts and clear past arrears in a timely manner.** Regulators must also ensure timely issuance of cost-reflective tariff orders.

8. [Express View on Oting killings case in Nagaland: A betrayal of the promise of justice](#)

Source: The post is based on the following articles

“Express View on Oting killings case in Nagaland: A betrayal of the promise of justice” published in the **Indian Express** on **18th April 2023**.

“Promoting impunity – Denial of nod to prosecute Army men in Oting massacre is disconcerting” published in **The Hindu** on **18th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 3: Security challenges and their management in border areas.

Relevance: About non-prosecution of soldiers.

News: Recently, the defence ministry has refused sanction for the prosecution of 30 army commandos allegedly responsible for the Oting incident.

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About the Oting incident

In 2021, a commando unit allegedly opened fire and killed six coal miners in a counter-insurgency operation in Oting, Nagaland.

Following that, the Nagaland government formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the incident. The Army announced its own investigation and promised action against the guilty, irrespective of their rank.

The SIT indicted 30 members of the Army unit involved in the operation and filed a chargesheet in 2022. The team sought sanction for prosecution from the Defence Ministry's Department of Military Affairs. However, the legal process was held up since the Centre had to sanction the prosecution of the indicted Army personnel.

Note: Prior sanction to prosecute Army personnel is necessary under Section 6 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).

Must read: [Armed Forces Special Powers Act \(AFSPA\) – Explained, pointwise](#)

How does the non-prosecution of soldiers erode the Centre's reputation?

It is nearly impossible to fix accountability when personnel are involved in criminal acts:

These aspects have been flagged repeatedly in Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Assam and Nagaland, which have experienced the worst of AFSPA in operation.

Create a misconception that AFSPA is used to promote impunity: The non-prosecution might create a view that the Centre is unable or unwilling to do anything about impunity in insurgency-hit States.

Read more: [No Trial Is Error – Allow prosecution of soldiers accused of killing innocents](#)

What should be done?

The government must demonstrate its commitment to peace in the region and justice for the victims by either granting sanction for their prosecution, or taking exemplary action based on the findings of the military court of inquiry.

9. [In Maharashtra heatstroke deaths, the critical factor of humidity](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**In Maharashtra heatstroke deaths, the critical factor of humidity**” published in the **Indian Express** on **18th April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS-3: Disaster Management.

Relevance: About the impact of heatstrokes.

News: Recently, thirteen people have died from an apparent heatstroke while attending a government award function in an open space in Navi Mumbai. This is possibly the biggest-ever heatwave-related death toll from a single event in the country.

What is a heat wave, and what are its implications?

HEAT-LINKED DEATHS	
Year	Deaths
2010	269
2011	12
2012	729
2013	1,433
2014	548
2015	2,040
2016	1,111
2017	384
2018	25
2019	226
2020	4
2021	4
2022	33

Compiled from Ministry of Earth Sciences, NDMA and Ministry of Health

Source: Indian Express

In the 10 years between 2010 and 2020, reported heatwave-related deaths in India came down by more than 90%. States and district administrations started implementing heat action plans around 2015. The recent increase in heatwave-related deaths could also be because of improved monitoring and reporting of incidents.

Read here: [Winter Heatwaves – Explained, pointwise](#)

How heatstroke can be fatal?

High temperature in itself is not fatal. The combination of high temperature and high humidity is referred to as the wet bulb temperature. This makes heat waves deadly.

High moisture content in the atmosphere makes it difficult for sweat to evaporate and bodies to cool down. This increases internal body temperature and is often fatal.

How does heatstroke impact productivity?

Read more: [Do not let increasing heatwaves sap worker productivity in India](#)

What can be done to mitigate the impact of heatstrokes during political gatherings?

Timely medical intervention is extremely important: Political parties are supposed to ensure that water, oral rehydration solutions (ORS) packets, medical kits, and mobile ambulances are readily available at all such events. These advisories are relevant for Karnataka, which is in the midst of an election

Follow the Election Commission's advisory on precautions: Electoral officers were advised to ensure that every polling booth had provisions for drinking water, functional clean toilets, facilities for people to sit, some areas under shade, and essential medical kits.

Implement state action plans: Almost every vulnerable state now has a heat action plan in place. This plan has to be followed in letter and spirit.

Proper implementation: The local administration needs to be vigilant and pro-active. And the implementation needs to be monitored by higher authorities on a daily basis.

