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Features :

Arranged as per syllabus Topics
Most complete coverage of major News Papers editorials

Index

GS Paper 1 ____ 3

Subject: Indian Society ____ 3

Topic: Salient features of Indian society ____ 3

On Caste-based Inequalities in India – Towards a more equal India ____ 3

On Socio-Economic Inequality – Cumulatively ravaging effects of inequality ____ 4

GS Paper 2 ____ 5

Subject: Indian Polity ____ 5

Topic: Indian Constitution - Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure. ____ 5

Issues with Delimitation ____ 5

Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure ____ 7

Impact of degrading center-state relations ____ 7

Topic: The role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders ____ 8

On Challenges of NGO Regulation ____ 9

Subject: Governance ____ 10

Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation ____ 10

The issues with Fact Check Unit ____ 10

On OTT Regulation ____ 11

Alcohol Policies in India ____ 12

On Abolition of Death Penalty ____ 14

Subject: Social Justice ____ 14

Topic: Issues relating to Education. ____ 15

On School Mergers – Strengthening schools ____ 15

Issues relating to Health ____ 16

On Generic medicines – Branded, generic and the missing ingredient of quality ____ 16

Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections ____ 17

Domestic Violence in India ____ 17

Subject: International Relations ____ 19

Topic: India and its neighborhood – relations. ____ 20

Counter terrorism policies of India and Israel ____ 20

Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests. ____ 21

The Qatar death row and India's options ____ 21

Impact of US-China Summit on India ____ 22

Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests ____ 23

On India-West Asia Relations ____ 23

GS Paper 3 ____ 24

Subject: Indian Economy ____ 24

Topic: Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth ____ 25

Impacts of changes to IT hardware import policy ____ 25

On India's mining sector ____ 26

India's pharmaceutical industry ____ 29

Topic: Infrastructure and Energy ____ 30

Benefits of Solar energy mini grids ____ 30

Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to growth, development and employment ____ 32

Impact of Soft Power on Indian Economy ____ 32

Issues with the 70 Hours Work Week ____ 33

Subject: Agriculture ____ 34

Topic: Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; Issues of food security. ____ 34

Issues with NFSA ____ 34

Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management ____ 35

India's increasing edible oil imports ____ 35

Topic: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country ____ 37

Opium Cultivation in India ____ 37

Subject: Science & Technology ____ 38

Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life ____ 38

Use of AI in Defence ____ 38

Deepfake Regulation ____ 40

Subject: Environment ____ 41

Topic: Environment Conservation ____ 41

Forest Conservation Amendment Act 2023 ____ 41

Subject: Internal Security ____ 43

Topic: Money Laundering and its prevention ____ 43

On Tax Havens – Cyprus Confidential: Shining a light on tax evasion ____ 43

Subject: Disaster Management ____ 44

Topic: Disaster and disaster management ____ 44

Char Dham Tunnel Collapse ____ 44

Fragile Himalayan ecosystem and development ____ 45

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GS Paper 1

Subject: Indian Society

Topic: Salient features of Indian society

On Caste-based Inequalities in India – Towards a more equal India

News: The Bihar Caste Survey provides insights into the relationship between caste and economic status in India. The survey sheds light on the deep-rooted inequalities in Indian society, particularly in terms of economic status and opportunities across different castes.

India has moved beyond jajmani relationships and caste-based discriminations. However, caste hierarchy and social separation persists in society to some extent.

Read here in detail about the **Caste Census.**

What is the present state of caste-based inequality in India?

Persistent Inequality: Despite economic growth, caste-based disparities in income, education, and job opportunities persist.
Poverty Data: Indicates higher poverty levels among Scheduled Castes (42.93%) and Scheduled Tribes (42.7%) compared to other groups.
Government Jobs: General category castes have a higher representation (3.19%) in government jobs than SC, ST, and OBC groups.
Education Levels: There's a significant disparity in graduate percentages among different caste groups, with the general category having the highest (14.54%).
Economic Mobility: The survey suggests that caste continues to be a barrier to social and economic mobility in India.
Income inequality in India: According to the World Inequality database, income inequality in India has sharply increased from 1990 to 2018. The top 10% saw their share of pre-tax income rise from 34.4% to 57.1%, while the bottom 50%'s share dropped from 20.3% to 13.1%. The top 1% accounts for nearly half of the increase in the top 10%'s income share.

What is the significance of the above data?

1. Access to government jobs is still the main source of income increase and social mobility for the underprivileged, such as the children of an agricultural laborer.
2. Access to education is the principal basis for occupational mobility from a traditional family job.
3. OECD Findings on economic mobility: The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) assessed the number of generations needed to move from the bottom 10% to the mean income level in various countries. In India, this transition takes about seven generations, a duration like China but longer than in Europe and the US.
4. Intergenerational Mobility: Azim Premji University highlights that a high percentage of sons of

casual wage workers remain in similar employment, even if they are twice as educated as their father. The issue is low quality education.

What should be done?

While caste-based reservations may still be necessary, the primary approach should be improving education and skill development access.
Enhancing intergenerational mobility through quality education and skill development is key to reducing inequality and ensuring equitable economic growth.
Reducing Caste-Based Barriers: Following B.R. Ambedkar's advice, the focus should be on eliminating occupational specialization linked to caste and enhancing skill acquisition.

On Socio-Economic Inequality – Cumulatively ravaging effects of inequality

News: This article discusses various forms of inequality around the world, including economic, gender, caste, and cultural inequality. It highlights the need for fair leadership in politics and corporations to address these inequalities and improve our society.

What is Inequality?

Inequality is the state of not being equal, especially in terms of status, rights, and opportunities.
The various types of inequality are:
Gender Inequality: Involves unequal treatment or perceptions based on gender. Iceland's Prime Minister's involvement in a strike against the gender pay gap, despite Iceland's reputation for gender equality, exemplifies this issue.
Caste Inequality: This is discrimination based on caste, particularly prevalent in India. Social reformers like B R Ambedkar have historically fought against this, advocating for the 'annihilation' of caste to achieve true political and economic reforms.
Cultural Inequality: This refers to unequal opportunities and treatment in the cultural or creative sectors. An example is the recent Hollywood strike, where technicians, writers, and actors are protesting against a widening disparity in earnings and the threat of technology, showcasing the challenges faced by those not in the limelight.
Corporate Inequality: Seen in unfair practices within corporations. The incident of Qantas illegally sacking 1,700 workers and issues of disproportionate executive pay illustrate this form of inequality.

For more details on **Inequality**, read here.

What are the issues with inequality?

Gender Inequality Consequences: Results in limited opportunities for women, such as lower pay for the same work and underrepresentation in leadership roles. It can also lead to increased incidents of gender-based violence and discrimination.
Impact of Caste Inequality: Hinders social and economic mobility, perpetuating poverty and limiting access to education and jobs for lower caste groups. It fosters social divisions and discrimination.

Cultural Inequality Effects: Creates disparities in recognition and rewards within the cultural sector, leading to a sense of insecurity among lesser-known artists and technicians. It can also limit the diversity of voices and creativity in cultural expressions.
Corporate Inequality Ramifications: Leads to worker dissatisfaction, strikes, and legal challenges. It can also result in a lack of trust in corporate leadership and a decrease in employee morale and productivity.

What should be done?

Reducing Cultural Disparities: Support equitable treatment and opportunities in cultural sectors, as shown by Hollywood workers' strike for fair earnings and against the impact of technology.
Correcting Corporate Injustices: Practice more empathetic and understanding leadership in corporations, and ensure fair treatment of workers, as highlighted by the case of Qantas's illegal worker sacking.
Tackling Gender Inequality: Follow examples like Iceland's proactive steps, including strikes led by leaders, to address gender pay gaps and sexual violence.

For more information on **Caste Inequality**, read here.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

Topic: Indian Constitution - Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Issues with Delimitation

News: This article discusses India's political representation issues. It suggests more parliament seats, state reorganization, and changes to the election system to improve fairness and give better voice to all regions and citizens in India's diverse democracy.

What is Delimitation?

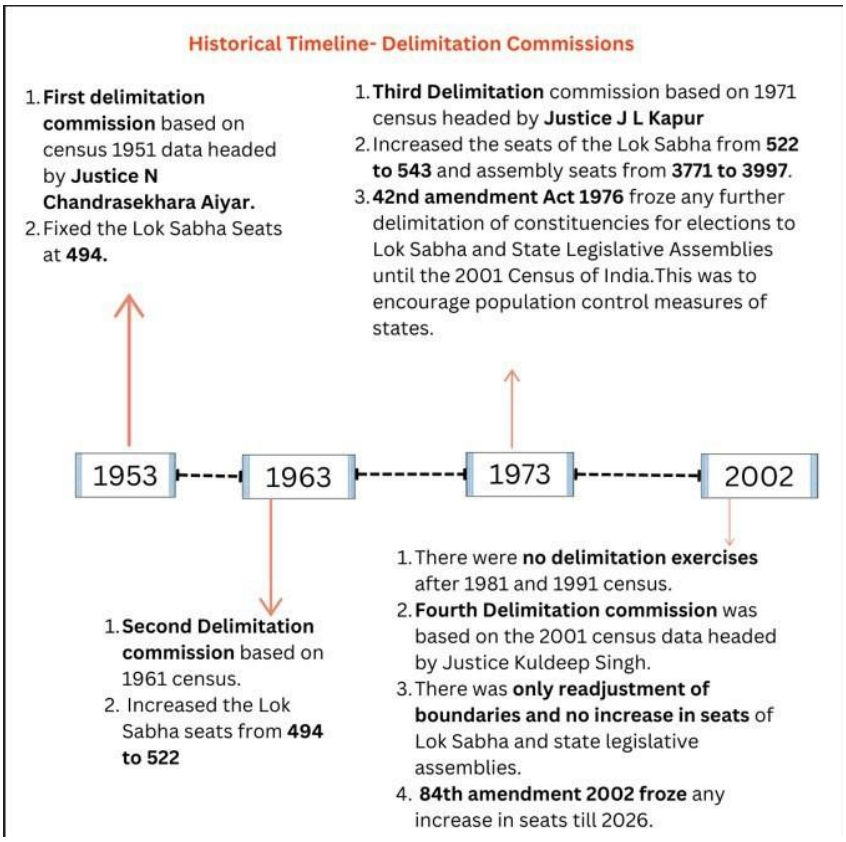
Delimitation is the act or process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country to reflect the changes in population. In India the task of delimitation exercise is assigned to a high-power body. Such a body is known as Delimitation Commission or a Boundary Commission.

Constitutional basis of Delimitation Commission:

Article 82	Article 82 mandates the **Parliament** to enact a Delimitation Act and constitute Delimitation commission after every Census.
Article 170	Article 170 provides for the division of territorial constituencies of states by **the Delimitation Commission** after every Census.

Delimitation Commission of India:

Appointment	The Delimitation Commission is appointed by the **President of India** and works in collaboration with the **Election Commission of India.**
Members	Retired Supreme Court judge (**Chairperson**) Chief Election Commissioner Respective State Election Commissioners



For more details on the **Delimitation Exercise**, read here

What are the issues with Delimitation?

