

9 PM Current Affairs Monthly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



November
2023

Features :

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

Index

GS Paper 1	5
Subject: Geography	5
Subject: History	5
Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times	5
Materialist School of Indian Philosophy	5
Topic: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues	6
On Tamil indentured labour in Sri Lanka	6
Subject: Indian Society	7
Topic: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India	7
On Caste-based Inequalities in India – Towards a more equal India	7
On Socio-Economic Inequality – Cumulatively ravaging effects of inequality	8
Evolution of Hindi language	9
Topic: Population and associated issues	10
On Increasing global elderly population – The world is getting older. Can India cope?	10
Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies	12
Unsustainable Urban infrastructure development – Planning for megapolises	12
GS Paper 2	13
Subject: Indian Polity	13
Topic: Indian Constitution - Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.	13
Domicile-based Private Sector Reservation	13
Issues with Delimitation	14
Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure	16
On 16 th Finance Commission - Finance Testing the South's Patience	16
Special Category Status (SCS)- Why is Bihar demanding the Special Category Status?	17
Impact of degrading center-state relations	18
Topic: The role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders	19
On Challenges of NGO Regulation	19
Topic: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States	20
Criminal Justice System	20
Topic: Parliament and State legislatures	22
On the Speaker – Give up impropriety, demonstrate impartiality	22
On cash for query case – Ethics, parliamentary conduct and the Indian MP	23
Topic: Evolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges	24
Issues faced by urban local bodies – Staff shortage, financial dependency plague local governance	24
Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies	25
On the challenges faced by the Information Commission - Rescue RTI	25
Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act	26
Challenges of enforcing the Model Code of Conduct – A better model	26
On electoral bonds – On electoral bonds, Supreme Court must uphold Right to Information	27

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary _____	28
On AIJS – A non-starter _____	28
On Restructuring the Supreme Court – It’s time to revamp the structure of the Supreme Court _____	29
On Transfer of Judges – Collegium’s opacity is injurious to the institution’s health _____	30
Subject: Governance _____	31
Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation _____	31
The issues with Fact Check Unit _____	31
On OTT Regulation _____	32
Alcohol Policies in India _____	33
On Abolition of Death Penalty _____	34
Topic: E-governance – applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential _____	35
DPI could help unlock a massive opportunity in the purple sector _____	35
What is e-FIR? _____	36
Subject: Social Justice _____	37
Topic: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections _____	37
Domestic Violence in India _____	37
Topic: Issues relating to Education _____	39
Importance of Sex education- Social justice, sexual education, the need of our times _____	39
On School Mergers – Strengthening schools _____	40
On challenges of Higher Education Institutes – The IITs are overcommitted, in crisis _____	41
Vocational education should be an integral aspect of schooling _____	42
Topic: Issues relating to poverty and hunger _____	43
PMGKAY extension _____	43
On the Poshan Tracker – Mother, child and the Poshan Tracker _____	44
Topic: Issues relating to Health _____	45
On Generic medicines – Branded, generic and the missing ingredient of quality _____	45
TB in India: A fight to the end _____	46
Impact of social media on mental health _____	48
Threats of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) _____	48
Subject: International Relations _____	50
Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests _____	50
The Qatar death row and India’s options _____	50
Impact of US-China Summit on India _____	51
Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests _____	51
On the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework- IPEF agreement: India has played its cards quite well _____	51
On India-West Asia Relations _____	53
On the India-UK Trade Deal – Prospects & challenges _____	54
Supreme Court’s MFN verdict _____	55
On India’s stance in the UN on the Israel-Palestine Conflict _____	56
Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora _____	57
On the functioning of the IMF – Act with urgency to reform _____	57
On the shortcomings of UN – Is the United Nations toothless in ending wars? _____	58
Topic: India and its neighborhood - relations. _____	59

Shift in Maldives' foreign policy- With Mohamed Muizzu's India-out policy, Turkey's inroads into Maldives _____	59
On India-Bhutan Relations – Closer together _____	60
GS Paper 3 _____	62
Subject: Indian Economy _____	62
Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment _____	62
On demands for reservation – Maratha reservation: Why everyone wants a 'sarkari naukri' _____	62
On Currency in Circulation – Cash questions _____	63
On India's inclusion in Global Bond Index – Caution: The watch word for bond index inclusion _____	64
On Currency Substitution – Can dollarisation save an economy? _____	65
Migrant Workers in India - The hypocrisy of our concern for workers trapped in Uttarkashi tunnel _____	66
Political parties promising “freebies” - What elite critics of freebies don't understand _____	67
Impact of Soft Power on Indian Economy _____	69
Issues with the 70 Hours Work Week _____	70
On NITI Aayog's Vision @2047 - India in 2047 _____	71
India Finance Report on NBFCs _____	72
SC Ruling on Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of India _____	73
On Tax demands from the Gaming industry – On gaming industry rules _____	74
On Rural Economic Distress – RBI governor's growth optimism masks rural distress _____	76
Topic: Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth _____	76
Impacts of changes to IT hardware import policy _____	76
On India's mining sector _____	77
India's pharmaceutical industry _____	79
Topic: Government Budgeting _____	81
On the issues with Old Pension Scheme – Pension bloat _____	81
Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it. _____	81
India's economic growth and inequality- A \$5 trillion economy, but for whom? _____	81
On Inequality – The world must fight inequality to safeguard ideals of democracy _____	82
Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. _____	83
From fossil fuels to cleaner energy - Clean energy share in India and its States' electricity mix _____	83
Benefits of Solar energy mini grids _____	84
Train accidents in India – Track Changes _____	85
On increasing Indian Railways' revenue – Easing the transport of cargo by Railways _____	87
On merger of railway budget and union budget – The Indian Railways' revenue problem _____	88
Subject: Agriculture _____	89
Topic: E-Technology in the aid of farmers _____	89
Significance of factors of Technology for agriculture- Producing more from less _____	89
Topic: Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; Issues of food security. _____	91
Issues with NFSA _____	91
Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management _____	92
Food safety _____	92
India's increasing edible oil imports _____	93