10. [Two Apples Of Our Eye – Manufacturing vs services is a false binary for India. We need both. But why we need them is not properly understood](#)

Source: The post is based on the article **“Two Apples Of Our Eye – Manufacturing vs services is a false binary for India. We need both. But why we need them is not properly understood”** published in **The Times of India** on **19th April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About the reasons to prefer manufacturing or services.

News: The India visit of Apple boss and two recent data points have re-ignited a simmering debate on manufacturing vs services. India has seen a dramatic 55% increase in the exports of electronics finished products.

On the other end, there has been a significant rise in the export of services not only from the IT sector alone but also from legal, medical, and MNC back-offices. So, experts have said India should focus more on services. This raises debate on what India should focus on, manufacturing or services?

Why India should prefer manufacturing or services?

Manufacturing is not a massive job-creator like Services: China, the largest factory in the world, with a manufacturing output of \$5 trillion, employs around 83 million workers in manufacturing. In China, despite its monster manufacturing capacities, half of its workers are employed in services.

In contrast, India, with a manufacturing output of around \$500 billion, employs between 27 million and 62 million workers. A study has found that manufacturing employment declined from 51 million in 2016-17 to 27 million in 2020-21.

Another study found that hi-end jobs, especially in the hi-tech sectors, have a much bigger multiplier effect on jobs created than low-tech jobs. In short, services industries tend to create more hi-tech jobs than relatively low-tech, low-skilled manufacturing assemblies.

Manufacturing is crucial to keep the trade deficit low: High-performing services and limited manufacturing will lead to the trade deficit. This is because most services are non-tradable in nature and the country will depend on imports largely for manufactured items. So, countries that have limited manufacturing capacities also tend to have structural current account deficits (CAD).

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For example, The UK and the US. Since they are developed they have enormous access to a reserve currency and more policy options to deal with structural CAD. But this is not feasible for emerging markets (EM) like India. CAD forces a trade-off between economic stability and income growth.

What India should prefer, manufacturing or services?

India needs both manufacturing and services. This is because,

To reduce CAD: India's CAD has been a perpetual policy constraint for the country since its independence. Despite the record growth in service exports and the spectacular emergence of electronics exports, India ended 2022-23 with a CAD of around 2% of GDP. So, India needs to have larger manufacturing capacities with market access to do away with CAD constraints.

To reduce risks of supply chains: India's high dependence on China for API (a key ingredient in pharmaceutical manufacturing) or rare earth minerals (critical for a range of industries) or industrial intermediates for strategic electronic products presents large, un-diversifiable risks. Even during Covid, the developed countries ringfenced vaccine supplies. Hence, India should focus on manufacturing along with the focus on services.

11. We need an action plan to deploy India's demographic advantage

Source: The post is based on the article **"We need an action plan to deploy India's demographic advantage"** published in **Mint** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 3 – Inclusive Growth**

Relevance: **concerns associated with inclusive growth and measures needed.**

News: The issues in India which receive less attention are children education, skilling youth for better-quality jobs, and restoring the female labour force participation rate.

Why are these issues important?

They affect India's ability to achieve desired growth. It has also been observed that the wage growth of listed companies has been increasing, despite low number of jobs created by them.

This increases disparities.

Further, **India's Phillips Curve has steepened**. This reflects a lack of adequate skilled labour and a lack of adequate upgrading of labour skills for the formal sector.

Due to this, India is creating too few jobs relative to the size of its labour force.

What are the other reasons that affect India's growth?

Agriculture: There are many **low-skilled labourers in agriculture**. As per the **World Bank**, India's agricultural labour force share was at 45% in 2020, despite the sector's share in GDP is less than 20%.

Education: Educational gaps become hindrance to the development of high skilled labour. The educational gaps exist in spite of a steady improvement in school enrolments in India since 2006 and measures for educating the girl child.

Female labour participation rate: Pandemic has impacted India's female labour participation. As per the data, **it has declined from 18% in 2016 to 11% in 2022, and to under 7% in urban areas.**

Even data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (**PLFS**) shows that female labour force participation is low in an absolute sense and also relative to most peer countries.

What can be done to address these issues?

First, the proportion of low-wage agricultural work must be reduced and turned into higher-wage, better-skilled employment.

This can be done by – **a)** raising the sector's presently subsidized costs of inputs to market prices, **b) allow foreign entry into the sector** and increase its productivity by lowering tariffs, **c)**

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reducing the number of agricultural labour by training the youth for vocational skills in manufacturing and services.