Delimitation could lead to regional imbalances: For instance, in the 2019 elections, each MP from Uttar Pradesh represented about three million voters, while an MP from Lakshadweep represented around 55,000 voters. This discrepancy might increase with delimitation.
Penalizing states with effective population control: As an example, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which successfully managed their population growth, could lose seats, whereas states like Rajasthan, which saw a population increase from 25 million to 68 million (1971-2011), might gain more representation.
Risk of empowering specific national parties: The process may benefit parties dominant in the north, impacting the diverse political landscape and potentially favoring Hindi-speaking states.
Undermining diverse representation: Delimitation might reduce the influence of culturally and linguistically distinct regions, particularly in southern and northeastern India, where the political culture differs significantly.

What should be done?

Increase Parliament seats: To enhance representation, seats should increase, possibly to 848, ensuring no state loses out.
Consider factors beyond population in delimitation: Include economic, geographical, and linguistic aspects to ensure fairness.
Reform the Rajya Sabha: Each state could have an equal number of MPs, elected directly with stringent domicile requirements.
Introduce proportional representation: Similar to Australia and France, this could ensure majority support for legislators.
Establish more states: Reference the U.S. model with smaller states for better governance, suggesting an increase from 29 to potentially 50 or 75 states in India.
Empower urban local bodies: Strengthening mayoral roles and direct elections in urban areas for improved.

Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

Impact of degrading center-state relations

News: This article discusses the impact of declining Centre-State relations on the economy of India. A detailed article on the **Challenges of Centre-State relations** can be read here.

In recent years, the frequency and intensity of disputes between the Union government and the States have increased. The economic costs of this development are long-lasting.

What are the emerging challenges in center-state relations?

1. **Lack of autonomy with states regarding public expenditure:** This is because State governments depend on the Centre for their revenue receipts.
2. **Homogenisation of social sector policies:** In a diverse country like India, states have their own unique socio-economic conditions, cultural differences, and varying levels of development.

Therefore, their needs and priorities in the social sector can differ significantly.
3. **Functioning of regulatory institutions:** Regulatory institutions often operate under the purview of the central government. Their functioning can influence the power dynamics between the center and the states.
4. **Powers of central agencies:** The extent of powers held by central agencies can sometimes be seen as encroaching on the autonomy of states. Striking a balance between centralized authority for national interests and respecting the autonomy of states is crucial.

What can be the impact of center-state federal frictions on the economy?

There are 3 important economic consequences of this:

Firstly, the spread of the Centre's span of activities leads to a situation where the **Centre starts crowding out the States in terms of investments**.
F**or instance, PM Gati Shakti.** The flexibility of States in formulating their State master plan is curtailed by the centralization of planning and implementation of the national master plan. This has become a reason for underinvestment by States, which can hamper regional economies.

Secondly, **unhealthy fiscal competition** between the Centre and States is developing. State governments are engaging in competition with other States and with the Centre, in place of healthy fiscal competition among different regions/States.
For instance, **welfare provisioning**. States' revenues, especially non-tax revenues, remain flat due to a lack of avenues for raising non-taxes (For e.g., profits of state-owned companies) due to the direct provisioning of many utilities and services by the Centre.

Thirdly, it may lead to **inefficiencies associated with 'parallel policies'**. Federal friction can lead to the Centre or the States duplicating the other's policies.
For instance, pension schemes. Though States joined the National Pension Scheme (NPS) initially, some States have started to roll back to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS). The fiscal costs associated with OPS will have long-term consequences for the economy.
Read more on **OPS vs NPS** here.

What needs to be done?

The interdependence between Centre and States is inevitable, especially in a large, diverse, developing society and **needs to be preserved**.

Topic: The role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders

On Challenges of NGO Regulation

News: The article discusses the challenges in tracking and understanding non-profit organizations (NGOs) in India due to the lack of a unified registry and comprehensive data. It suggests the need for regulatory changes, better policies, and increased transparency in the NGO sector.

What are NGOs?

The World Bank categorizes NGOs as organizations committed to activities that alleviate suffering, protect the poor's interests, preserve the environment, and provide essential social services or community development.

What are the regulatory provisions for NGOs in India?

Constitutional Provisions: Article 19(1)(c) guarantees the right to form associations; Article 43 promotes rural cooperatives; the Concurrent List in Entry 28 addresses charities and charitable institutions.
Legal Registration: In India, NGOs must legally register under specific acts, such as the Societies Registration Act (1860), the Indian Trusts Act (1882), and Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, to obtain legal status.

Financial Regulations for NGOs in India:

a) Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010: Regulates foreign funding of NGOs in India. Implemented by the Ministry of Home Affairs, it mandates NGOs to use foreign contributions for the stated purposes and necessitates registration renewal every five years.
b) Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999: Initially focused on managing foreign exchange for trade and payments, FEMA's role expanded in 2016 to include the monitoring of NGOs receiving foreign contributions. This change aimed to centralize the oversight of foreign fund flows to NGOs under one regulatory body, enhancing the scrutiny and regulation of these funds.

What challenges exist in regulating NGOs?

Lack of Unified Registry and Inconsistent Data: India lacks a single, comprehensive registry for NGOs, leading to significant gaps in data. With an estimated 3 million NGOs but only about 175,000 registered on Niti Aayog's Darpan portal, many NGOs remain untracked. This gap results in inconsistent data on their sizes, funding patterns, and activities.
Diverse Legal Structures: NGOs in India have varied legal forms such as societies, trusts, and Section 8 companies, each governed by different laws. This makes it challenging to implement a uniform regulatory framework.
Varied Funding Sources: The diverse sources of funding, both domestic and foreign, complicate the financial regulation of NGOs.

What changes are needed for NGOs in India?

Regulatory Overhaul: Current legal entity definitions are outdated and don't reflect the diverse nature of NGOs, from grassroots organizations to large institutions.

Policy Measures for Micro-sized NGOs: Policies should be tailored to the specific needs of micro-sized NGOs, which make up a significant portion of the sector. This includes tax structures for philanthropy and rules for foreign donations, mirroring business policies for MSMEs.
Focus on Organizational Building: Given that private and corporate philanthropy in India is around ₹25,000 crore annually, NGOs need to grow in capacity to utilize this capital. Non-programmatic grants and capacity building support can help NGOs, especially those without significant retained profits or equity capital, to expand and increase their impact.
Transparency and Trust Building: NGOs should adhere to mandatory reporting and disclosures similar to those required of publicly listed companies. This will build trust with donors and ensure honest, transparent operations.

Subject: Governance

Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

The issues with Fact Check Unit

News: The article discusses the functions of the Tamil Nadu Fact Check Unit (FCU). It also highlights the issues that may arise due to this and suggests steps to deal with these challenges. Recently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has issued an order to set up a Fact Check Unit (FCU) with the intent of checking across all media platforms the authenticity of information related to the Government of Tamil Nadu.

What will be the functions of the Tamil Nadu FCU?

1. **Checking the Authenticity of Information:** It will check the accuracy of information related to the announcements, policies, schemes, guidelines and initiatives of the Government of Tamil Nadu.
2. **Ability to Act on Complaints as well as take *suo motu* cognizance:** The FCU has been given powers to act on complaints as well as take *suo motu* cognizance of social media posts/articles.
3. **Forwarding of Complaints to Authorities:** Identified complaints are then researched and verified through authentic government sources. Actionable complaints will then be forwarded to the authorities concerned to initiate legal action.
4. **Dissemination of Content for generating Awareness:** The FCU will disseminate creative content through its social media platforms to create awareness.

What are the issues with the FCU constituted by the government?

According to the author, these are the issues associated:
1. **Unreasonable Restriction on the Freedom of Speech:** The right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) can be reasonably restricted under Article 19(2). However, **"public**

interest" is not a ground under Article 19(2) to restrict the freedom of speech.
2. **Requirement of Enacting a Legislation Bypassed:** Restrictions under Article 19(2) can only be by way of a "law", i.e. legislation passed by the State. Thus, just a Government Order (Executive Action) cannot impose restrictions on the freedom of speech and expression.
3. **Ambiguities in the Order:** The phrase "information related to the Government of Tamil Nadu" has not been defined, thereby making it vague and arbitrary. This lack of clarity might lead to action against people criticising the policies of the government.
4. **Lack of Legal Remedies:** It does not provide for an opportunity of legal hearing to the author of a post.
5. **Undermines Separation of Power:** Government has become the judge, jury, and executioner on the authenticity of any information related to themselves.
6. **Limited Ability to achieve the stated Objectives:** The order states that mis/disinformation, fake news, and hate speech have necessitated the creation of the FCU. However, hate speech, mis/disinformation and fake news has no direct connection with information related to the Government of Tamil Nadu, which is the focus of the FCU. Thus, it may not be a solution to curb them.

For more **Issues with the FCU**, read here.

For **Bombay High Court's observations on FCU**, read here.

What should be done?

1. **Consultations need to be held with all stakeholders** including the public and social media intermediaries.
2. Measures such as **support for an independent network of fact-checkers** and **promoting media literacy** should also be undertaken.
3. **International best practices** such as **the European Commission's Code of Practice on Disinformation,** which was brought after a broad consultative process and opinion poll, can be followed.

On OTT Regulation

News: The article discusses the new Broadcasting Services Bill in India, which might replace the 1995 Cable TV Act. It suggests the bill could control media more, affecting minority representation and viewer choices, continuing past issues with media regulation in India.

What are the key provisions of the Broadcasting Services Bill, 2023?

1. **Unified Regulation Framework:** The bill aims to replace the Cable Television Networks Act of 1995, creating a single framework for broadcasting, OTT, digital media, and more.
2. **Addresses Technological Changes:** It addresses changes in the broadcasting landscape, like DTH and OTT platforms, reflecting technological advancements.
3. **Simplifying Business Procedures:** The bill seeks to simplify business procedures and enforce the

Program and Advertisement Codes more effectively.
4. **Inclusion of Emerging Technologies:** It includes contemporary definitions and provisions for new broadcasting technologies.
5. **Enhanced Self-Regulation:** Proposes 'Content Evaluation Committees' and a 'Broadcast Advisory Council' for better self-regulation in broadcasting.
6. **Accessibility Considerations:** Focuses on accessibility for persons with disabilities through comprehensive guidelines.
7. **Penalties and Fines:** Introduces statutory penalties for breaches, considering the financial capacity of entities involved.

What is the current landscape of broadcasting regulation in India?

Broadcasting Regulatory in India	Description
Cable Network Act 1995	Regulates the registration of broadcasters and distributors, with state governments setting up agencies to ensure adherence to this legislation.
Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)	Oversees the pricing structures for both TV channel subscribers and broadcasting service providers.
Prasar Bharati	An autonomous organization established by Parliament, encompassing both Doordarshan Television Network and Akashvani radio broadcasting.
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	Central authority for managing both private and public broadcasting, overseeing multimedia advertising, and supervising print media regulations.
Electronic Media and Monitoring Centre	Tasked with overseeing, analyzing, and documenting TV content to ensure it aligns with governmental standards and regulations.

What are the concerns with this Bill?

1. **Threat of Censorship:** The bill could give the government more power over media content. It allows government officers to prohibit broadcasts they deem inappropriate. This might result in undue censorship or content restrictions.
2. **Does not address Conflict of Interest:** The bill does not address ongoing issues in media regulation, such as the influence of politicians and cable operators. This has been a problem in the past.

What should be done?