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

Topic: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country _____	94
Opium Cultivation in India _____	94
Subject: Science & Technology _____	95
Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life _____	95
Use of AI in Defence _____	95
Deepfake Regulation _____	96
Basics of electricity transmission _____	97
On regulating AI – World leaders have a long road ahead _____	98
On international AI Regulation – AI Summit: Why new global pact on tackling Artificial Intelligence risks is a big deal _____	99
Subject: Environment _____	101
Topic: Environment – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation _____	101
Transition to electric trucks - Fleet electrification to tackle urban pollution _____	101
Climate-smart agriculture (CSA)- Need for climate-smart agriculture in India _____	102
On solving the Air Pollution problem – Who is in charge of my ‘air’? _____	104
Forest Conservation Amendment Act 2023 _____	107
On noise pollution due to firecrackers – More light, less sound _____	109
Air Pollution in Indian cities _____	110
On Air Quality Standard of India – Indians are choking on pollution. How can it be stopped? _____	111
On the challenges of mobilising Climate Finance – On Stocktaking climate finance _____	112
On the importance of Biosphere Reserves – Biosphere reserves are evolving as pockets of hope _____	113
Subject: Internal Security _____	115
Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism, Terrorism _____	115
Long-term effects of terror attack- _____	115
On the Issues with UAPA – J&K High Court underlines that criticism of a government can't be called a terrorist act _____	115
Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas _____	116
Counter terrorism policies of India and Israel _____	116
On Maritime Security Challenges – The challenge of maritime security in the Global South _____	117
Topic: Money Laundering and its prevention _____	119
On Tax Havens – Cyprus Confidential: Shining a light on tax evasion _____	119
Topic: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security. _____	120
ICMR data breach _____	120
On the issues of government's fact-checking unit – Retrograde step _____	121
Subject: Disaster Management _____	122
Topic: Disaster and disaster management _____	122
Char Dham Tunnel Collapse _____	122
Fragile Himalayan ecosystem and development _____	123
On the rising risks of urban flooding – The expansion of settlements into flood-prone areas _____	124

GS Paper 1

Subject: Geography

Subject: History

Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times

Materialist School of Indian Philosophy

News: The article discusses the materialist school of Indian Philosophy and its principal teachings.

The Indian philosophical tradition encompasses a wide range of beliefs, theories, and perspectives on existence, knowledge, ethics, and spirituality. Rooted in ancient texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and various philosophical treatises, it includes several major schools of thought like Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta, and more. Each of these offers distinct insights into the nature of reality and the human condition through rigorous inquiry, debate, and exploration of fundamental questions about life and the universe. In this tradition, all schools of philosophy had to provide **proofs, or *pramānas***, for their conceptual framework.

What are the different *pramanas* accepted in Indian Philosophy?

Pramana	Definition
Pratyaksha	Direct perception or knowledge gained through sensory perception, i.e., seeing, hearing, etc.
Anumana	Inference, or knowledge obtained through logical reasoning based on observations or evidence.
Upamana	Analogy, where knowledge is gained by comparing or likening something to a familiar object.
Shabda	Testimony, or knowledge derived from trustworthy sources such as scriptures or experts.
Arthapatti	Postulation or presumption, used to explain a fact when no other pramana can explain it.
Anupalabdhi	Non-apprehension, or knowledge obtained from the absence or non-existence of something.

What is the Materialist School of Indian Philosophy?

The Materialist School upheld the ***pratyaksa pramāna*** (perception, or more literally that which is within sight) as the foundation of knowledge.

Its tenets included:

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

1. **Perception as Foundation of All Knowledge:** The implication of this principle is the denial of innate ideas (ideas or consciousness existing independent of the material world).
2. **Pleasure-seeking:** The dictum of 'eat, drink and be merry' describes the pleasure-seeking ways of materialists, best encapsulated by the Sanskrit dictum "yāvat jīvēt sukham jīvēt" or "whilst living, live well".
3. **Focus on Individual and not Collective Ethics:** Unsound ethics will have consequences on the material world. So the question of ethics is left for each person to answer for themselves.
4. **Lack of a Divine Agency:** No divine agency exists to safeguard human society from terrors, either natural or human. They do not believe in God, punishment and rewards.
5. **Material Notion of Hell:** The experience of hell is defined as death by the enemy's weapon, diseases, starvation and other such pains.
6. **Material Notion of Heaven:** The Lokāyatas' conception of heaven reflects the male preoccupation with the female of the human species.
7. **Notion of Heaven and Hell:** The notions of heaven and hell were not a supernatural category but real aspects of the material world. For them, hell was nothing less than all the suffering and pain surrounding us, for example war, disease, hunger, etc. The luxuries, on the other hand, were considered as heaven. Given the patriarchal age, these luxuries often reflected the male preoccupation with the female of the human species.
8. **Discarded Ritualism:** The Lokāyatas found the ritualism in the concluding periods of the Vedic era exploitative and useless.
9. **Against Orthodoxy and Social Ills:** Caste, rank in society or orthodoxy of views were out of the question in their society. They entertained freedom in thought, in religious and social matters.

Topic: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues

On Tamil indentured labour in Sri Lanka

News: This article discusses the history of indentured labour under British rule. It also highlights the challenges faced by them, especially that faced by the Tamil indentured labour in Sri Lanka.

2023 marks the 200th year of the arrival of Tamil indentured labour in Sri Lanka (in November 1823).

How did the concept of indentured labour begin?

A wave of liberal humanism swept through Europe in the 18th century. As a result, the British banned slavery in their colonies, only to replace it with another kind of bondage, termed "indentured labour". Labour crisis following the abolition of slavery in British colonies led to a soaring demand for workers from India to work on plantations and infrastructure projects in the Caribbean, Fiji, Réunion, Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

What were the challenges faced by indentured labour?

1. **Misleading promises:** They were misled about the work they would undertake, the wages they would receive, the quarters where they would live, and even the countries they were sailing to.
2. **Debt burden:** Most laborers reached their destination deep in debt, as they had to pay for their extremely high fare.

3. **Lack of access to basic facilities:** They were to reside in squalor, with no access to sanitation, running water, medical facilities or schools for their children.

What led to an increase in the requirement of indentured labour in Sri Lanka?

In the 1870s, the rapid spread of a fungal disease led to a blight that caused the disappearance of coffee from Sri Lankan plantations, paving the way for **tea**, whose estates increased manifold. While coffee requires only 3 workers for every 10 hectares of cultivation, tea requires at least 8, and as such, demands more field labour. This led to an **increase in the requirement of workers**. Along with the shortfall caused by the **abolition of slavery**, and led to a massive, organized transfer of Indian Tamils to Sri Lanka.

What were the challenges faced by Tamils in Sri Lanka?

Along with the usual challenges of indentured labour, Tamils faced the following as well:

1. Colonial practices and policies deemed them “foreigners”, thus rendering them **stateless** (under Sri Lanka’s Citizenship Act of 1948) and **prevented assimilation**.
2. **Women tea-pluckers** worked all day in the plantations **without any toilet facilities**.
3. System of sub-contractors called **kanganies**, labour recruiters and overseers played a dominant role in the **exploitation** of Indian labourers on plantations. The vague contracts led to greater abuse.
4. The Plantation Tamils **could not buy land and build houses**, for colonial laws restricted landholding to those “domiciled” in Ceylon only.

Subject: Indian Society

Topic: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India

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%).

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](#).

Evolution of Hindi language

News: The article discusses the evolution of Hindi, highlighting its openness to diverse influences and its role as a voice against oppression and injustice. It's in the light of recent controversies and efforts to purify it by removing Persian and Arabic elements.

What is the nature of language according to Bhartrihari?

Bhartrihari, was a famous philosopher. He pointed out following features of a language:

1. Language to be dynamic and ever-changing.
2. "Dhwani" or sound arbitrarily assigns meanings to words, leading to their fluidity. Words don't have fixed meanings. They change and evolve over time.
3. Despite similarities, each word is unique, with no exact synonyms existing.