Second, the large primary education gaps created in children's learning during the pandemic need to be decisively addressed.

This can be done by – **a)** delivering a **grade-by-grade national curriculum** for a 30-day remedial summer programme and another enriched 30-day start-of-the-year boot camp for reinforcement, **b)** ASER-style surveys could be conducted at pre-summer, end-of-summer and exit-of-boot-camp stages to assess success and identify remaining gaps, **c)** **STEM education** should be encouraged at secondary schooling levels in public schools, with screening based on entrance tests.

Third, it is necessary to make it easier for women to join and remain in the labour force, especially in urban areas.

This can be done by utilizing **Corporate Social Responsibility** of the companies to – **a)** Support for entities that provide education to the girl child and skilling to the young female population; **b)** maternity leaves and primary caregiver relief for spouses will provide the flexibility for mothers in resuming work; and, **c)** **setting up of quality childcare facilities in company premises** or neighborhoods to reduce the domestic burdens of working women.

12. A competition law that clicks for all

Source: The post is based on an article “**A competition law that clicks for all**” published in **Business Standard** on **20th April 2023**.

Syllabus: **GS 3 – Economy**

Relevance: **concerns associated with the Digital Competition Law**

News: The government has constituted a committee in February 2023 to examine the need for a separate law on competition in digital markets.

What are the arguments in support of the separate competition law for digital markets?

The proponents of a separate competition law for digital markets (**SCLDM**) argue that entities in **digital markets enjoy increasing returns and have a huge repository of data.**

This might allow them **to gain a monopolistic position in the market and engage in abusive practices such as market denial and the creation of entry barriers.**

As a result, **the idea is for a SCLDM that is based on ex ante rules and places specific requirements on systemically significant digital intermediaries (SIDIs).**

However, the proposed idea to have separate competition law for digital markets may not be appealing.

Why is separate competition law for digital markets not a good step?

First, market failure usually arises from distortions in the choices made by producers and consumers. **The distortion occurs when an economic activity is placed on a different level than others.**

Hence, different laws for physical markets and digital markets **would distort the level playing field and thereby contribute to market failure.**

Second, digital markets are not different from physical markets in terms of competition. The sources of dominance, such as increasing returns to scale and data repositories, are not unique to digital markets.

Similarly, **abuses like denial of markets and entry barriers are equally prevalent in physical and digital markets.** The remedies like ex-ante regulations and obligations on large enterprises are equally relevant in both physical and digital markets.

Therefore, it is difficult to define digital markets and distinguish them from physical markets.

Third, newer kinds of markets keep emerging with time and technological advancements. Hence, **it would be never ending as lawmaking cannot match the speed of technological changes.**

Further, there are governance norms that disincentivize entities from abusing their dominance and entities cannot use their huge repository of data because they do not own it.

Thus, concerns, which are broadly similar in digital markets as in physical markets, are being addressed, as they emerge, without having a separate law.

Fourth, the case for SCLDM rests on the issue that an entity in digital markets may become dominant faster. However, **this is irrelevant as dominance ceased** to be a concern with the repeal of the **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969.**

Moreover, instead of prohibiting dominance, competition law prohibits abuse of dominance. The **Competition Act, 2002**, prohibits the abuse of dominance by a dominant enterprise, and defines who is “dominant” and what is “abusive”.

However, **such definitions could be obsolete as market structure changes** with time.

What can be the way ahead?

The existing competition law could adopt a similar approach to the prohibition of fraudulent and unfair trade practices (PFUTP) adopted in the securities markets.

Further, **if Digital Competition Law is being considered** then it is necessary that it digitalises the processes relating to compliance, monitoring, surveillance, investigation, enforcement, and appeals under the competition law.

13. [India's fighter jet conundrum](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**India's fighter jet conundrum**” published in “**The Hindu**” on **21st April 2023.**

Syllabus: GS 3 – Internal Security – Defense Technologies

Relevance– Issues related to armed forces

News– The article explains issues related with the squadron strength of the air force.

What is the present and upcoming scenario of squadron strength of the Indian air force?

Indian air force has today **31 squadrons against the sanctioned strength of 42 fighter squadrons.** It won't go up in the next decade but can go further down by 2029.

If current orders are delivered, and the case for **114 Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA)** has progressed, India can have 29 to 31 squadrons by 2030.