Clarify Ambiguous Terms: The bill should clearly define its broad terms to prevent subjective interpretations and ensure fair enforcement.
Balance Government Control: There needs to be a balance between government oversight and media freedom to avoid overreach and censorship.
Strengthen Self-Regulation: Enhance self-regulation mechanisms to reduce excessive government intervention in content regulation.

Alcohol Policies in India

News: The article discusses India's conflicting views and policies on alcohol. It mentions how alcohol is seen differently in various cultures and religions within India, and how state policies focus more on revenue than health. The need for a consistent, health-focused alcohol policy is emphasized.

How do Indian attitudes vary towards alcohol?

Cultural Views: Alcohol is viewed differently across Indian cultures. Upper castes often see it as negative, linking it to "tamasic" food, while many tribal societies accept it openly.
Gender Dynamics: Alcohol consumption by men often negatively impacts women, leading to many women-led social protests against alcohol.
Alcohol and Religion: Different religions in India have varied stances on alcohol. Islam forbids it, Christianity is more permissive, and Hinduism does not explicitly prohibit it.
Medical View: Medically, alcohol is recognized as harmful in India, known for increasing the risk of heart diseases and impacting liver health.

What are the approaches to alcohol policy across different States?

a) Revenue-Driven Policies: States like Haryana and Delhi have policies driven by the revenue potential of alcohol sales, with Haryana having liquor vends every few hundred meters in some cities.
b) Socio-cultural Factors: Gujarat continues prohibition as a Gandhian legacy, while Mizoram, a Christian-majority state, also has prohibition laws.
c) Government Control for Safety: Tamil Nadu, learning from hooch tragedies, controls alcohol sales through its State Marketing Corporation, aiming for safer consumption.

What are the issues with alcohol policies in India?

Revenue vs. Health Priorities: The focus on generating revenue often overshadows health concerns. States like Kerala stepped back from partial prohibition for financial reasons, showing a conflict between health and revenue.
Also, the practice of notifying "dry days" in advance so people can purchase alcohol beforehand, showing a bureaucratic approach rather than a focus on health.
Inconsistent State Policies: There's a lack of uniformity in policies among states. For instance, Haryana's approach with numerous liquor vends contrasts with the prohibition in Gujarat and Mizoram.
Weak Enforcement of Regulations: Despite existing rules, enforcement is lax. The article notes that alcohol firms flout advertising bans, including in major events like the cricket World Cup, with little government intervention.
Exclusion from GST: States are reluctant to include alcohol under the GST scheme, indicating a preference for maintaining individual control over alcohol policies for revenue reasons.

What should be done?

National Health-Focused Policy: A national alcohol policy prioritizing health over revenue is necessary. This should align with the WHO's updated stance of "no alcohol is good."
Tackle Societal Hypocrisy: The hypocrisy in societal attitudes, like the difference in private and public consumption and varying views across castes and religions, needs to be confronted.
Legislative Action on Advertising: Stronger legislative measures are needed to enforce advertising bans and control surrogate advertising by alcohol firms.
Balanced Approach to Revenue and Health: The policy should find a middle ground between revenue generation and health impact mitigation, considering the economic aspects without compromising public health.

Open Discussion: Society needs open, non-judgmental discussions about alcohol use, breaking down the traditionalism vs. modernism dichotomy and addressing religious perspectives.

On Abolition of Death Penalty

News: This article discusses the arguments against the death penalty.
A detailed article on **Death Penalty** can be read here.

Recently, the parliamentary committee that examined the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the proposed criminal statute likely to replace the IPC, has not made a recommendation to abolish the death penalty.

What are the provisions for the Death Penalty in India?

Capital punishment in India is a legal penalty for some crimes under the Indian Penal Code. It can be granted in cases such as under **Section 302 of IPC (Murder)**, **Section 305** (Abetment of suicide of a minor or insane person) or **Section 121** (Treason for waging war against Government of India).
In **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab, 1980**, the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutionality of the death penalty in India but laid down the **'rarest of rare' doctrine**. It requires judges to impose the punishment only in the 'rarest of rare' cases.

What are the arguments for abolishing the Death Penalty?

1. **Does not deter crime:** There is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than long prison sentences.
2. **Takes away the scope for reform:** Imprisonment for the remainder of the convict's natural life will be a more rigorous punishment and provide scope for reform.
3. **Disproportionately affects the underprivileged:** Most of those on death row came from underprivileged backgrounds. Nearly $3/4^{th}$ of death row prisoners are from Lower Castes or Religious Minorities.
4. **Global opinion in favour of its abolition:** There are 98 countries which have abolished it for all crimes.

What should be done?

1. **Devising a Remission Policy:** Removing capital punishment and introducing a universal **remission policy** will be important. In **remission**, the duration of the sentence is reduced without changing the nature of the sentence.
2. **Life Imprisonment as an alternative:** 'Life imprisonment' (term for the remainder of one's natural life) should be the default alternative to death sentences.

Subject: Social Justice

Topic: Issues relating to Education.

On School Mergers – Strengthening schools

News: The article discusses how merging small schools in India, as done in a project called SATH-E, saves money and improves education.

Some highlights on the present State of School Education in India:

Challenges: The system faces issues like poor learning outcomes, teacher shortages, and governance difficulties. A significant challenge is running many small, inefficient schools. In Jharkhand, merging 4,380 such schools addressed this problem.
Government Initiatives: Initiatives like the Right to Education Act and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have improved educational access. The mid-day meal scheme supports student welfare. The SATH-E project, implemented in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha, focuses on merging schools for efficiency and better quality. This resulted in substantial cost savings, exemplified by Jharkhand's 2400 crore rupees saved from school mergers.

What is the SATH-E Project?

The Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-E) Project, launched in 2017, aims to transform school education in India. It selected Jharkhand, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh to develop as role model states.
Key strategies: It includes merging schools, remedial programs, teacher training, monitoring recruitment, reorganizing institutions at district and state levels, and using Management Information Systems (MIS). The MIS helps in setting goals, planning, resource allocation, and evaluating performance.
Monitoring: Progress is monitored nationally by the National Steering Group (NSG) and Central Project Monitoring Unit (CPMU), and at the state level by State Project Monitoring Units (SPMU).

What are the benefits of school mergers?

1) Resource Consolidation: Merging schools, as seen in Jharkhand with 4,380 schools, leads to significant cost savings and efficient resource use.
2) Improved Academic Environment: Larger schools offer better facilities and a more diverse peer group, enhancing the learning experience.
3) Enhanced Teacher Availability: Consolidation helps in rationalizing teacher deployment, ensuring better teacher-student ratios.
4) Governance and Monitoring: With fewer but larger schools, governance and monitoring become more effective, as seen in the SATH-E project.

What are the concerns with school mergers?

1) Access to Education: Merging schools can increase travel distances, potentially leading to higher dropout rates, especially in tribal and hilly areas.
2) **Right to Education Act Compliance:** Activists argue that mergers may violate the RTE Act, which guarantees education in neighborhood schools.
3) **Cultural and Geographical Challenges:** In diverse states like India, the one-size-fits-all approach of school mergers may not suit all communities.

What should be considered in school mergers?

1) Ensure Accessibility: Provide transportation and infrastructure to ensure students can attend larger, merged schools without difficulty. Khunti district's approach of arranging buses for students from distant areas can be emulated.
2) **Focus on Teacher Rationalization:** Improve teacher availability and quality in merged schools to enhance learning outcomes.
3) **Maintain Close Proximity Schools:** Especially for primary education, to prevent increased dropout rates due to distant schooling locations.
4) **Improve Monitoring and Governance:** Enhanced governance leads to better school performance and reduced dropout rates, as seen in the outcomes of school mergers.

Issues relating to Health

On Generic medicines – Branded, generic and the missing ingredient of quality

News: This article discusses the issues with prescribing generic medicines without appropriate quality checks. It also highlights reforms needed to ensure access to affordable medicines in India.

Recently, the National Medical Council (NMC) directed all doctors to prescribe only generic names instead of brand names, which led to protests. The NMC has since withdrawn the order.

What are generic medicines?

A generic drug is a pharmaceutical drug that contains the **same chemical substance (active pharmaceutical ingredient (API))** as a drug that was originally protected by chemical patents. Generic drugs are **allowed for sale after the patents on the original drugs expire**. It may differ in some characteristics such as the manufacturing process, formulation, excipients, color, taste, and packaging.

What are the allegations against big pharmaceutical brands?

1. **High Costs:** Many brands are costly. Generics are relatively more affordable.
2. **Unethical practices by big pharma:** According to the 1975 **Hathi Committee**, branded companies propagate the myth that only they have good quality through propaganda and unethical marketing techniques.
3. **Nexus between Pharma companies and Doctors:** This alleged nexus can indulge in unethical marketing and promotional offers or kick-backs.

What are the challenges associated with generic medicines?

1. **Underqualified Pharmacists:** In over-the-counter sales in India, an underqualified salesperson can decide the brand of generic medicine to be given.
2. **Doctor's Vast Experience negated:** The prescribing doctor has no freedom to mention a brand in which he has invested his faith in terms of quality.
3. **Lack of Quality Compliance:** There is a lack of coordination between manufacturers, networks of pharmaceutical industries and price control authorities in ensuring quality compliance.
4. **Prevalence of Substandard Drugs:** The prevalence rate of spurious and "not standard quality" medicines, stands at 3-4%. Drugs must be 100% quality test-passed.
5. **Profit Considerations:** The underqualified chemist or sales boy at the retail store may decide the generic brand primarily on the basis of profits to be gained, and not the best one.

What should be done?

No Compromise on Quality: The government must ensure the quality of medicines produced, procured, and supplied. For this, there has to be periodic lifting of samples for testing. **TN Case Study:** All supplied medicines are kept under quarantine till double blinded samples are cleared in quality testing by government and private sector laboratories. **Allow Recommendation of Generic Brand:** Till such time as the government is able to ensure quality, doctors should be allowed to use the name of the company of confidence.

What are some other reforms which can improve access to affordable medicines in India?

1. **Tackling Availability of Essential Medicines:** The availability rate of all essential medicines must be above 90%. However, there is a lack of availability due to low profit margins.
2. **Banning Unscientific Medicine Combinations:** There must also be a ban on unscientific combinations of medicines.
3. **Expanding the network of Janaushadhi Kendras:** To ensure affordable medicines for all under Universal Health Care, free medicines and free diagnostics are required. For this, the network of Janaushadhi kendras needs to be expanded.
4. **Fixing Profit margins:** Approved norms of the profit margin for wholesale agents and retailers must be limited to a fixed percentage.

Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections

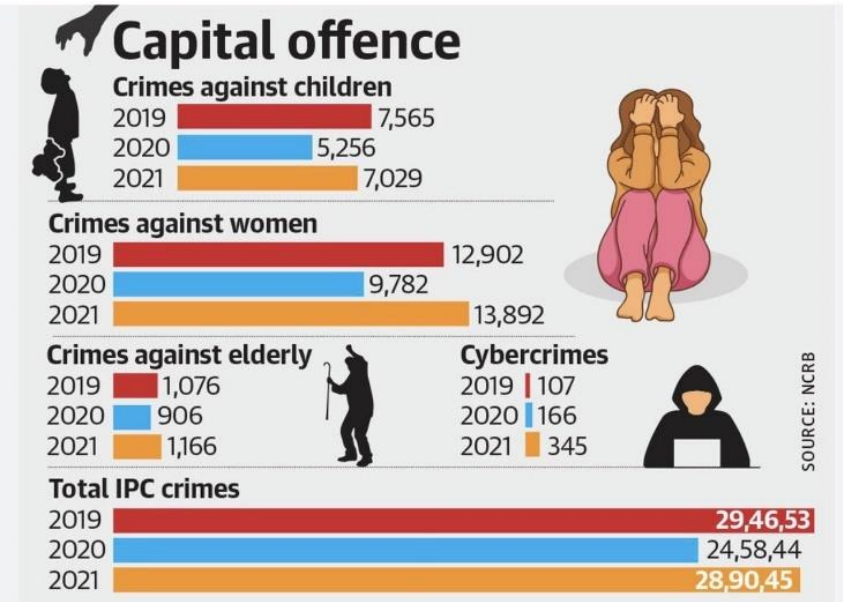
Domestic Violence in India

News: The article discusses how in India, the legal system and police often don't support women facing domestic violence. Laws exist, but they're not effectively used. There's also criticism of the

courts and media for suggesting women misuse these laws, which discourages them from seeking help.

What is domestic violence?

According to the Domestic Violence Act, domestic violence is defined as any harm or damage to a woman in a domestic relationship, encompassing physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and financial abuse. It also includes threats of abuse and harassment related to illegal dowry demands. According to National Crime Records Bureau of India, a crime against a woman in committed every three minutes.
The 2019 National Crime Records Bureau report shows around 400,000 registered domestic violence cases.



What are the challenges faced in the fight against domestic violence in India?

1) Widespread Occurrence: The National Family Health Survey 5 (2019-20) indicates that 30% of Indian women aged 18-49 have experienced physical violence since age 15, highlighting the extensive nature of the problem.
2) Dowry-Related Deaths: According to the 2015 National Crime Records Bureau report, an average of 21 women dies every day in India due to dowry-related violence.
3) Ineffective Legal Support: A study of over 400,000 FIRs in Haryana found that the legal process, from filing FIRs to obtaining convictions, often disadvantages women in domestic violence cases.
4) Police Reluctance: There's a significant reluctance among police to file FIRs for domestic violence, often advising victims to resolve issues through counseling, reflecting a patriarchal bias.
5) Judicial Prejudices: Judicial comments, as seen in the **Rakesh and Reena Rajput v The State of Jharkhand case**, suggest a perception of women misusing domestic violence laws, which can discourage victims from seeking legal redress.

What government initiatives are in place to combat domestic violence in India?

1) One Stop Centres (OSCs): Established to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, including domestic violence.
2) Ujjawala Homes and SwadharGreh: Residential facilities providing shelter, food, clothing, and counseling to women victims of domestic violence.
3) Emergency Response Support System (112): A unified emergency number for immediate assistance in cases of domestic violence.

What are the legal provisions aimed at combating domestic violence in India?

1) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: Criminalizes the giving and receiving of dowries, addressing a significant root cause of domestic violence.
2) Indian Penal Code Amendments: Introduction of Section 498A in 1983 and Section 304B in 1986, specifically targeting domestic violence and dowry-related deaths.
3) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005: A comprehensive law that defines domestic violence to include physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, and economic abuse. It offers protection and legal recourse to victims.

What should be done?

A report by Standing Committee on Home Affairs on **'Atrocities and Crimes against Women and Children (2021)'** gave the following recommendations:

Report-Based Registration Enhancements: Implement strategies like **decoy operations** and online FIR registration for timely action on domestic violence cases.

Boosting Conviction Rates: The report suggests establishing fast-track courts and employing the Online Investigation Tracking System.

Support for Marginalized Groups: The Committee advises including specific provisions for women from disadvantaged communities.

Helpline and Shelter Homes: A recommendation for a nationwide helpline and more shelter homes.

Cyber-crime Measures: Enhanced training for law enforcement in cyber tools.

Increasing Female Police Representation: Recruitment drives to increase women in the police force are recommended.

Institutional and Legal Reforms: Creation of databases for criminals and vulnerable groups and amending laws for effectiveness.

Utilizing Nirbhaya Fund: Proper allocation and utilization of the Nirbhaya Fund for women's safety initiatives.

Terminology used:

Decoys: A decoy is someone from the police who talks to a suspect and helps catch them or gather information about the crime they might commit.

Subject: International Relations

Topic: India and its neighborhood – relations.

Counter terrorism policies of India and Israel

News: The article discusses India's strategic restraint after the 2008 Mumbai attacks and contrasts it with Israel's response to Hamas. It argues that India's non-aggressive approach led to international support and economic growth, while Israel's aggressive tactics only increased support for the Palestinian cause.
A detailed article on the **Israel-Palestine Conflict** can be read here.

About the 2008 Mumbai attacks: The 2008 Mumbai attacks, conducted by Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba militants, involved coordinated shootings and bombings across Mumbai, India. It remains one of the most significant terrorist incidents in India's recent history.
What is the Israel-Palestine Conflict? The Israel-Palestine conflict is a long-standing dispute between Israelis and Palestinians over land, national identity, and sovereignty, involving issues like borders, security, and control of Jerusalem. It has led to multiple wars and ongoing tensions.

What is the difference between actions taken by India and Israel in response to the attacks?

India's Response to 2008 Mumbai Attacks:

1) Strategic Restraint: India refrained from immediate military retaliation against Pakistan.
2) International Diplomacy: Emphasized global diplomacy, gaining support from the U.S. and other nations.
3) Avoiding Escalation: Avoided a potential nuclear crisis and economic downturn during the global financial crisis.

Israel's Response to 2023 Hamas Attack:

1) Military Action: Israel responded to the Hamas attack with a violent military response.
2) Global Perception: This action inadvertently brought the Palestinian issue to the forefront globally.
3) Contrasting Outcome: Unlike India's approach, Israel's response increased international sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

What impact did India's restraint have on Pakistan?

1) Economic Decline: Post-26/11, Pakistan experienced a significant economic downturn. Real GDP growth plummeted, and Foreign Direct Investment dropped by 42% by 2010.
2) International Image: The global perception of Pakistan shifted negatively. The United Nations designated the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) as a terrorist organization in 2010, reinforcing its association with terrorism.
3) Reduced U.S. Aid: Following 26/11, there was a call, notably by then-Senator Joe Biden, to reduce U.S. military aid to Pakistan, which had increased post-9/11 for combating Taliban and al-Qaeda militants.
4) Legislative Changes: The U.S. Senate passed the revised Kerry-Lugar Bill in 2009, tripling non-

military assistance to Pakistan but imposing conditions that were perceived as offensive by Pakistan, further straining relations.

What should be done?

1) International Diplomacy: Focus on diplomacy and building international alliances, like India's garnering of global support post-Mumbai attacks.
2) Economic Stability: Prioritize maintaining economic stability during global crises, as India did by avoiding war during the 2008 financial crisis.
3) Counter-Terrorism Measures: Implement calculated, targeted actions against terrorism, akin to India's Balakot air strikes, demonstrating strength without widespread conflict.
4) Avoid Aggressive Responses: Learn from Israel's 2023 response to Hamas, understanding that aggressive military action can inadvertently increase global sympathy for the opposition's cause.

Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

The Qatar death row and India's options

News: This article discusses the various ways through which India can tackle the death penalty awarded by Qatar to Indian Navy officers.
Aspects of **India-Qatar bilateral relations** have been discussed in detail here.
Background of the **Death Penalty to retired Indian Navy officers by Qatar** can be read here.

What are some similar incidents that have occurred in the past?

Case of Kulbhushan Jadhav: He was sentenced to death in 2017 in Pakistan on charges of espionage and sabotage. India moved the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**, which ordered Pakistan to review the process of Jadhav's trial and conviction and provide India with consular access.
Case of Wing Commander Abhinandan: His aircraft was shot down by Pakistani fighter jets and was captured on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control, but was released later following intense back-channel communications between India and Pakistan.

What are India's options in the Qatar case?

1) **Legal route under Qatari law:** India can pursue a legal battle with the aim of reducing the sentence to imprisonment.
2) **India-Qatar Prisoner Transfer Agreement:** In 2015, an agreement pertaining to the transfer of sentenced prisoners was signed, under which Indian citizens sentenced in Qatar have the choice to serve their sentence in India.
3) **Approach the ICJ due to violation of Vienna Convention:** Just as in the Jadhav case, there was a delay in notifying the Indian embassy here too. **Article 36 of the Convention** requires immediate notification of an arrest and the right to consulate access.

4) **Diplomatic Dialogue**: India can exert diplomatic pressure on Qatar due to significant economic ties. For instance, Qatar is the largest provider of LNG to India. Also, the Indian community represents the largest expatriate group in Qatar.
5) **Engage Civil Society:** Numerous global human rights organisations have been actively combating unlawful imprisonment and capital punishment. For instance, Amnesty International. These organisations also have the potential to mobilise and advocate for their release.
Read in detail about the **Vienna Convention** here.

What should be done?

This is a challenging diplomatic issue that requires careful consideration and strategic action. India's response should take into account the implications of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, international precedents, and the broader context of India-Qatar relations. Whether through diplomatic dialogues, political interventions, legal appeals, or a blend of these strategies, India has the potential to seek a resolution.

Impact of US-China Summit on India

News: The article discusses the recent meeting between US President Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping. They discussed issues like artificial intelligence regulation and regional security, without major breakthroughs. India should watch these developments and maintain strong relationships with Western countries and China.

What was the recent US-China summit about?

It occurred on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Key discussion topics included - **a)** the regulation of artificial intelligence (AI) and regional security issues, **b)** High-level political and military communication channels between the US and China were agreed to be renewed, **c)** The summit focused on managing the US-China competition rather than forming a strategic partnership, **d)** The discussions also touched on the crises in the Middle East and the Ukraine war.

How does this affect India?

1) Impact on Indo-Pacific Strategy: India's strategy in the Indo-Pacific is influenced by the summit, as it involves two major players in the region, the US and China. This discussion may affect the balance of power and alliances in the region, impacting India's strategic positioning.
2) Economic Implications for India: Xi Jinping's push to re-engage US businesses could challenge India's efforts to attract Western investment. India must enhance its economic appeal to remain a viable alternative to China for Western businesses.
3) Strategic and Security Concerns: The talks between Biden and Xi about regional security, including the Indo-Pacific region, are crucial for India to monitor, impacting its own security strategies.

4) **Improve India's ties with both US and China**: Better US-China ties will allow for better balancing act by India. It can improve ties with both nations while maintaining strategic autonomy.

Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

On India-West Asia Relations

News: The article discusses India's focus on maintaining peace in West Asia, an important region for India's energy needs and trade. It highlights India's historical and recent diplomatic efforts in the region, including strengthening ties with various countries and supporting a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

Figure 1, West Asian Region:

How Have India's Relations with West Asia Evolved?

Historical Links: Ancient trade between the Indus Valley Civilization and Dilmun (modern Bahrain) and the Mesopotamian Civilisation, and the inclusion of Punjab in the Persian Empire (6th BC), signify early connections.
Post-Independence Foundations: India's relations with West Asia after its independence, marked by strong ties with leaders like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. These early connections were rooted in shared interests and political movements like the Non-Aligned Movement.
Challenges from Pakistan's Influence: India faced hurdles in enhancing ties due to Pakistan's proactive politics in the region. This influence often led to complications, as some West Asian countries were suspected of supporting Islamic fundamentalism in India.