In short, Bhartrihari viewed language as a living entity, constantly redefined by those who use it, with the capacity to evolve.

About Hindi language:

Hindi's name comes from the Persian word 'Hind' linked to the Indus River area.

Article 343(1) of the Indian Constitution declares Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union. This was established on September 14, 1949, a day now celebrated as Hindi Day, and the language is also recognized by the United Nations.

Its influence stretches beyond India's borders, finding official and regional recognition in countries like Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, Mauritius, and Trinidad & Tobago.

The Central Hindi Directorate ensures the language's growth and regulation, reflecting the depth of India's linguistic and cultural landscape

For information about various constitutional provision related to language in India [read here](#)

How did the Hindi language evolve in India?

- 1. The Impact of Historical Forces:** Hindi's evolution was significantly shaped by colonial encounters and the Indian national awakening. Intellectuals, from the Hindi region, were inspired by reform movements in Bengal to modernize the language.
- 2. Fusion with Other Dialects and Languages:** Khari Boli Hindi, the basis of modern Hindi, drew from dialects like Braj Bhasha, Awadhi, and Bhojpuri. It also integrated words from Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, reflecting its adaptive nature.
- 3. The Hindi-Urdu Division:** A political campaign to replace Urdu with Hindi in Bihar and the United Provinces sparked a divide, falsely presenting Hindi and Urdu as separate languages for Hindus and Muslims, respectively. This led to movements to 'Sanskritize' Hindi.
- 4. Enduring Eclecticism:** Despite attempts to standardize and 'purify' Hindi, it retained its eclectic character. Influential literary figures from other linguistic backgrounds, including Urdu and Punjabi, continued to enrich Hindi literature.

What is Hindi's role in social protest?

- 1. Foundation in Protest:** Hindi emerged from a background of resistance and has maintained that role. It became a means to challenge colonial power and advocate for national awakening.
- 2. Literature as Dissent:** Writers like Premchand, who initially wrote in Urdu, and Rahi Masoom Raza, author of "Aadha Gaon," have used Hindi to express themes of social justice and unity, thus participating in the larger narrative of protest through their works.
- 3. Reflecting Plurality and Protest:** Hindi has allowed writers from many different backgrounds to use their writing to challenge social injustice. Like Krishna Sobti from Punjab.
- 4. Hindi's Emancipatory Role:** Throughout its evolution, Hindi has maintained its core purpose of challenging injustice and promoting the welfare of various groups.

Topic: Population and associated issues

On Increasing global elderly population – The world is getting older. Can India cope?

News: This article discusses the trends in human population growth, especially ageing, as reported by the UNFPA. It also highlights the challenges associated with a rapid pace of ageing and low fertility levels.

What are the findings of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)?

Findings of the UNFPA include:

- 1. Ageing of Population:** Globally, ~14% of the total population comprises those aged 60 years and above in 2022. By 2050, this share is expected to **rise to 22%**.
- 2. Early Onset of Low Fertility Rates in developing countries:** A significant drop in fertility levels is being seen very early in their economic development journey.
- 3. Shrinking Population in Asia and Europe:** By 2100, Asia and Europe's population will shrink by the highest percentage.
For instance, China's population will decline from 1.4 billion to 732 million in 2100.

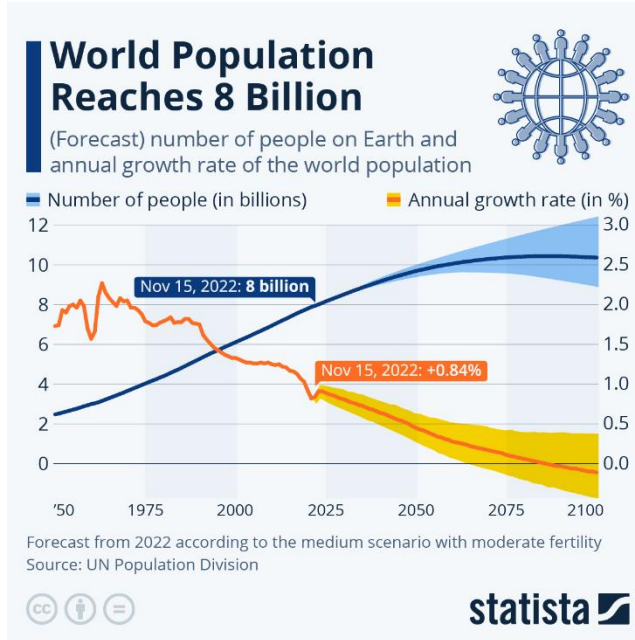


Figure 1. Global Population Trends. Source: Statista

groups will have equal populations.

What is the status of India's Fertility Rates?

According to the **National Family Health Survey 2022**, except for Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (amongst the larger states), fertility rates elsewhere have **dropped below the replacement level of 2.1**. In **urban India**, the **fertility rate is at 1.6**. This is below replacement level. When low fertility is combined with **increased longevity**, it will increase the elderly population at a rapid pace. For a detailed breakdown of **India's Fertility Rates**, [read here](#).

What are the implications of a rapid ageing of population?

1. **Unsustainable economic burden:** Developed countries with better economies could sustain their elderly people when their populations began to age rapidly. This is not the case with developing countries like India. It will also increase the healthcare burden of taking care of elderly.
2. **Slowing of economic growth:** Ageing populations mean **fewer workers, fewer taxpayers** and hence, a **reduction in a country's ability to generate wealth**. For instance, China is expected to replace USA by 2035 to become the largest GDP. However, the rapid decline in China's population and liberal immigration policy of USA will help USA in reclaiming the top position soon.
3. **Impact on geopolitical power:** Lancet research points out that by the end of this century, the world will be **multipolar**, with **India, Nigeria, China and USA** as the dominant powers, **due to a larger working age population**.

What can countries do to prevent rapid ageing?

1. Policy decisions such as **immigration** and **strong reproductive and sexual rights for women** will be key to reversing the ageing trend.
2. Following policy decisions can persuade working women to have more children:
 - 2.1. Good healthcare
 - 2.2. Work-life balance
 - 2.3. Childcare and maternity leave
 - 2.4. Educating male partners about sharing burden in household tasks.

What is the ageing scenario in India?

According to UNFPA's **India Aging Report, 2023**:

1. **Rapid Ageing of Population:** In 2022, the 10.5% of India's population was aged 60 years and above. By **2050**, this share will double to **20.8%**.
2. **Cohort of the aged surpassing the cohort of children:** The number of elderly people will be larger than the number of children (those below 15 years) by 2046.
3. The report also points out that this unprecedented rise in the ageing population will have significant **implications for health, economy and society** in India.

What is the "greying" phenomenon?

Greying is a cumulative result of **increasing longevity, declining fertility** and the **progression of larger groups of population to older ages**. In the 1970s, there were 3 times as many 15 to 24-year-olds than older people. By **2050**, these age

Terminology used:

Total Fertility Rate: It refers to the total number of children born or likely to be born to a woman in her lifetime. TFR of about 2.1 is called **Replacement-level fertility**. TFR less than 2.1 indicates that a generation is not producing enough children to replace itself, eventually leading to an outright reduction in population.

Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies

Unsustainable Urban infrastructure development – Planning for megapolises

News: The article discusses the extensive construction and infrastructure development in Indian cities like Delhi and Mumbai, which includes new transport links and real estate. However, this rapid growth brings challenges like traffic and pollution.

What is the National Urban Policy Framework?

The National Urban Policy Framework (NUPF) is India's plan for future city development. It follows two main aspects. **First**, it has **ten basic principles**, called sutras. **Second**, these principles are used in ten areas of city life and management. Each area is examined for current issues, goals are set, and actions are recommended.

Here are the **10 guiding principles** simplified:

1. Cities are made up of people's skills and talents.
2. Cities need their own unique identity.
3. City plans should change and grow, not be fixed.
4. Cities should be built to use space well.
5. There should be public areas for people to meet.
6. Cities need many types of transport systems.
7. Cities should not harm the environment.
8. Cities need to make and manage their own money.
9. One clear leader should guide a city.
10. Cities should help the area around them grow too.

How is Mumbai's infrastructure evolving?

1. **Metro Expansion:** New metro lines are being constructed to improve connectivity in the suburbs, which is a significant leap in public transit for the city.
2. **Road Infrastructure:** A coastal road project is in progress, expected to manage four times the traffic compared to the current sea link.
3. **Trans-Harbour Link:** A 22-kilometer trans-harbor link nearing completion promises to enhance the connection between Mumbai and the mainland, potentially transforming traffic flow and commerce.
4. **New Airport:** Construction of a new airport is underway, anticipating the future growth of Mumbai's population and its increasing air travel demands.
5. **Real Estate Boom:** Real estate development is booming, with construction areas expanding, indicating a major urban transformation.

What are the potential challenges posed by infrastructure development in the city?

1. **Traffic Congestion:** Despite new transport links, the infrastructure struggles to keep pace with the growing needs. As observed in Delhi and Bengaluru, better roads often lead to more traffic, not less.
2. **Pollution:** The construction activities, especially in Mumbai, are contributing to high levels of air pollution. This could worsen as development continues.

3. **Resource Strain:** The increase in construction approvals could lead to a surge in population growth. This would put additional pressure on the water supply and waste management systems.
4. **Land Scarcity:** Although improved connections can mitigate land scarcity by integrating neighboring regions, they can also lead to uncontrolled urban sprawl, as seen with the expansion of Delhi through Gurgaon and Noida.
5. **Socio-economic Challenges:** The redevelopment of areas like Dharavi slum leads to displacement and socio-economic issues that need to be carefully managed.
6. **Urban Sprawl:** As transport links improve, cities are likely to spread out further, resembling vast urban sprawl.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

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

Domicile-based Private Sector Reservation

News: The article discusses the reasoning provided by the Punjab and Haryana High Court in quashing domicile-based private sector reservation in Haryana.

Recently, the Punjab and Haryana High Court quashed the Haryana State government legislation providing 75% reservation to State domiciles in the private sector in jobs with a monthly salary of less than ₹30,000.

What are the arguments against domicile-based private sector reservation provided by the Court?

1. **Legislative Overreach:** The court stated that it was beyond the purview of the State to legislate on the issue and restrict private employers from recruiting from the open market.
2. **Violates Right to Equality:** It also held that the Act was violative of equality guaranteed under Article 14. By allotting 75% reservation for “locals”, the Act goes against the rights of citizens of the rest of the country.
3. **Violates Right to Freedom:** It said the Act violates freedom guaranteed under Article 19 by imposing unreasonable restrictions on workers’ right to move freely throughout the territory of India.
4. **Slippery Slope:** The Court held that such acts could lead to other States coming up with similar enactments. This would lead to putting up of protectionist walls throughout India. Other States like Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand have also enacted similar legislation.
5. **Lead to Inspector Raj:** The court termed the requirements on private employers stipulated in the Act as similar to those under “Inspector Raj” (over regulation/ supervision by the Government).

What are the issues with domicile-based private sector reservation?

1. **Negatively affect the Economy:** Workers move to other States seeking job opportunities that are relevant to their skills and abilities. The shortage of qualified workers in a state may impact businesses and thus the economy of the entire country.
2. **Discourage Investment:** Compulsions to employ decreases the competitiveness of companies. Apart from that, such measures directly discourage investment potential in a state by creating compliance burden.

3. **Threat to Unity:** This step would create friction among locals and non-locals in the implementing states. This will shake the fundamentals of India's Unity in Diversity in the long run.

4. **Hamper Inclusive Growth:** If States impose restrictions that prevent job seekers from other States from accessing opportunities, citizens of poorer States will have to make a living within their own regions. This will lead to rising inequalities.

What is the reasoning behind Haryana government's decision of providing domicile-based private sector reservation?

1. **Demand by the Locals:** There is resentment among locals in better-off States over their jobs being taken up by "migrant" workers. This has led to their governments coming up with ill-thought-out protectionist measures.
2. **Private Sector's Preference for Migrant Labour:** Private employers often exploit the migrant labour market as such workers tend to work long hours for low wages with little or no social protection and benefits. The private sector prefers them over local workers with better bargaining power.
3. **Addressing Unemployment and Economic Disparities:** Introducing reservation might be an attempt to address high unemployment rates among certain communities or regions. Especially in Haryana which has one of the highest rates of unemployment (9%) as per PLFS 2021-22.

What should be done?

Uphold Uniform Labour Rights: States should ensure that migrant workers enjoy basic labour rights, thereby creating a level playing field for all workers (local as well as migrants) and eliminating preference for migrant labour. This will also protect the migrant labours from exploitation.

Apart from this, the State gov't's focus should be on: **Ease of Doing Business Reforms** to attract industries, **Skill Development Programs, Infrastructure Development, Education Reforms and Rural Development.**

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?