The three **Mig-21 squadrons** will be phased out by 2025. Also, the **Jaguars, Mirage-2000s and Mig-29s** will begin going out by the end of the decade.

By 2027-28 the first of the MIG-29s will start going out. By early 2040s, most of these types will be phased out, some of the earlier batch of SU-30s will also start going out.

The future squadron strength will depend on the 83 Light Combat Aircraft MK1A, LCA-MK2 and MRFA. The decision on MRFA is essential to arrest this drawdown.

What are the future procurement plans for fighter jets?

The IAF has in total contracted **272 SU-30s.** A deal to procure **12 additional SU-30MKIs and 21 additional MIG-29s** from Russia has been struck.

Increasing the low availability rates of Su-30 and other fighters in service will offset some of the shortfalls in the interim. However, that could be potentially impacted due to the **Ukraine war.**

India has an ambitious plan for the **acquisition of over 500 fighter jets.** A bulk of them are **indigenously designed and manufactured.** However, these are at various stages of development. Their manufacturing and timely deliveries are critical.

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The **fifth generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft** is awaiting CCS sanction. The development of it would take 10 years after sanction. The project cost of AMCA is estimated to be around ₹15,000 crore.

The RFI for **114 MRFA** was issued in April 2019 to global aircraft manufacturers. But there has been no progress. The project is yet to receive the **Acceptance of Necessity**, the starting point of the procurement process.

The MRFA is a reincarnation of the earlier **Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA)** contest for 126 jets.

What are some facts about the India LCA programme?

The LCA was originally intended as a **Mig-21 replacement**. It has seen a series of delays and has now come back on track.

The LCA achieved **Initial Operation Clearance (IOC)** in December 2013 and **Final Operational Clearance (FOC)** in February 2019.

In February 2020, the Defence Ministry signed a **₹48,000 crore deal with HAL for 83 LCA-MK1A**. HAL will be delivering the first three aircraft in 2024 and 16 aircraft per year for the subsequent five years.

A more capable and larger **LCA-MK2** received sanction from the Cabinet Committee on Security in September 2022 at a **total cost of ₹9000 crore**. It is expected to be ready for production by 2027.

The LCA-MK2 will be **like the Mirage-2000 in terms of capability**. There is also a **Twin Engine Deck Based Fighter** on the drawing board for the Navy's aircraft carriers. The TEDBF is expected to take its first flight by 2026 and be ready for production by 2031.

The LCA project has seen long delays. It has also evolved in tune with the **changing technological requirements**.

What the IAF is flying today is very different from what was actually conceived at that point of time. The one we are flying today is called **federated architecture**. Any new weapon or any new system can be integrated much more easily.

[14. Centre's interest-free loan facility provides space for states to increase capital expenditure. Will they?](#)

Source– The post is based on the article **“Centre's interest-free loan facility provides space for states to increase capital expenditure. Will they?”** published in **“The Indian Express”** on **21st April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy – Fiscal Policies

News– In recent months, there have been two significant developments relating to state governments' finances. **First**, a moderation in state governments' off-budget borrowing, and **second**, better than expected utilisation of the funds under the central government's capex loan scheme.

What are changes made by the central government in case of off-budget borrowings by states?

State governments' off-budget borrowings were earlier not subject to strict oversight by the Centre. This allowed states to push some borrowings off-budget.

However, as per guidelines issued by the Centre in 2021-22, **incremental off-budget debt** for the year would need to be adjusted **over four years between 2023-2026**.

Further, off-budget borrowings after this period would be considered as **borrowings made by the state itself**.

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What are the provisions made by the central government in case of interest free capex loans?

The Centre has released Rs 812 billion to states under the “**Special Assistance as Loan to States for Capital Expenditure**” scheme (interest-free capex loans) in 2022-23. This is higher than the amount indicated in the **Centre’s revised estimates**.

For the ongoing year, the Centre has further enhanced the allocation under the **interest-free capex loan** to the states to Rs 1.3 trillion. This loan is over and above the **normal borrowing limit** for the year.

There was **back-ended utilisation of the capex loan** in 2022-23. 30% of the total amount for 2022-23 was disbursed to states in March. So, the Union government seems to have **tightened the guidelines** for the scheme.

Around **two-thirds of the capex loan** will be **untied in nature**, and it will be released in instalments.

Why has the central government changed the provisions related to interest free capex loans?