India's foreign policy towards West Asia, since (2014):

Look West Policy- Aims to fulfill national interests without entangling in regional Arab politics.
Economic Agreements- Like the recent India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
Strategic Investments- For instance, Saudi Arabia's investment in India's Jio platform.
Regional Cooperation- Participation in forums like the India-Arab Cooperation Forum and cooperation with the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

De-Hyphenation Policy- This policy allowed India to engage with conflicting parties independently, such as separate visits to Israel and Palestine, showcasing a balanced and autonomous diplomatic approach.

What are India's Major Achievements in West Asia?

Strategic and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation: Enhanced cooperation in strategic and counter-terrorism areas is evident. In 2018, the UAE extradited Farooq Takla, a wanted terrorist and aide to Dawood Ibrahim, to India.
De-Hyphenation Policy Success: India's de-hyphenation policy, separating its relations with Israel and Palestine, allowed for independent engagement with both and showcased a balanced approach in foreign policy.
Recognition at the Organisation of Islamic Countries: India's growing influence was acknowledged when it was invited as the Guest of Honour at the Organisation of Islamic Countries summit in 2019, a significant diplomatic achievement given past challenges.
Part of I2U2: India actively participates in the I2U2 group, alongside Israel, UAE, and USA, focusing on collaborative projects in food security and clean energy. This cooperation significantly influences West Asia by promoting regional stability, economic growth, and sustainable development.

Why is Peace in West Asia Important for India?

Critical Energy Supplier: West Asia is crucial for India's energy requirements, being the primary supplier of crude oil and natural gas. This makes the region's stability directly influential on India's energy security.
Largest Trading Partner: With a trade volume of $150 billion, West Asia stands as India's largest trade partner. The UAE and Saudi Arabia alone account for $90 billion and $50 billion, respectively.
Strategic and Maritime Security: The prolonged Israel-Hamas conflict threatens to destabilize West Asia, potentially impacting India's strategic interests in the region. Additionally, peace in West Asia is crucial for India's control of Indian Ocean maritime routes, a key aspect of its geopolitical strategy.
Indian Diaspora: Approximately 8-9 million Indians reside in West Asia, with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE hosting large Indian communities.

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

Topic: Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth

Impacts of changes to IT hardware import policy

News: The article discusses India's attempts to reduce IT hardware imports and increase local production. This includes offering more incentives to manufacturers and potentially restricting imports, but it's uncertain if these efforts will significantly lower imports or boost domestic manufacturing and job creation.

What is India's policy towards IT hardware import?

India's IT hardware import policy involves restricting certain imports to boost domestic production. The policy is part of a broader strategy to reduce dependence on China and includes enhanced incentives under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, to encourage local manufacturing in the IT hardware sector.
To this effect, the government announced in August its decision to restrict laptop imports but had to withdraw its decision over concerns raised by the industry

For more information, read here

For **PLI Scheme,** read article1, article2

What are the implications of India's IT hardware import policy?

Positive Implications:
Boost in Domestic Production: The policy aims to increase local manufacturing of IT hardware, as part of the government's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme.
Investment in Local Industry: Companies like Dixon Technologies have committed to substantial production worth ₹48,000 crore in six years, indicating a growth in domestic manufacturing.
Job Creation Potential: Moving assembly work to India, as indicated by Dixon Technologies' investment of ₹250 crore, could create employment opportunities.

Negative Implications:
Surge in Imports Pre-Policy Implementation: Anticipating the restriction, imports of computers and related products jumped 42% to $715 million in September.
Dependence on Imported Components: Even with local assembly, most components might still be imported, notably from China.
Limited Impact on Overall Imports: IT hardware imports requiring government approval were just $8.8 billion in 2022-23, a small fraction of India's total imports of about $900 billion.
Impact on Investment: Frequent changes in government policy can lead to uncertainty and have a detrimental effect on investment.

What should be done?

Broaden Policy Focus: Beyond restricting imports, India needs comprehensive strategies to attract investments and build efficient manufacturing networks.

Enhance Value Addition: The policy could add a condition of local value addition to be eligible for PLI scheme incentives, encouraging more than just assembly in India.
Address Manufacturing Challenges: Recognize and tackle reasons why hardware components aren't currently made in India, ensuring the PLI scheme effectively shifts part of the value chain to the country.
Improve Business Environment: Following the example of Apple's manufacturer leaving India, the government should create favorable conditions for companies to expand operations successfully.
Promote Technology Transfer and Skill Development: Encourage partnerships and collaborations that facilitate technology transfer and skill enhancement in the IT hardware sector to build local expertise and capabilities.

On India's mining sector

News: The article discusses Afghanistan's large lithium reserves and India's potential in mining these minerals. It highlights how mining can create jobs, especially for underprivileged communities in India, and suggests a balanced approach between economic development and environmental protection.

What is the current mining sector situation in India?

Underexplored Territory: Only 10% of India's landmass has been explored for minerals, and just 2% is mined.
Potential in the Hindu Kush Range: Geological reports suggest the Hindu Kush range, extending into India, may have valuable minerals. There's been a recent discovery of lithium in Jammu and Kashmir.
The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023: an important step to promote private sector involvement in mineral exploration and mining. This move can indeed help reduce import dependencies and strengthen supply chain resilience, particularly for critical minerals that are essential for various industries, including technology and clean energy.
Part of MSP: India joined Minerals Security Partnership (MSP). It is a US-led alliance of 14 developed countries launched in June 2022. The elite critical minerals club is also known as the 'Critical Minerals Alliance'.

What are the benefits of investing in mining in India?

Job Creation: Mining generates more employment compared to other sectors. According to the 12th Five Year Plan, mining creates 13 times more jobs than agriculture and six times more than manufacturing per percentage point of economic growth.
Support for Electric Vehicles: Mining critical minerals like lithium aids the burgeoning electric vehicle industry, crucial for the transition from oil to electric mobility.
Economic Diversification: Investing in mining diversifies India's economy, reducing reliance on traditional sectors.
Strategic Global Positioning: By entering the global mining race, India can position itself as a key player in the critical minerals market.

Deep-Sea Mining Prospects: India's extensive coastline offers opportunities in the emerging field of deep-sea mining.

What are the issues with mining sector in India?

High Import Dependency: India heavily relies on imports for many critical minerals, such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements. For example, in 2021-2022, India's lithium imports were worth $22.15 million.
Government-Led Exploration: The majority of exploration projects are carried out by government agencies like the Geological Survey of India and PSUs, with minimal private sector involvement, leading to inefficiencies.
Regulatory Challenges: The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957, despite several amendments, has not fully liberalized the sector for private investment. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023, seeks to address this by introducing new types of licenses to encourage private exploration, but concerns remain about its efficacy.
For more information on Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023, read here.
Exploration Risks: Exploration is a high-risk venture, requiring specialized, time-intensive operations. For instance, aerial surveys and geological mapping are costly and often yield less than 1% commercially viable mines.
Impact of Global Events: Global events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, significantly affect India's mineral supply chains, demonstrating vulnerability to external shocks.
Environmental Concerns: Mining activities can be harmful to the environment, necessitating a balance between ecological protection and mining.

Government Initiatives for the mining sector in India:

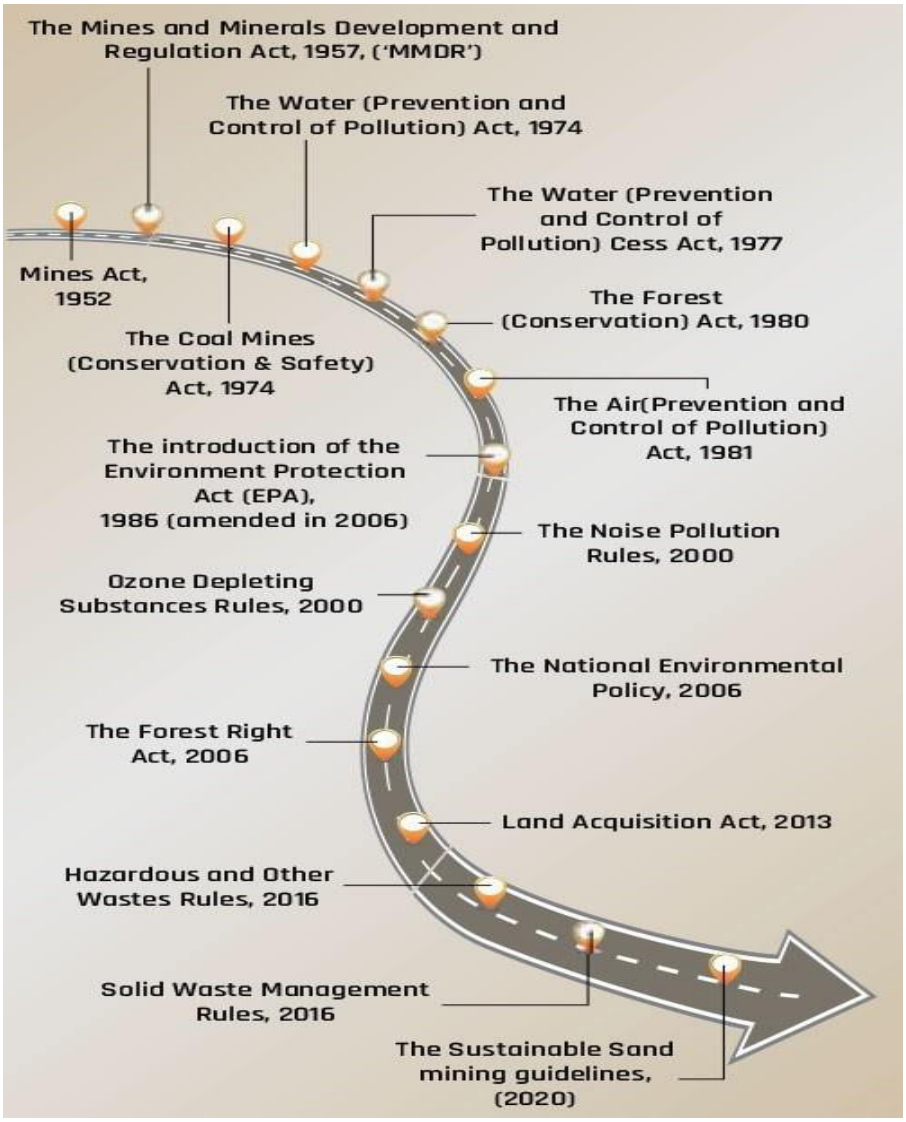


Figure 2.Source: TERI

What should be done?

Increase Exploration: Expand exploration beyond the current 10% of India's landmass to uncover more mineral resources.
Strengthen Mining Regulations: There is a need for robust environmental, labor, and land laws to regulate mining and prevent exploitation.
Balance Environmental Concerns: Strive for a middle ground between mining development and ecological conservation.
Reimagine Economic Policies: Follow Harvard's Kennedy School's 'Reimagining the economy' initiative focusing on job-centric economic development over GDP growth.

For more information read here.

India's pharmaceutical industry

News: The article discusses issues with India's pharmaceutical industry, highlighting problems with substandard drugs and regulatory challenges. It mentions recent government efforts to improve drug tracking and regulation, including a new portal to monitor drug production and distribution.