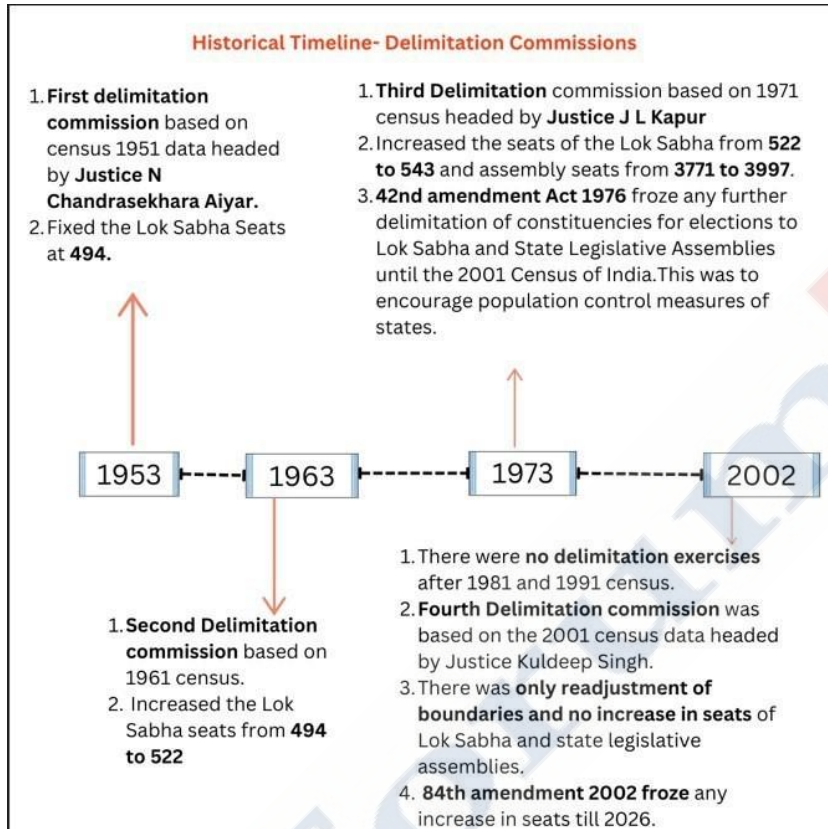
Delimitation is the act or process of fixing limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country to reflect the changes in population. In India the task of delimitation exercise is assigned to a high-power body. Such a body is known as Delimitation Commission or a Boundary Commission.

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

On 16th Finance Commission - Finance Testing the South's Patience

News: The article talks about India's Finance Commission deciding tax sharing between the Centre and states. It discusses the debate over richer states subsidizing poorer ones, the impact of political freebies on the economy, and whether to create a fiscal council to oversee government spending. The 16th Finance Commission may present challenges to wealthy and southern states that have stabilized their populations.

For more detail on 16th Finance Commission [read here](#)

What is the role of the Finance Commission?

1. **Determining Tax Distribution:** The Finance Commission's main role is to decide how to share the central tax revenue between the central government and the states in India. Currently, states get 41% of the taxes collected by the Centre.
2. **Balancing Vertical and Horizontal Sharing:** The Commission must balance vertical sharing (how much money states get from the Centre) and horizontal sharing (how the money is split among states).
3. **Advising on Fiscal Challenges:** Beyond tax distribution, the Finance Commission is expected to provide guidance on broader fiscal issues. This includes looking into the trend of political freebies and considering the need for a fiscal council to oversee the government's budget and spending.

For more detail on the roles of finance commission [read here](#)

What federal issues will arise after the 2026 delimitation?

1. **Reduced political influence for southern states:** After the 2026 delimitation, southern states may have fewer seats in Parliament. Their slower population growth compared to northern states could lead to a decrease in their political representation.
2. **Financial implications of delimitation:** With potential reduced influence in Parliament, southern states may find it harder to argue against continued financial support to poorer, faster-growing states. This could exacerbate the north-south economic divide.
3. **Cross-Subsidization Debate:** The ongoing requirement for richer states to subsidize poorer ones may become more contentious. Southern states, which are economically better off, might resist the pressure to support the poorer northern states if their political clout diminishes post-delimitation.

For more detail on delimitation [read here](#)

What should be done?

1. **Addressing Tax Sharing Concerns:** The Finance Commission should review the current tax sharing formula, considering states' demands for a greater share due to their front-line role in service delivery, against the Centre's need to fund its own commitments.
2. **Tackling the Freebie Culture:** To prevent fiscal strain from political promises of freebies, the Commission could recommend setting clear guidelines or limits, promoting sustainable financial practices over short-term gains.
3. **Evaluating the Need for a Fiscal Council:** The Commission should reconsider the establishment of a fiscal council as suggested by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) committee, to ensure responsible fiscal management and to provide informed assessments of the Centre's fiscal performance.
4. **Building Consensus:** Address the emerging economic divide by fostering dialogue between southern states worried about losing parliamentary seats and financial autonomy, and northern states in need of support.

Special Category Status (SCS)- Why is Bihar demanding the Special Category Status?

News: The article discusses Bihar's request for Special Category Status to help with its development challenges, such as poverty and lack of resources. This status would bring more financial aid and benefits. Other states also want this status, but it's hard to get due to government policies.

What is Special Category Status (SCS)?

SCS is a classification for states in India that face specific challenges, like difficult terrain or socio-economic issues. It was introduced in 1969, based on the fifth Finance Commission's recommendations.

Five Factors for SCS: (i) hilly and difficult terrain (ii) low population density and/or sizeable share of tribal population (iii) strategic location along international borders (iv) economic and infrastructural backwardness and (v) non-viable nature of state finances

What are the benefits of SCS?

1. **Financial Benefits:** Previously, SCS states received about 30% of central assistance based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula. However, post the 14th and 15th Finance Commission (FC) recommendations and the Planning Commission's abolition, assistance changed to a shared pool of funds, increasing from 32% to 41% for all states.
2. **Favorable Funding Ratios:** In SCS states, the Centre-State funding ratio for centrally sponsored schemes is 90:10, more beneficial than the typical 60:40 or 80:20 for the general category.
3. **Additional Incentives:** SCS states enjoy concessions in customs, excise duties, income tax, and corporate tax rates to encourage investments and industry setup.

For more information on SCS, [read here](#)

Why does Bihar want SCS?

1. **Economic Backwardness:** About one-third of Bihar's population lives in poverty. The state has a low per-capita GDP of around ₹54,000, marking it as one of India's poorest states.
2. **Impact of Bifurcation:** Bihar's bifurcation led to industrial decline, with many industries moving to Jharkhand, resulting in fewer employment opportunities.
3. **Natural Challenges:** The state faces regular floods in the north and droughts in the south, impacting agriculture and livelihoods.
4. **Need for Welfare Funding:** Bihar's Chief Minister highlighted the need for SCS to secure approximately ₹2.5 lakh crore for various welfare measures over five years.

5. **Lack of Resources:** Bihar argues its lack of natural resources and continuous water supply for irrigation contributes to its underdevelopment.
Note: States like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha also want SCS. Andhra Pradesh cites revenue loss after bifurcation, and Odisha points to natural disasters and a large tribal population (nearly 22%). However, the Central government, referring to the 14th FC report, has consistently rejected their requests, stating that no state should receive this status.

What should be done?

1. **Reassessing Criteria for SCS:** Given Bihar's situation, there's a need to revisit the criteria for SCS, especially considering Bihar meets most except for the hilly terrain and geographically difficult areas.
2. **Alternative Funding Models:** Following the Raghuram Rajan Committee's suggestion, exploring new funding models based on a multi-dimensional index.
3. **Addressing Bihar's Specific Needs:** Bihar urgently needs significant support for poverty alleviation, focused aid for disaster management and agriculture, and policies that attract new industries and create job opportunities.

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:

1. **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**.
For 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.
2. **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/Stater.
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.

3. **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.