Centre intends for these funds **to supplement, not finance budgeted capex**. Recent years have seen lower-than-budgeted capital spending by many states.

The increased allocation for the interest-free capex loan scheme would support state governments in **funding their capital spending** this year.

The full utilization of these funds by states will cover the impact of **the scheduled reduction in the borrowing limit and drop in the GST compensation**.

Faster identification of projects under this scheme could result in a less **back-ended disbursement** of funds. This will also have a bearing on the borrowing requirement of states.

What are issues with state fiscal public finances?

There is a **divergence** in states’ **actual monthly borrowings** against the **indicative amount**. So, it is difficult to gauge their **underlying fiscal health**. This suggests that states are unable to project their **borrowing requirement accurately in advance**.

States’ **ability to scale up execution** will be critical to ensure the **full utilisation of the capex loan**. **Spending patterns** may be influenced by assembly elections in states.

[15. A mega-science project bound to put India on the map for cutting-edge research](#)

Source– The post is based on the article “**A mega-science project bound to put India on the map for cutting-edge research**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **21st April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Science and Technology

News– Union Cabinet approved the full budget for the LIGO-India mega-science project. It includes the construction, commissioning and joint scientific operation of a state-of-the-art, advanced LIGO in India.

How will LIGO-India projects be beneficial for the country?

The LIGO-India Observatory will enhance **global capability** in the **emergent field of gravitational-wave astronomy and astrophysics (A&A)**.

LIGO-India will also prompt Indian S&T in academia, national laboratories and industries to develop a **range of cutting-edge technologies** of national relevance.

LIGO-India will **bring together** researchers in fundamental and applied sciences from national research laboratories, IITs and IISERs, universities and the industry on a **common platform**. This will also attract talent from the large pool of Indian researchers spread worldwide.

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The synergy with the quantum sensing and metrology vertical of the National Mission for Quantum Technology and Application holds high promise for India to take lead in the future of **Gravitational wave detectors**.

The project will galvanise India Inc to **enhance capability and capacity to engineer and manufacture complex components** with precision. Clearly, the commissioning of LIGO-India will enhance the **reputation of Indian industry**.

What are the benefits associated with mega science projects?

Mega science projects promote **close collaboration** between researchers from disparate areas of science and technology, and across geographies. These projects work within an **organised, goal-oriented management structure**.

Mega-science does not **undermine individual research efforts**. It enriches the **overall S&T culture**.

Scientifically advanced countries work to **create ecosystems** that **connect academia, laboratories and industry** on a national scale. These ecosystems have **strong global links**. Mega-science ventures provide **ideal learning platforms** to set up such model ecosystems on a manageable scale.

Mega-science projects also inculcate **invaluable elements of work ethic** in the scientific community. These create a **collaborative ecosystem** that remains open to growing by bringing in **wider participation**.

It also promotes culture within S&T communities to **anticipate breakthroughs and appreciate new findings** that may often deviate from the **current comfort zone for policymakers**.

What are steps taken in the country to promote mega science projects?

In India, mega-science ventures were recognized and defined as a **distinct category of the scientific enterprise** during the **Planning Commission's 11th plan period (2007-2012)**.

Such ventures require **large-scale collaborative effort**. It requires **highly skilled human resources**, significant **fiscal capital and infrastructural investment** and close **academia-industry partnership**.

It was also envisaged that the needs of most mega-science projects would span across **multiple departments** of the government. So, there is a need to **encourage cooperative, coordination structures** between partnering agencies.

In this spirit, a **MoU was set up between the Department of Science & Technology (DST) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) to jointly fund and administer** "mega-science" projects. India is a partner in "big science" frontier international ventures, such as **Large Hadron Collider Facility, ITER, Thirty Meter Telescope; and Square Kilometre Array**.

In India, **LIGO-India and Indian-based Neutrino Observatory (INO), Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) near Pune and Himalayan Chandra Telescope (HCT)** in Ladakh are examples of mega science projects.

16. A breakthrough in EV battery tech

Source: The post is based on the article "**A breakthrough in EV battery tech**" published in **Business Standard** on **21st April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Technology

Relevance: About Sodium-ion batteries

News: The demand for Electric Vehicle (EV) is on rise. As per **the Economic Survey 2022-23**, EV market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 49 percent between 2022 and 2030, and annual sales are expected to reach 10 million by that time.