About Indian Pharmaceuticals industry:

Global Standing: India ranks 3rd worldwide in terms of production volume and 14th by value.
Generic Medicines: India is the world's largest provider of generic medicines, accounting for a 20% share in global supply by volume. The industry offers around 60,000 generic brands across 60 therapeutic categories.
Vaccine Manufacturing: India leads in vaccine manufacturing, contributing 60% of the world's vaccines.
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): a) Greenfield Pharmaceuticals- 100% FDI is permitted under the automatic route. **b)** Brownfield Pharmaceuticals- Also allows 100% FDI, with 74% under the automatic route and the remaining through government approval.
Market Size and Growth: The current value of the industry is $50 billion, projected to grow to $65 billion by 2024 and $120 billion by 2030.
Exports: India is a significant exporter, serving over 200 countries. It supplies over 50% of Africa's generics, about 40% of the generic demand in the US, and 25% of all medicines in the UK. There was a 103% growth in the industry from 2014 to 2022, rising from $11.6 billion to $24.6 billion.
Potential: The Indian Economic Survey 2021 foresaw the pharmaceutical industry in India reaching between USD 120-130 billion by 2030. Additionally, sectors related to the pharmaceutical industry, such as biopharmaceuticals, bio-services, bio-agriculture, bio-industry, and bioinformatics, are projected to reach $150 billion by 2025, a significant increase from the $70 billion recorded in 2020.

What are the issues with India's pharmaceutical industry?
Read here.

Drug Type	Incident Summary
Anaesthetic	In Sri Lanka, two fatalities occurred due to Indian-made anaesthetic drugs.
Eye Drops	Eye drops from India caused infections in 30 patients and blindness in 10 in Sri Lanka. A separate incident in the U.S. involved eye drops leading to infections and blindness, linked to a drug-resistant bacteria.
Cough Syrups	In 2022, WHO associated Indian cough syrups with over 70 child fatalities in Gambia due to kidney injury. Similar products caused 18 child deaths in Uzbekistan in December 2022.

What are the government initiatives to improve this situation?

Adherence to WHO Standards: The Indian government directed medicine manufacturers to follow World Health Organization standards, aiming to improve drug quality.

Monitoring Portal for the Pharmaceutical Industry: The Indian government is launching a monitoring portal to oversee the pharmaceutical industry, aimed at tracking the entire drug-making process and ensuring transparency. This portal mandates manufacturers and distributors to submit detailed information on raw materials and invoices. It also lists drugs identified as substandard, thereby safeguarding against their distribution.
National Policy on Research and Development and Innovation in Pharma-MedTech Sector: It focuses on fostering academia-industry collaboration to establish India as a leader in drug discovery and medical device innovation.
Scheme for Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma MedTech Sector (PRIP): the PRIP scheme, with a budget of Rs. 5000 crores, intends to propel the sector towards innovation-driven growth. It includes setting up Centers of Excellence and emphasizing research areas like New Chemical Entities, enhancing India's global competitiveness in pharmaceuticals.
For more information on the Drug regulatory system in India, read here

What should be done?

Enhance Regulatory Enforcement: Strengthen the enforcement of existing regulations and standards set by bodies like the WHO and US FDA to ensure drug quality.
Improve Transparency: Implement the proposed portal fully for tracking drug-making processes, raw material sourcing, and distribution, thereby increasing supply chain transparency.
Increase Trust in Generics: Address the distrust among physicians towards unbranded drugs through better quality assurance and education.
Enhance Monitoring Systems: Adopt and implement the Mashelkar committee's recommendations, such as the appropriate ratio of drug inspectors to production and retail units for more effective monitoring.
For more suggestions for a way forward, read here.

Topic: Infrastructure and Energy

Benefits of Solar energy mini grids

News: The article discusses the role of solar energy mini-grids in addressing energy poverty, particularly in rural areas of developing countries.

What are Solar energy mini-grids?

Solar energy mini-grids are small-scale, decentralized electricity networks powered by solar energy. Unlike traditional large-scale power grids, solar mini-grids are localized and can operate independently. They can produce enery amount from a few kilowatts up to 10 megawatts. They are primarily used to provide electricity to rural communities that lack access to the central power grid.

What is the significance of mini-grids?

Economic and Environmental Benefits: Solar mini-grids offer a cost-effective, sustainable alternative to diesel generators. They are instrumental in reducing reliance on fossil fuels and promoting renewable energy.

Decentralised energy systems: In the absence of centralised grid infrastructure, these grids are crucial in climate-vulnerable regions, offering resilience against climate shocks like drought and flooding.

Development Accelerators: Beyond providing electricity, these grids facilitate various rural development services, enhancing the quality of life and economic opportunities in rural areas.

Mini grid companies are also providing mobile telephony, irrigation, agro-processing, e-mobility.

Cost of solar PV energy is now highly competitive, standing at $24/MWh, lower than both coal and natural gas.

100% electrification in India: Under e Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana ('Saubhagya'), on march 2019, government declared 100 percent electrification of all 'willing' household. But this effort was aimed at extending the reach of grid electricity, which does not specifically address the quality and reliability of electricity supply. Mini grids are important in improving reliability of electricity services.

What are the Challenges of installing mini grids?

1) Funding requirement: Despite being the cheapest source, only 10 percent of the amount required to achieve net-zero emissions has been invested in solar energy.
About $220 billion is required to build 210,000 mini-grids needed globally. Currently, solar investments are only 10% of what is needed for net-zero emissions.
2) Energy bias: There is a bias towards favoring large-scale solar projects on the national and international level. International frameworks like ISA (International Solar Alliance) are favouring such bias.

What should be done?

1) Energy mix: There is a need for a diverse energy mix, which is focused on adequate centralized and distributed renewable generation.
2) Financial Mechanisms: Implementing guarantees and innovative financial mechanisms, along with robust risk underwriting, can catalyze private sector investment in solar mini grids.
3) International Support: Initiatives like the ISA's Global Solar Facility aim to catalyze investments in solar projects, especially in underserved regions. Similar initiatives are required for mini grids as well.

Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to growth, development and employment

Impact of Soft Power on Indian Economy

News: The article discusses India's impressive economic growth and its increasing influence on the global stage. It highlights the nation's achievements in various areas, including sports, film industry, diplomacy, and cultural exports, emphasizing the importance of "soft power" in shaping India's positive impact worldwide.

About India's Economy:

India is currently the **fastest-growing large economy** in the world. This rapid growth trajectory is a testament to its robust economic policies and market dynamics.
The country is on track to become a **5 trillion dollar** economy before the end of the decade.
India is moving towards securing the third spot in the global economic pecking order.
India's aim to become a **developed nation by 2047** guides its long-term economic strategy.

What factors are contributing to India's economic growth?

A. Strong Market Foundations:
Large Domestic Market: India's vast domestic market is essential in driving economic growth.
Sustained Reforms: Continuous improvements in various sectors boost the economy's efficiency and competitiveness. Recent initiatives comprise the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, the production-linked incentive scheme, the national infrastructure pipeline, and the labor code bills, among others.
Favorable Demographics (Demographic Dividend): A young (1.4 billion people, with more than 40% below the age of 25) and increasing population supports a dynamic workforce and consumer base.

B. India's Soft Power Contributing:
International Recognition to Yoga: Celebration of International Yoga Day on 21st June every year, as proposed by the Indian Prime Minister, showcases its cultural heritage globally.
Diversified Sports Sector: The expansion of sports beyond cricket, to include football, kabaddi, and other sports, not only diversifies India's sports portfolio but also attracts substantial investments and international attention.
Global Film Industry Achievements: The international success of Indian films, exemplified by 'RRR' and its Oscar-winning song 'Naatu Naatu', highlights the global appeal and cultural influence of India's film industry.

C. Active International Engagement:
Leadership in G20: Under its G20 presidency, India demonstrated its ability to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes, culminating in a joint declaration that underscores its diplomatic acumen.
Involvement in Quad and IPEF: India's active participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF) highlights its commitment to regional security and economic collaboration. These efforts are crucial for maintaining stability and fostering economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region.

'Lifestyle for the Environment' (LiFE) Initiative: India's Prime Minister introduced the LiFE concept at COP26 in Glasgow. This initiative calls for an international mass movement focused on environmental protection, showcasing India's leadership in addressing climate change.
Voice of the Global South: India champions fair and sustainable solutions globally, particularly in areas like energy security, representing the Global South's interests.

Terminology used:

Soft power: Soft power is defined as power of attraction between the countries through culture, political ideas, and policies rather than military powers.

Read more on the benefits of **Soft Power** here.

Issues with the 70 Hours Work Week

News: The article discusses why the argument for longer working hours in India based on the comparison with Post-War economies such as Japan, Germany and South Korea is flawed. It also highlights strategies to achieve higher outputs without longer working hours.

A detailed article on the **70 Hours Work Week** can be read here.

What are the flaws in the comparison of India's situation to Japan and Germany?

The case of high working hours in Japan, Germany and East Asia post-World War II is not helpful in understanding the situation in India because it was a unique phenomenon.
This is due to the following factors:
1. **High Demand for Labour due to the impact of World War II:** A high demand for labour services in these countries was a crucial determinant of hours worked. After witnessing major destruction during World War II and experiencing a decline in their workforce due to war mortality, the demand for labour was abnormally high.
2. **Need for Post-war Reconstruction:** In the economic rise of the three countries mentioned, it was post-war reconstruction that provided the demand for greater output in the first instance. Longer workdays followed.
3. **Role of External Aid:** In the case of west Germany, there was the Marshall Plan by which the United States had assisted the country's revival.
4. **Role of Nationalism:** A political aspect beyond finance is a strong nationalistic element. It must have enabled the voluntary supply of effort to rebuild the nation after a destruction by foreigners.
5. **Role of a Dictatorial Government:** Particularly in the case of South Korea, presence of a dictatorship enabled the commandeering of able-bodied men to work on large-scale development projects.

What are the economic strategies that India can follow to achieve greater output and employment?

1. **Leveraging global demand:** For this, Indian goods would have to be globally competitive.
This can be achieved by working on the following:
a. Productivity of its workforce, related to its health and skill.
b. Physical infrastructure that complements labour.
2. **Expanding the Domestic Market and Aggregate Demand:** Producing food at a lower cost will lead to an increase in the real income of most Indian households (due to savings on food expenditure). They would now have more to spend on non-agricultural goods and services, leading to greater demand in the economy (which is needed to increase production in the rest of the economy). With this, output will also grow, and in turn employment.

Subject: Agriculture

Topic: Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; Issues of food security.

Issues with NFSA

News: This article discusses the issues with the current style of implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) as just a free-ration scheme.

A detailed article on **India's Public Distribution System** can be read here.

The National Food Security Act, 2013 came in the backdrop of India's slow performance on the nutritional front, despite rapid economic growth. It laid down the **framework for a comprehensive food-security system** aimed at improving nutrition and access to food. According to the author, the Public Distribution System was an important part of it, however, the main reason behind the NFSA was to move beyond the limited nature of the PDS.

What is the PMGKAY Scheme?

PMGKAY is a free food grain scheme that covers over 57% of India's population.
Under PMGKAY, started in April 2020 in the wake of the COVID pandemic, each beneficiary got free 5 kg of food grain per month, in addition to the PDS scheme (an extra 5 kg of food grain per month supplied at a subsidised price).
Recently, the Hon'ble PM announced an extension of the PMGKAY scheme for another five years.
Read more on **PMGKAY** here and the recent **PMGKAY Extension** here.