Topic: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States

Criminal Justice System

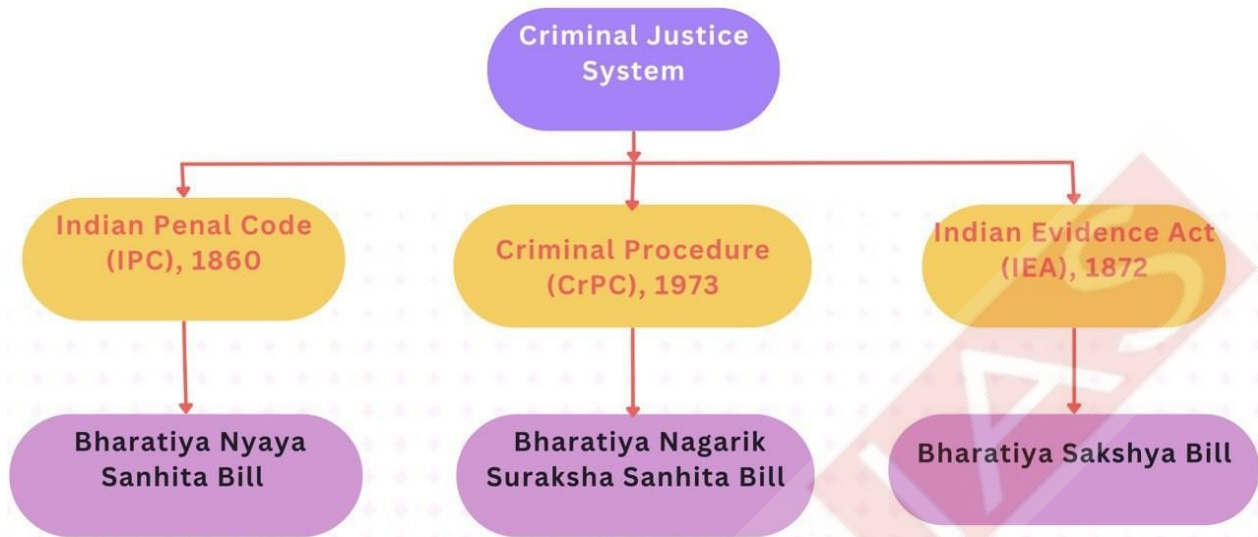
News: The article discusses three new Indian Bills that aim to modernize the country's criminal justice system by replacing existing laws. These Bills focus on updating legal provisions and ensuring they align with modern practices and norms.

What is the core criminal justice system in India?

The core criminal justice system in India is currently based on three main laws: the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act (IEA), 1872. These laws form the foundation of how crimes are defined, prosecuted, and tried in India.

To modernize this system, the government has introduced three new Bills. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill is set to replace the IPC; the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill will take the place of the CrPC; and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill is aimed at replacing the IEA.

Indian criminal justice system replacement



What is the need of modernizing the criminal justice system in India?

1. **Modernizing Jurisprudence:** The replacement of India's criminal justice system signifies an update to modern legal standards. For example, the Bills introduce community service as a punishment, reflecting a shift towards a more reformative approach.
2. **Aligning with Supreme Court Rulings:** The new legislation aligns with key Supreme Court decisions, such as the decriminalization of adultery and same-sex relations, ensuring the legal system is consistent with contemporary judicial interpretations.
3. **Addressing Overlaps with Special Laws:** The replacement helps eliminate inconsistencies and duplications with specific laws. An example is the removal of IPC provisions on weights and measures, avoiding overlap with the Legal Metrology Act, 2009.
4. **Updating Definitions and Illustrations:** The Bills update terms like 'unsound mind' to 'mental illness', aligning with modern medical understanding as per the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. However, they still retain some outdated illustrations, indicating a need for further modernization.
5. **Ensuring Fairness and Efficiency:** Parliament aims to create a criminal justice system that is fair, just, and efficient, catering to the needs of a modern society.

What are the challenges in replacing the criminal justice system in India?

1. **Balancing Civil and Criminal Laws:** The challenge is to appropriately differentiate and integrate civil law aspects within the criminal justice system. Criminal law typically addresses offenses against society or the state, while civil law focuses on individual losses. But CrPC also covers post-divorce maintenance for spouses and children.
2. **Reformative vs Punitive Approach:** The Bills introduce community service as punishment but retain trials for non-compoundable minor offences (such as keeping an unauthorized lottery office, which carries a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment), indicating a struggle to balance reformative and punitive elements.
3. **Consistency in Sentencing:** Providing consistent sentencing, especially when the range is wide (like the up to 10-year imprisonment for deceiving a woman into cohabitation), is a complex issue.

4. **Updating Age and Gender Laws:** The Bills need to address modern norms regarding age thresholds for criminal responsibility and update gender-related offences, evidenced by the non-inclusion of marital rape as an offence.

Topic: Parliament and State legislatures

On the Speaker – Give up impropriety, demonstrate impartiality

News: This article discusses the various issues in the functioning of the Speaker lately, which have signaled a decline in the independence of the office. It also highlights reforms to ensure its impartial functioning.

Article 93 of the Constitution provides for the election of both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker to the Lok Sabha. (**Article 178 for Speaker in state legislative assemblies**).

What are the functions of the Speaker in India?

1. **Interpretation:** He/She is the **final interpreter** of the provisions of the **Constitution of India**, the **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Lok Sabha** within the House.
2. **Constitution of Committees:** The **Committees of the House are constituted by the speaker** and function under the speaker's overall direction.
3. **Custodian of the rights and privileges** of the House, its committees and its members.
4. **Money Bill:** He/She **decides whether a bill is a Money Bill or not** and his/her decision on this question is final.
5. **Disqualifying Members:** It is the speaker who **decides the questions of disqualification of a member** of the Lok Sabha, arising on the ground of defection under the provisions of the **Tenth Schedule**.

What are the issues with the functioning of the Speaker?

1. **Regarding suspension of members for misconduct:** It is noticed that the Speakers misuse these provisions usually against the Opposition members.
For instance, no swift action was taken against a member of the ruling party for passing communal slurs in Parliament recently.
2. **Regarding referring of bills to committees:** Significant bills that require detailed scrutiny are not referred to committees.
As against more than **60%** of Bills referred to committees in the Lok Sabha during 2004-14, less than **25%** have been referred during 2014-2023.
3. **Regarding certifying bills as Money Bills:** There have also been challenges in the Court in recent years against certification of certain Bills as a Money Bill by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha.
For instance, the Aadhar Bill.
4. **Regarding disqualification:** Past instances have shown the Speakers favouring the ruling dispensation. This can derail the stability of elected governments.

What should be the way forward?

The Supreme Court in **Keisham Meghachandra Singh vs The Honble Speaker Manipur (2020)**, recommended that Parliament amend the Constitution to vest the powers of the Speaker regarding disqualification in an independent tribunal to be headed by judges.

In **Britain**, the Speaker, once elected, resigns from his/her political party, thus reflecting impartiality while presiding over the House. Adopting this practice will build confidence in the office of the Speaker.