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This will add pressure on the battery supply chain. Hence, there is a need to diversify the battery market from lithium-ion batteries to more cost-effective batteries like sodium-ion batteries.

How are sodium-ion batteries better than lithium-ion batteries?

The cheapest lithium-ion battery is **LFP (lithium-iron-phosphate)**. However, the rapid growth in the worldwide EV battery demand has caused problems with lithium mining and the prices have also increased.

In such a case, sodium-ion batteries are the alternative. **Large quantities of sodium can be extracted from both the earth's crust and seawater** and at a lower cost than lithium.

Moreover, **an aluminium current collector can be used at both electrodes**, unlike the lithium-ion battery, which requires a more expensive copper current collector at the anode.

Overall, a **sodium-ion battery is 20-30 percent cheaper than an LFP battery**. Further, the **Sodium-ion battery has no over-discharge characteristics**, which means it can be allowed to discharge to zero volts.

This reduces the chances of fire hazards during transportation, unlike lithium batteries which must always be stored with a minimum charge.

Sodium-ion batteries have faster charging times and could have a longer lifespan compared to lithium-ion variants.

What progress has been made for sodium-ion batteries and what are the associated challenges?

There are many companies working on sodium-ion technology.

For example, the world's largest EV battery manufacturer unveiled its first-generation sodium batteries in mid-2021 and announced a commercial launch in 2023.

However, **a major challenge in scaling up production is** the development of suitable materials and supply chain for both electrodes and the electrolyte.

Another concern is that it is often argued that sodium-ion batteries are heavier than the lithium-ion variants for the same energy delivered due to higher density.

However, the first generation of sodium-ion batteries has reached energy densities up to 160 Wh/kg while the most recent LFP batteries have achieved just over 180 Wh/kg.

How are sodium-ion batteries relevant for India?

A large part of the Indian market in the next decade will comprise **smaller sub-10kWh batteries that go into two- and three-wheelers**. Due to which, manufacturers have switched to LFP batteries given its low costs.

However, these batteries have higher densities making them heavier.

They can be replaced by sodium-ion batteries as **sodium-ion batteries offer a cost-effective option for applications where weight and energy density are less of an issue**.

What can be the way ahead?

Sodium-ion batteries present a promising opportunity in developing India's home-grown battery technology, thereby reducing the dependency on oil imports.

Moreover, the need for accelerated growth of EVs at a lower cost offers the opportunity **for India to become a global leader in manufacturing sodium-ion batteries**.

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17. [HAPless In Heat – As extreme summer temperatures hit many parts of India, are govts thinking of vulnerable groups?](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**HAPless In Heat – As extreme summer temperatures hit many parts of India, are govts thinking of vulnerable groups?**” published in **The Times of India** on **21st April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS-3: Disaster Management.

Relevance: About the impact of heatwaves.

News: Heatwaves have forced schools to close in parts of Meghalaya and Tripura. Indian Meteorological Department has also issued warning to nine states facing heatwaves simultaneously.

What are heat waves?

Read here: [Heat strokes in India: Reasons and Impacts – Explained, pointwise](#)

How can heat waves be fatal?

Read here: [In Maharashtra heatstroke deaths, the critical factor of humidity](#)

About heatwaves in India

Heatwaves have become India’s new normal – longer, more frequent, and deadlier. A Lancet study last year reported a 55% increase in heat-related deaths over 17 years in India. Among age group of 65 years, heat-related deaths increased from 20,000 in 2000-2004 to 31,000 in 2017-2021. A Climate Transparency report found India lost 5.4% of its GDP to heatwaves in 2021, the highest among G20 nations. Another report found that 66% of India’s workers are exposed to heat in their open-air jobs. These workers range from airports’ outdoor staff to miners and construction workers.

What are the challenges in mitigating heat waves?

a) India’s Heat action plans (HAPs) had not identified vulnerable groups and were designed for dry heat without considering local humidity levels, **b)** India barely records heat-related deaths, **c)** There is scant public awareness on dealing with wet bulb conditions.

Must read: [Wet Bulb Temperature: Explained: India Heatwaves and the role humidity plays in making them deadly](#)

What should be done?

HAPs must be integral to city planning. India should also encourage reducing/rescheduling work hours, allowing natural shade, and creating shelters at work sites.

18. [‘Cap tiger numbers at 4k, don’t make them a pest’](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Cap tiger numbers at 4k, don’t make them a pest**” published in **The Times of India** on **21st April 2023**.