What are the issues in the implementation of the NFSA currently?

According to the author, there are various issues with the NFSA in its current form:

1. **Cereal-centric Policy:** The excessive focus on rice and wheat goes against the stated objective of the Act, which mandates an expansion of the food basket to include pulses, edible oil and other

nutritious food.
It has contributed to a skewed production structure, whereby India is a large importer of pulses and edible oil, though self-sufficient in rice and wheat.
2. **Has become a Political Instrument:** It has become a political instrument (example: the latest extension of PMGKAY). It has come at the cost of dilution of several provisions in the original law.
3. **Exclusion of Beneficaries:** Beneficiary coverage remains fixed at 2011 census levels, excluding more than 100 million beneficiaries.
4. **Limited Maternity Benefits:** As against a provision of maternity benefits for all pregnant women, the scheme has been restricted to only 1 childbirth. The amount has remained frozen at Rs. 6,000 per delivery, with no increase in the last decade.
5. **Limited Hikes for Child-related Provisions:** Both the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the Mid-Day-Meal scheme have seen insignificant hikes.
6. **Regionally Skewed Distribution:** Unlike the Act's provision for the decentralization and expansion of public procurement, it remains largely concentrated, such as in the states like Puniab and Haryana.
7. **Environmental Consequences:** The environmental consequences of paddy cultivation have led to declining water tables, and pollution due to stubble burning.

Reducing the Act to a free PDS scheme may help the majority of our population gain access to free food, vielding political dividends, but it should not come at the cost of implementing key provisions of the NFSA – that of providing a framework for improving nutritional and food security.

Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management

India's increasing edible oil imports

News: The article discusses India's increasing reliance on imported edible oils over the past 10 years. It highlights the significant growth in imports, the changing domestic production of different oil types, and the impact of global market changes on India's edible oil market.

About India's Edible Oil:

Rising Imports: India's edible oil imports have surged, reaching 16.5 million tonnes in 2023, up from 11.6 million tonnes in 2013-14.
Value Fluctuations: Despite the increase in volume, the import value in rupees declined due to a drop in global prices.
Domestic Production: In 2022-23, India produced about 10.3 million tonnes of edible oil, with mustard and soybean as leading contributors. This is significantly less than the amount imported.

What is the impact of high import dependency?

Price Volatility: High import dependency subjects India to global market fluctuations, leading to inconsistent edible oil prices domestically.
Future Risks: The current trend suggests a potential increase in imports, potentially exceeding 20 million tonnes in the future, which could further lower India's self-sufficiency and expose it to greater global market risks.
Strain on Government Exchequer: High import volumes place a significant financial burden on the government's exchequer, impacting fiscal balance and potentially diverting funds from other critical areas.
Policy Implications: The reliance on imports presents considerable challenges for policymakers. For instance, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's vegetable oils price index significantly increased in 2022, influenced by external factors such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

What are the government's initiatives to overcome the issue of edible oil dependency?

National Food Security Mission - Oilseeds & Oil palm (NFSM-OS&OP): Launched in 2018-19, this scheme focuses on increasing production and productivity of nine oilseed crops and expanding Oil Palm & Tree Borne Oilseeds. It provides incentives for seed production, production inputs, and technology transfer.
National Mission on Edible Oils (Oil Palm) - NMEO (OP): Initiated in 2021-22, it specifically targets oil palm cultivation. Aiming to increase the area under oil palm from 3.70 lakh hectares to 10.00 lakh hectares by 2025-26, it emphasizes development in the North Eastern States and Andaman & Nicobar.
Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana- RAFTAAR (RKVY-RAFTAAR): Supports state-level oilseed programs approved by the State Level Sanctioning Committee, enhancing crop production activities related to oilseeds.
Other initiatives: include raising the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for oilseed crops, establishing a buffer stock for oilseeds, and conducting cluster demonstrations of oilseed crops. These initiatives are aimed at enhancing domestic production and reducing dependency on imports.

What should be done?

Embrace New Technologies: Adopting genetically modified (GM) crops, especially for mustard and soybean, can significantly enhance yields and contribute to increased domestic production.
Support Oilseed Farmers: The government should offer better support, like MSP, to encourage farmers to grow oilseeds. This would shift focus from cereals like wheat and paddy to oilseeds.
Diversify Oil Sources: Expanding the cultivation of alternative oil sources like cottonseed, rice bran, and domestically grown palm can help in increasing overall oil production.
Reduce Import Dependency: Policies need to be formulated to gradually reduce dependency on imports by increasing domestic production, thus insulating the economy from global price fluctuations.
Educate Consumers: Raising awareness about domestic oil brands and encouraging the use of locally produced oils can help in creating a market for homegrown oils.

Topic: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country

Opium Cultivation in India

News: This article discusses the importance and distribution of opium cultivation in India. It also highlights issues that have emerged out of a recent government decision to open it to private players.

What are the uses of the opium crop?

2 types of narcotic raw materials can be produced from opium poppy: **opium gum (latex)** and the **concentrate of poppy straw (CPS)**.
Opium contains **morphine**, which is known to relieve chronic pain (analgesic). Besides, it is also grown as a source of **edible seed and seed oil**.
It is also used to produce **opioids** (a class of drugs made from opium) like heroin.

What is the geographic distribution of opium production in India?

In India, there are about **1 lakh farmers** across 22 districts in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh with a **licence** to cultivate opium.
3 districts that border Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan — **Mandsaur, Neemuch, and Chittorgarh,** together account for 80% of India's opium.
Opium cultivation is known as *swabhiman ki kheti* (agriculture of dignity) in the Mewar region. Some families have been doing this for as long as 200 years.

Figure 3.Source: The Hindu.

What are the issues with opium cultivation in India?

1. **Stagnant Procurement Rates:** The procurement rate for opium hasn't increased in many years.
2. **Rising Input Cost:** The input cost has increased due to the rise in the price of fertilizers, labour costs, and pesticides.
3. **Risk of Crop Theft:** Farmers have to be vigilant all the time.
4. **Highly Regulated:** Because it is an addictive substance that can cause mental clouding and hallucinations, opium production is highly regulated in India.
5. **Competition from Private Players:** Farmers have been agitated (due to a variety of reasons discussed below) due to a government decision to open up the sector to private players in 2021.

Why was a change in opium policy brought in?

In 2021-22, the Union government changed its opium policy, allowing private players to produce CPS from the opium poppy. According to the govt, the move will have following advantages:
1. **Boost the yield of alkaloids** (organic compounds of plant origin which have pronounced physiological actions on humans): In CPS, poppy straw is washed 6-10 times in water and/or various acids and other chemicals. This leads to a **high morphine concentration**.
2. **Export Competitiveness:** As other countries have already shifted to the CPS method, the demand for Indian opium (which is produced using lancing method) in global market is reducing. This policy provides an opportunity for India to regain its share.
3. **Better Drug Law Enforcement:** It will also help in ensuring better drug law enforcement as it will reduce the illicit market for opium gum.
4. **Price Competitiveness:** CPS is less labour-intensive compared to the method used by farmers currently. Thus, labour costs can be reduced.

What are the issues with the CPS system and entry of private players?

According to farmer's organisations, these are the emerging issues:

1. National Security Issue: Farmers believe that private companies are likely to pose a threat to national security as the drug mafia can get access to alkaloids.
2. Costly Medicine: When opium production is handed over to private companies, life-saving medicines which are made using opium will become costly and poor patients will suffer.
3. Lack of Transparency: Farmers allege that there is no transparency in the CPS mechanism.
4. Lack of Consultations: The Centre brought this scheme during the lockdown without holding any meeting with the farmers.
5. Rise in Illegal Activities: Farmer leaders believe that instances of distressed farmers turning to illegal activities such as smuggling will increase if private players are allowed into the field.

Subject: Science & Technology

Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Use of AI in Defence

News: This article discusses the current developments and the way forward for India in the context of increasing use of AI in Defence.

What is the contemporary global sentiment regarding AI in Defence?

There is a growing global sentiment, on the one hand, for a severe limitation of the military applications of **AI, especially autonomous weapons** that can operate without human control. On the other hand, major powers are already investing heavily in the accelerated development of greater autonomy, based on AI, for weapons systems. Recently, the **UN General Assembly** voted with an overwhelming majority to urge the international

community to address the challenges presented by lethal autonomous weapons. Human rights and arms control activists have also campaigned to ban autonomous weapons. They argue that **"killer robots"** violate the basic principles of international laws of war and raise fundamental ethical questions about human-machine relationships in the use of force.

What is an autonomous weapon?

Autonomous weapon systems are any weapons that select and apply force to targets without human intervention, usually through the application of artificial intelligence.

What are the advantages of autonomous weapons?

1. **Force Multiplier: Can offset military advantages** such as more men, more ships, etc. It may enhance the capabilities of military forces, allowing them to achieve more with fewer resources and personnel.
2. **Cheaper:** Low cost of production and deployment.
3. **Precision and Accuracy:** AI-based autonomous weapons have the potential to enhance precision and accuracy in targeting, reducing collateral damage and civilian casualties compared to traditional weapons.
4. **Speed of Decision-Making:** AI systems can process information and make decisions much faster than human operators.
5. **Adaptability:** Autonomous weapons equipped with AI can potentially adapt to changing situations on the battlefield, making them more versatile in responding to unpredictable scenarios.

How much is the use of autonomous weapons growing in the world?

Countries such as the US, China and India are all engaged in developing autonomous weapons. For instance:
USA: The US Navy has ambitious plans to build 150 **uncrewed ships** in the years ahead. It is also developing new institutions to fully integrate AI into defence management. A new initiative is also announced for the Indo-Pacific, called the **Replicator**, to develop and deploy thousands of unmanned systems across all domains within the next 2 years.
China: It is deploying AI for various functions from inventory management, maintenance, and logistics and in developing unmanned systems for a full range of functions, including reconnaissance, surveillance, and combat.

What should India do?

1) AI should necessarily be an important part of India's national defense plans.
2) India must **invest big in the core AI sciences**, developing the full range of technological capabilities, operational military doctrines, and the institutions to effectively integrate AI into Indian defense management and armed forces.
3) India must have a **bigger say in global outcomes** by working with like-minded countries on the responsible military use of AI and autonomous weapons.

Deepfake Regulation

News: This article discusses challenges posed by deepfakes and the techniques law enforcement agencies employ in tracking them down. It also suggests important provisions for a future legal framework to regulate Deepfakes.
A detailed article on **Deepfakes** can be read here.

What are Deepfakes?

Deepfakes are fake content in the form of videos, pictures and audio which are created using powerful artificial intelligence tools.
The technology involves modifying or creating images and videos using a machine learning technique called **generative adversarial network (GAN)**. This AI-driven software detects and learns the subject's movements and facial expressions from the source material and then duplicates these in another video or image.

How can Deepfakes be tracked?

Deepfake videos can be detected using technical analysis. This includes:

1. **IP address Tracking:** It involves tracking the unique identifying number assigned to every device connected to the internet.
2. **Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT):** The process of gathering and analyzing information from public sources to answer a specific question.
3. **Metadata Analysis:** Metadata is data that describes other data. It can help identify factors such as when a file was created, and where or when a document was last modified.
4. **Facial Recognition Technique:** It can analyze discrepancies in facial features or movement inconsistencies that deviate from natural human behavior or structures.
5. **Content Recognition Algorithms:** They can detect irregularities in audiovisual elements such as unnatural alterations, discrepancies in facial expressions, or anomalies in contextual details.