It is also important that Speakers avoid actions that are inappropriate and **demonstrate 'impartiality'**, in consonance with sound democratic practices.

On cash for query case – Ethics, parliamentary conduct and the Indian MP

News: This article discusses the recent allegation of taking money for putting up questions in Parliament by a Lok Sabha MP. It also highlights the issues with the procedure followed in this case.

Recently, a complaint was lodged with the Lok Sabha Speaker alleging that an MP had received money from a businessman for putting questions up in Parliament with a view to promoting the person's business interests. The Speaker in turn referred the complaint to the **Ethics Committee** for examination. The committee's proceedings have resulted in much public debate.

A detailed article on **Questions in Parliament** can be [read here](#).

What is the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee?

Read in detail about the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee [here](#)

What is the procedure followed in the case of an MP taking money for putting up questions in Parliament?

If an MP takes money for putting questions up in Parliament, they will be **guilty of breach of privilege and contempt of the House**.

Such complaints are usually referred to the **Committee of Privileges** for investigation. The committee **submits its findings in a report** along with the **recommendation for action** against the MP.

If a case involving illegal gratification for conducting parliamentary work is proven, the **MP may even be expelled** from the House.

What are the various issues in this case?

1. **Referring to the Ethics Committee instead of the Privileges Committee:** Complaints of MPs accepting money for parliamentary work are usually referred to the privileges committee or special committees appointed by the House for that purpose.
2. **Lack of rules and regulations regarding submission of questions:** The Lok Sabha has not framed any rules to regulate the online submission of questions.
3. **Freedom of speech under Parliamentary Privileges: Article 105** of the Constitution gives the freedom to say "anything" in the House. This right can be extended to using any source for information for putting questions up. Therefore, an investigation into the sources of information of an MP may not have legal sanction.
4. **Issues with the Ethics Committee's functioning:** The term 'unethical conduct' has not been defined anywhere. It is left entirely to the committee to examine a particular act of conduct and decide whether it is unethical or not.

How does a parliamentary probe differ from a judicial probe?

The differences between the two include:

Judicial probe	Parliamentary probe
1) A judicial probe is conducted by judicially trained persons.	1) Parliamentary committees consist of Members of Parliament who are not experts.

2) A judicial body probes a matter as in the statutes.	2) Parliament does the investigative work through its committees which function under the Rules of the House.
3) The rules of evidence under the Indian Evidence Act are applicable to a judicial probe.	3) The Indian Evidence Act is not applicable to a probe by a parliamentary committee. The question of the relevance of the evidence is finally decided by the Speaker.

Topic: Evolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges

Issues faced by urban local bodies – Staff shortage, financial dependency plague local governance

News: This article discusses the various issues plaguing the efficient working of urban local self-government bodies.

A detailed article on **Local Governments in India** can be [read here](#).

What is the constitutional basis of urban local bodies?

The Indian Constitution provides a clear mandate for **Democratic Decentralisation** through the 73rd and 74th Amendments which seek to create an institutional framework for grassroots democracy through self-governing local bodies in both urban and rural areas of the country.

The **74th Amendment Act** pertaining to urban local government was passed in 1992. It came into force on 1st June 1993.

This added **Part IX -A** and consists of provisions from **Articles 243-P to 243-ZG**.

It also added **the 12th Schedule** to the Constitution. It contains 18 functional items of Municipalities and deals with Article 243 W.

What are the various issues with local governments?

Issues regarding Funds:

- i. Most local governments are financially dependent on their state governments.
- ii. Except 5 States, all others have to get approval from the State before borrowing money.

Issues regarding Functionaries:

- i. They also have limited control over who to hire and how to distribute work. Due to this, they are not able to build a strong organization and ensure accountability for the workers.
- ii. Mayors and councils have limited power over staff appointments and promotions. No city has complete power over its staff. Due to poor control over the appointment of staff, there is a high level of unfilled posts.
- iii. Data shows that **35% of posts** in India's municipal corporations are vacant.

Lack of transparency:

- i. There is a lack of transparency in publishing cities' civic information which citizens can access easily.
- ii. Only 11 of the 35 States/Union Territories have enacted the Public Disclosure Law that mandates publishing of key civic data.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

Lack of financial transparency:

- i. Data shows that no city publishes a quarterly financial audit statement.
- ii. Only 28% of the capital cities disseminate their annual audited financial statements.
- iii. None of the major capital cities publish their internal audit information.

Irregular Elections:

- i. Elections to the local bodies are often delayed. For a long period of time, there have been no functional local governments in various states.

State Finance Commissions not established:

- i. SFCs are not established every 5 years as per Constitutional requirements.
- ii. Not all recommendations are accepted by State governments.

Excessive State Control:

- i. There is also strict control exercised by the state government over urban bodies.
- ii. Instead of providing guidance and support through the control mechanism, the control turns out to be negative, restricting the functioning of these bodies.

Corruption:

- i. Corruption, favoritism and nepotism are rampant.

Lack of coordination:

- i. Poor coordination among center, state, and various departments at local level leads to poor implementation of urban policies.
- ii. Inability to coordinate leads to administrative inefficiency and thus poor urban governance.

Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

On the challenges faced by the Information Commission - Rescue RTI

News: The Supreme Court criticized governments for not filling vacancies in information commission. This makes the Right to Information Act ineffective. Despite past instructions, many commissions remain understaffed. This threatens the Act's role in promoting transparency and exposing scams.

What directives did the Supreme Court provide in its 2019 judgment to the Centre regarding the appointment of Information Commissioners?

SC has directed the Centre on Appointments of Information Commissioners:

1. **Start Early:** Begin the appointment process 1-2 months before a vacancy arises.
2. **Comparable Terms:** Appoint CIC and Information Commissioners on terms similar to the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
3. **Transparency Measures:** Clearly mention appointment criteria in advertisements and on websites.
4. **Advance Advertisement:** Promote vacancies well before the incumbent's retirement.
5. **Selection Criteria:** Make the selection criteria and the search committee's decisions public on the website.
6. **Diverse Qualifications:** Appointees should be eminent individuals from varied fields like law, journalism, public service, etc.
7. **Bias Observation:** The court noted a trend of appointing only government employees and stressed broader representation.

What are the changes to Central Information Commission (CIC) and State Information Commission (SIC) under the RTI Amendments Act 2019?

Term Changes: Central Government will decide the term for Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioner.

The term for State Chief Information Commissioner and State Information Commissioner will also be set by the Central Government.

Salary and Conditions: Central Government will now determine the salary, allowances, and service conditions for the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioner.

Similarly, the pay and conditions for the State Chief Information Commissioner and State Information Commissioner will be set by the Central Government.

Why did the Supreme Court say that the RTI Act has become a dead letter law?

The Supreme Court said the Right to Information Act has become a "dead letter law" because:

1. Governments haven't filled vacancies in information commissions.
2. 7 out of 11 commissioner posts in CIC are vacant.
3. Commissions in Telangana, Tripura, and Jharkhand are defunct.
4. Despite a 2019 judgment ordering timely filling of vacancies, governments haven't complied.
5. The RTI Act's role in promoting transparency and exposing scams might be undermined.
6. The RTI, born from a grassroots movement, risks subversion by the government's inaction.