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

Relevance: About tiger population.

News: Recently, the government released the 5th cycle of India’s Tiger Census. Based on the survey, the tiger population in India has grown from 1,411 in 1972 to 3,167 in 2022.

What are the key findings of India’s tiger census?

Read here: [India is home to 75% of global tigers; count rises above 3,000](#)

What are the government initiatives that led to an increase in the tiger population?

Read here: [Increasing tiger population in India and government initiatives – Explained, pointwise](#)

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What are the challenges India faces with the increased tiger population?

India nearing the inherent ecological carrying capacity: India's present reserves do not have the environmental capacity to support more than 4000 tigers. Reaching 10,000 tiger populations might create landscape transformations.

Few state governments have issued 'shoot at sight' orders to eliminate tigers.

Note: The standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) have deal with various conditions including killing tigers.

Read here: [Burning bright – India must balance conservation efforts with the rights of forest dwellers](#)” and [Celebrate the rise in tiger population, but look beyond the numbers](#)

What are the advantages of India's tiger conservation plans?

Reserve-specific tiger conservation plans: India's tiger conservation plan was reserve-specific. The plan has better preventive and control measures like day-to-day monitoring, kill monitoring, deployment of Rapid Response Teams and timely compensating depredations. This deals with human-tiger conflicts.

Help other countries: The good practices under Project Tiger can help other tiger range countries strengthen their tiger efforts. India has already formalised its engagement with Cambodia for tiger revival, including translocation. This effort is very important for the South-East Asian region.

What should be done?

India needs sustainable tiger populations with viable tiger porosity between tiger source areas. For that, India needs **a)** A 24x7 surveillance of human-wildlife interface linked to a control room based on gainful community stewardship, **b)** Technology for preventive and control measures, **c)** A vibrant landscape approach for engaging with all stakeholders monitored by the state-level steering committee, **d)** regulation of agriculture/ cash crop cover and related actions.

19. [Heatwaves & Cool Heads – We shouldn't panic about summer extremes, because there are well-understood solutions. The trick is to implement them smartly](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Heatwaves & Cool Heads – We shouldn't panic about summer extremes, because there are well-understood solutions. The trick is to implement them smartly**” published in **The Times of India** on **22nd April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS-3: Disaster Management.

Relevance: About the impact of heatwaves.

News: Heatwaves have forced schools to close in parts of Meghalaya and Tripura. Indian Meteorological Department has also issued warning to nine states facing heatwaves simultaneously.

What are heat waves?

Read here: [Heat strokes in India: Reasons and Impacts – Explained, pointwise](#)

How can heat waves be fatal?

Read here: [In Maharashtra heatstroke deaths, the critical factor of humidity](#)

How heat waves are increasing along with climate change?

Heatwaves have increased every decade since the 1980s, and they now engulf most of the country. With climate change, temperature and humidity are rising together, leading to high wet-bulb temperatures.

At 1. 5°C warming, there will be more severe heatwaves. At 2°C, “deadly” heatwaves would frequently cross 35°C wet-bulb temperatures, which is the limit of human survivability.

What are the various Geoengineering solutions to combat climate change?

Must Read: [Geoengineering Technologies: Applications and Concerns – Explained, pointwise](#) and [Geo-engineering and climate control](#)

Can Geoengineering solutions mitigate heatwave impacts?

Geoengineering solutions have enormous uncertainty and unintended consequences to manage extreme heat. For instance, Stratospheric Aerosol Injection (SAI) would not immediately cool the area or save lives. It would take months before the planet starts cooling due to sulphur spray.

Note: SAI involves spraying sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere to mimic the cooling effect of a volcanic eruption.

What are the ideal solutions for heat waves?

Reducing carbon emissions: This is the cheapest and the best option to limit warming and deadly heat waves. Further, this can be done by deploying existing technologies – solar and wind energy, energy-efficient appliances, green buildings, electric vehicles, and reducing wasteful consumption. This will also support green growth and jobs.

Redesign cities and buildings to adapt to heatwaves: This entails incorporating more open spaces, green areas, and water bodies into urban landscapes. Also, buildings must be energy-efficient, with well-insulated walls and roofs and effective shading and ventilation systems to maintain a cool interior.