What provisions should be included in a special legal framework dealing with Deepfakes?

1. **Clear Definitions:** A legal framework for deepfake videos should include a clear definition of what exactly constitutes a deepfake.
2. **Prohibitions Against Misuse:** Prohibition on certain uses of deepfake videos, such as using them to commit fraud, impersonate others, or interfere with elections.
3. **Timely Redressal:** A significant challenge with Deepfakes lies in the rapid dissemination of these videos. Establishing an **active watchdog mechanism** is imperative since courts tend to operate at a slow pace.
4. **Involving Social Media Platforms:** They should be required to take steps to detect and remove deepfake videos in a time bound manner.
5. **Legal Remedies:** Victims of deepfake videos should also have the ability to seek legal recourse from the creators and distributors of the videos.
6. **Protection for Minors:** Deepfakes may contribute to severe consequences, particularly when it involves minors who may be driven to take extreme measures.

7. **Protecting the Rights of the Artist:** It is important to balance the rights of artists for fair use. General principles such as copyright and the right to privacy of the artist can be applied.

Subject: Environment

Topic: Environment Conservation

Forest Conservation Amendment Act 2023

News: The article discusses the 2023 Forest Conservation Amendment Act, which focuses on using forests for economic benefits like tourism. It reduces legal protections for many forests, leading to criticism about neglecting indigenous rights and potential negative impacts on forest management.

What is a forest?

In India, the definition of a "forest" is not uniformly established at the national level. Instead, each state is responsible for determining what constitutes a forest within its territory. This decentralized approach to defining forests originates from a 1996 Supreme Court order known as the T.N. Godavarman Thirumulkpad vs the Union of India judgment.

Types of forests:
State Forest Departments govern two primary types of forests as defined under the Indian Forest (IF) Act of 1927. a) Reserve Forests (RF)- Rights are restricted unless specified. b) Protected Forests (PF)- Rights are generally allowed unless prohibited.

Constitutional Provisions:
The **42nd Amendment Act, 1976**, shifted Forests from the State to the Concurrent List, allowing both state and central legislation.
Article 51 A (g) declares it a fundamental duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests and wildlife.
Similarly, **Article 48 A**, found in the Directive Principles of State Policy, obliges the state to strive to protect and enhance the environment, including forests and wildlife.

Legal Provisions and Amendments:
Indian Forest Act, 1927: Established to consolidate laws related to forests and wildlife, it played a crucial role in designating reserved and protected forests post-independence. However, it faced challenges like overlooking certain forest areas and misclassifying non-forest lands.
Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980: This Act aimed to strengthen forest protection by prohibiting the felling of forests for non-forestry purposes without the central government's approval. It was a response to the rampant deforestation and aimed to ensure sustainable forest management.
T.N. Godavarman vs. Union of India, 1996: A landmark Supreme Court ruling expanded the definition of forests to include all types, irrespective of their ownership or classification, under the

Forest Conservation Act.
Amendments in 2016 and 2017: Prior consent from the tribal grama sabha was mandatory for any alterations to forests for non-forest purposes.
Amendments in 2022: Proposed changes allowed plantation development on non-FC Act lands, reflecting a balance between conservation and development needs.

What are the major changes made under the Forest Conservation Amendment Act 2023?

1. **Reduced Forest Protections and Exclusion of Areas:** The Act reduces legal protections for many forests, particularly those converted for non-forest use after 1996, and applies only to areas categorized under the 1927 Forest Act or designated after October 25, 1980, excluding others from its scope.
2. **Economic Exploitation:** It facilitates economic activities in forests, such as ecotourism and safari, which were previously restricted.
3. **Security Infrastructure:** The government can construct security measures in forest areas, especially within 100 kilometers of international borders.
4. **Removal of Prior Consent:** The requirement for tribal consent for altering forests for non-forest purposes has been removed.
5. **Compensatory Afforestation:** The Act includes provisions for afforestation or reforestation by private entities, without specific guidelines on tree types.
6. **Impact on Forest Rights Act:** The amendment potentially limits the application of the Forest Rights Act, affecting indigenous communities' rights to forest land.

What are the major concerns related to the Forest Conservation Amendment Act 2023?

1. **Neglect of Indigenous Rights:** The Act fails to recognize the rights of indigenous communities, potentially obstructing their access to forest resources and traditional lands.
2. **Contradiction in Forest Governance:** It challenges the concept of decentralized forest governance, conflicting with federal norms and the concurrent jurisdiction of forests.
3. **Ambiguity in Strategic Projects:** Defining strategic projects, such as security infrastructure, is vague, leading to potential misuse and misinterpretation regarding forest land use.
4. **Environmental Security Overlooked:** The Act does not prioritize internal environmental security, a concern for states frequently facing natural disasters.
5. **Compensatory Afforestation Concerns:** The lack of specifics on the types of trees for afforestation could lead to environmental mismatches and ineffective reforestation efforts.

Subject: Internal Security

Topic: Money Laundering and its prevention

On Tax Havens – Cyprus Confidential: Shining a light on tax evasion

News: The article discusses the benefits being provided by Cyprus, in terms of taxes and secrecy. This has made the EU member country a haven for evasion and money laundering for the rich, including Russia's autocratic regime and other dictators and anti-democratic actors.

A detailed article on **Money Laundering** can be read here.

What is a tax haven?

It refers to a jurisdiction with extremely low tax rates.

What is tax evasion?

Tax evasion is a criminal activity by individuals, corporate, trusts and other entities to evade taxes by illegal means. It is the deliberate misrepresentation or concealment of the true state of their financial affairs to the tax authorities to reduce their tax liability.
According to the State of Tax Justice Report 2023, countries across the world will lose **$ 4.8 trillion** to tax havens over the next 10 years.

What is money laundering?

According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), money laundering is the processing of money obtained from criminal activities to disguise their illegal origin. These criminal activities include financial fraud, drug trafficking and terrorist activities.
It involves these 3 stages:

Figure 4.Source: ALESSA.

What are the benefits being provided by Cyprus?

1. **Preferential and loosely controlled tax rates**.
2. **Tax exemptions** on income and gains on offshore trusts.
3. **Zero estate duty** (a levy on the estate of a person who has died).
4. **No trust registration requirements**.
5. Promise of beneficial **owner secrecy**.
6. **Golden Passport scheme:** Cypriot passports were made available in return for a certain investment and gave the new recipients a protective shield for their secretive investments in that country.

Subject: Disaster Management

Topic: Disaster and disaster management

Char Dham Tunnel Collapse

News: A tunnel collapse in the Himalayas trapped 40 construction workers. This incident occurred on the Char Dham national highway project between Brahmakhal and Yamunotri in Uttarkashi. The Char Dham Project is part of India's large-scale infrastructure initiatives in mountainous regions.

What is the Char Dham Project?

Char-Dham Road Project is a prestigious two-lane expressway project. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is executing this program in Uttarakhand.
Purpose: The project proposes widening roads up to 10 meters to improve the accessibility to Char-Dham (shrines); Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath, and Kedarnath.
For more information on **Char Dham Project,** read here.

Other Recent Incidents and Damages:
There have been multiple incidents in these areas, indicating a pattern of challenges and dangers associated with such projects.
Subansiri Lower Hydroelectric Power Project: A major landslide disrupted construction and blocked diversion tunnels.
Teesta River Flash Floods: Flash floods damaged the Chungthang Dam and Teesta hydropower stations, leading to significant financial losses.

What are the reasons behind frequent incidents in the Himalayas?

1. **Disaster vulnerable area:** The region is increasingly vulnerable to landslides, flash floods, and earthquakes, exacerbated by climate change.

2. **Ignorance of technical and environmental appraisal:** Minimal appraisal are being taken. These are not just bureaucratic hurdles but crucial for safety and sustainability of the manpower and the environment.
3. **Himalayan Biosphere:** The Himalayas are recognized as a unique and sensitive biosphere that requires special care and preservation.

Read more about the **Vulnerability of Himalayas.**

What should be done?

1. **Assessment over political will:** Political will for socially significant projects such as Char Dham should not be given importance over technocratic assessment of whether they are feasible.
2. **Environmental Impact:** The article underscores the need to consider the ecological impact of construction projects in this fragile region.

Fragile Himalayan ecosystem and development

News: The article discusses frequent accidents in India during development projects like tunnel and dam construction. These incidents often happen in sensitive Himalayan regions, causing environmental and safety concerns. It emphasizes the need for careful planning and stronger safety measures.

What are the reasons for the recent development accidents in India?

Sensitive Himalayan Terrain: Many accidents occur in the fragile Himalayan region, which is prone to landslides and seismic activities. For instance, the collapse of the Uttarakhand tunnel and the landslide at the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border hydroelectric project are examples of this.

Rapid Infrastructure Development: The push for quick infrastructure growth, like the Char Dham Yatra project in Uttarakhand, often overlooks the environmental and safety aspects.

Environmental Ignorance: Projects often neglect the unique environmental conditions of the Himalayas. The damage in Joshimath, attributed to heavy construction, showcases this issue.

Climate Change Impact: Increased instances of flash floods, like the one affecting the Chungthang Dam, are partly due to climate change effects on the region.

Why are these accidents concerning?

1. **Risk to Human Life:** These incidents pose significant dangers to human lives, as seen in the 40 workers trapped in the Uttarakhand tunnel.
2. **Frequency and Scale:** The regular occurrence of these accidents during development projects indicates systemic issues in planning and safety.
3. **Potential Economic Impact:** Such mishaps can adversely affect local economies, which are often reliant on these development projects for growth.

4. **Long-Term Consequences:** These accidents can have lasting impacts on local ecosystems and communities, affecting livelihoods and natural resources.

What initiatives have been taken for the restoration of the Himalayan Ecosystem?

National Mission on Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem- It was launched in 2010 and covers 11 states (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, all northeast states and West Bengal) and 2 UTs (J&K and Ladakh). It is one of the eight missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).
SECURE Himalaya Project- It is a part of "Global Partnership on Wildlife Conservation and Crime Prevention for Sustainable Development" (Global Wildlife Program) funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It promotes sustainable management of alpine pastures and forests in the high range Himalayan ecosystems.
Mishra Committee Report 1976- The committee recommended placing restrictions on heavy construction work, blasting and felling of trees in the Himalayan region.
For detailed information on **Ecological health of Himalayas,** read here

What should be done?

1. **Strict Geological and Environmental Scrutiny:** Projects in sensitive regions like the Himalayas should undergo rigorous environmental impact assessments. This can prevent incidents like the Joshimath structural damage.
2. **Risk Assessment:** Before approval, all major projects should have a detailed risk analysis, including the resilience of structures. The Uttarakhand tunnel incident exemplifies the need for such assessments.
3. **Balancing Development and Safety:** While infrastructure development is essential, it should not compromise safety standards. The frequent mishaps in recent times, like the Chungthang Dam damage, underline this need.
4. **Addressing Climate Change Impacts:** Recognizing and planning for the effects of climate change, which can lead to events like flash floods, should be a priority in project planning.