Need a new heat code based on the wet-bulb temperature: This is because many regions in India are now experiencing wet-bulb temperatures exceeding 30°C during certain parts of the year. But Indian guidelines are based on dry-bulb temperature hence, they do not capture this. Both the Global countries and India are moving in the right decarbonisation trajectory. This will aid in mitigating climate impacts with active youth participation.

[20. Proposed changes in gas pricing fail to adequately address the needs of the consumer](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Proposed changes in gas pricing fail to adequately address the needs of the consumer**” published in “**The Indian Express**” on **22nd April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS3- Infrastructure: Energy

Relevance: Issues related to the gas pricing.

News: The government of India has modified the October 2014 pricing mechanism for domestically produced natural gas. 8-10 per cent price reductions announced for CNG and PNG respectively by the major CGD players.

What are the issues with the energy sector in India?

India’s **per capita commercial energy consumption** has remained around a third of the global average. It is at par with **sub-Saharan levels**. India cannot achieve **geopolitical standing** in a **multi-polar world**, without addressing her **energy poverty**.

India accounts for just under **6% of global commercial energy consumption**. It consumes under 23% of the commercial energy consumed by China in both absolute and per capita terms. India’s share of **global gas consumption** is just 1.5%. Gas accounts for only 6.3% of India’s **commercial energy basket**.

What are the issues with the revised gas pricing mechanism for domestically produced gas?

Deny benefits to Indian consumers: The revision comes at a time when Natural Gas and LNG prices have fallen by 70%. The current **Henry Hub price** for natural gas is just above 2\$/MMBTU (million British Thermal Units). There is a **surplus of Russian natural gas**.

Spot LNG is trading well below \$13/MMBTU. The proposed changes deny Indian consumers the benefit of these falling prices.

No reason for differential treatment of KG Basin: The changes proposed do not impact the **pricing of gas from the KG Basin fields**. For the KG Basin fields, the price is capped at the **full energy equivalent of alternate imported fuels**. The logic behind this **differential treatment** and the **magnitude of the difference** imposed remains unclear.

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Not universally applicable: The floor price of \$4/MMBTU and the ceiling price of \$6.5/MMBTU for domestic natural gas is applicable only to the gas produced from the nominated fields of ONGC/OIL. It is not applicable to all-natural gas fields covered by government-administered prices.

Again, the **basis for choosing** the floor of \$4 and the ceiling of \$6.5 and **applying it selectively** to only certain public sector natural gas fields remains unclear.

Other issues: The nominated fields of ONGC/OIL that are subject to a floor price and a ceiling price will be eligible for an **arbitrary 20% premium** for natural gas produced from “new wells”. The reasoning for these **arbitrary provisions**, applied selectively to certain fields, also remains unclear.

What will be the impacts of the new gas pricing mechanism?

The **different formulations** for pricing the same commodity are further complicated by the proposed new and unprecedented variations. This is prone to gaming and creates a non-level playing field.

The high well-head prices in India for domestic natural gas ensure a continued high price for LNG exports to India.

Note: *The well-head price is the price without transportation costs charged by the producer for petroleum or natural gas.*

21. [Quantum Jump: GoI does well to fund R&D in computing's next revolution](#)

Source: The post is based on the article “**Quantum Jump: GoI does well to fund R&D in computing's next revolution**” published in **The Times of India** on **22nd April 2023**.

Syllabus: GS – 3: Science and Technology – Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Relevance: About National Quantum Mission.

News: The government's recent announcement for National Quantum Mission (NQM) for 2023-24 through 2030-31 is a fillip to R&D in quantum tech.

About National Quantum Mission

Read here: [Cabinet approves National Quantum Mission to scale-up scientific & industrial R&D for quantum technologies](#)

What is quantum computing, and what are its applications?

Must read: [Quantum computing technology and associated applications – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the significance of quantum entanglement?

The ground-breaking research of the 1970s and 1980s into the phenomenon of quantum entanglement was recognised with a Physics Nobel only in 2022. Their research has shown that entangled particles (physically apart yet linked) can ferry information over massive distances. This is the heart of quantum science.

What are the challenges in developing quantum computing technologies?

Lack of technology: India only has a basic quantum computer Qsim that allows researchers to simulate quantum computation.

Lack of skills: In 2021, for 290 quantum tech masters' grads globally, there were 851 jobs. Barely 16% of the world's universities offer degrees in the field.

What should be done?

India's public-funded research institutes must collaborate with startups and firms to develop the initial intermediate-sized supercomputers.