What is the government's view on the Supreme Court remark?

Official Stance: Despite the vacancies, the government continues to highlight the importance of the RTI Act to democracy.

MoS Statement: Jitendra Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel and Public Grievances, spoke favorably about the RTI Act. He described the law as crucial for ensuring transparency in governance. He emphasized the RTI Act's role in nurturing trust between citizens and the state.

Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act

Challenges of enforcing the Model Code of Conduct – A better model

News: The article discusses the challenges of enforcing India's election rules, the Model Code of Conduct. It mentions recent actions by the Election Commission against various politicians for rule violations. There are concerns about the Commission's impartiality and a proposed change affecting its independence.

What is the Model Code of Conduct?

The model code refers to a set of norms laid down by the Election Commission of India, with the consensus of political parties. It bears no statutory backing and remains unenforceable.

It spells out the dos and don'ts for elections. Political parties, candidates and polling agents are expected to observe the norms.

It is operational from the date that the election schedule is announced till the date that results are announced. For more information [read here](#).

What are the challenges of enforcing the Model Code of Conduct?

1. **Reliance on Political Cooperation:** The MCC's effectiveness depends on the cooperation from political parties and governments, which can be inconsistent.
2. **Interpretation of Clauses:** Some MCC clauses, such as maintaining the "purity of the election process," are subjective and difficult to enforce uniformly.

3. **ECI's Vigilance and Action:** The Election Commission of India's role is crucial. They acted against leaders from different parties like BJP, Congress, and AAP, but the effectiveness and consistency of these actions are under scrutiny.

What are the concerns about the impartiality of the ECI?

1. **Selective Action:** The ECI took action against various leaders across parties like BJP, Congress, and AAP. However, complaints against Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister were reportedly ignored. This raises questions about selective enforcement.
2. **Influence of Central Agencies:** Allegations of the Enforcement Directorate being used for political purposes during elections, without ECI intervention, add to the concerns of bias.
3. **Proposed Legislative Changes:** The potential for the ruling party to control ECI appointments through new legislation (the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023) could further compromise the Commission's impartiality and independence, impacting its ability to conduct free and fair elections.

For information on the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023 [read here](#).

On electoral bonds – On electoral bonds, Supreme Court must uphold Right to Information

News: This article discusses the issues with the Electoral Bonds scheme in light of the ongoing proceedings in the Supreme Court regarding its validity. It also suggests reforms to tackle the issue of a lack of transparency in political funding.

A detailed article on the **Electoral Bonds Scheme** can be [read here](#).

Recently, a Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court has taken up petitions challenging the electoral bonds scheme.

The proceedings focused on arguments pertaining to the **voters' right to information** and the **right to confidentiality of donors**.

What is the citizen's 'Right to Know'?

1. The citizens' **right to know** was established by the Supreme Court rulings in the **People's Union for Civil Liberties case, 2003** and in the **Association for Democratic Reforms case, 2002**.
2. The Court ruled that the **right to know** about public officials is derived from the **right to freedom of expression**.
3. The Court mandated the Election Commission to **disclose information related to candidates** running for office to the public.
4. This information included information on their **assets, criminal records, and educational background**.

What is the stand of the government on the citizen's 'Right to Know'?

The **Attorney General** has told the Supreme Court, in the written submissions, that the "citizens' right to know is **subject to reasonable restrictions**".

The argument put forward by the **Solicitor General** is that **citizens have no right to know** the donors/recipients' identities.

As per the author, this statement doesn't suit the world's largest democracy.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Disclosing the identities of donors and recipients.**

2. **Eliminate private funding and introduce public funding for political parties.** It's a small investment for the preservation of democracy (estimated at around Rs. 10,000 crore every 5 years).
3. **Establish a National Election Fund to which all donors could contribute.** The funds could be allocated to parties based on their electoral performance.

Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary

On AIJS – A non-starter

News: This article discusses the various issues with the formation of the All-India Judicial Service (AIJS).

Recently, President Droupadi Murmu suggested the creation of an All-India Judicial Service (AIJS) which will help diversify the judiciary by allowing bright youngsters from varied backgrounds to become judges through a merit-based process.

What is the AIJS?

Article 312 of the Constitution, as amended by the 42nd Amendment Act in 1976, provides for the creation of an AIJS. It requires a resolution adopted by the Council of States with two-thirds majority of present and voting, and a parliamentary law.

Under AIJS, District judges will get recruited centrally through an all-India examination and allocated to each State along the lines of the All India Services.

It is well argued that it will ensure a transparent and efficient method of recruitment to attract the best talent in India's legal profession.

What is the need for the AIJS?

1. **Huge vacancy of judges and delay in recruitment:** Currently there is a 21% vacancy across all levels of courts in the country and a pendency of more than 5 crore cases, primarily due to inordinate delay in holding regular exams by states.
2. **Declining quality of judicial officers:** The ever-continuing decline in their quality will delay delivery of justice, increase pendency of cases, impair quality of judgments, and in turn affect the competence of higher judiciary as well.
3. **Subjectivity in the process:** Current judicial appointments at the lower level and upper levels have been criticised for subjectivity, corruption and nepotism, making a neutral and impartial system of recruitment imperative.

What are the issues with AIJS?

A national system of recruitment at the district judge level may have the following issues according to the author:

1. **Lack of consensus:** As the Union Law Minister disclosed last year in the Rajya Sabha, there is no consensus on the proposal. Only 2 High Courts agreed to the idea, while 13 were against it.
2. **Current system ensures diversity:** The current system of recruitment of **district judges through the respective State High Courts** is more conducive to ensuring diversity, as there is scope for both reservation and a clear understanding of local practices and conditions of the State.
3. **Issues related to expertise:** Unlike civil servants (who are recruited through a national common examination), judges are not assisted by an experienced lower bureaucracy in decision-making. Hence, they need to be well-versed in the issues involved for judicial functioning and the local practices and conditions of the State.

4. **Against the federal nature of the Constitution:** It is unlikely that all States will agree to this subject becoming centralised.

5. **May not attract the best talent:** This is due to the following:

a. **Other preferences available:** Lawyers typically consider judicial service based on practical experience rather than academic brilliance. Options such as litigation, joining law firms and going into the corporate sector appear more beneficial to some students of good institutions.

b. **Lack of certainty in career progression:** Given that the number of district judges elevated to the High Courts is much lower than those from the Bar, the lack of certainty on career progression may also render a national judicial service unattractive.

On Restructuring the Supreme Court – It's time to revamp the structure of the Supreme Court

News: The article discusses the issues with the functioning of the Supreme Court which necessitate reforms such as the constitution of a separate Constitutional Bench and regional benches.

What are the powers of the Supreme Court?

1. **Original Jurisdiction:** It decides disputes between different units of the Indian Federation. This includes any dispute between:
 1. the Centre and one or more states; or
 2. the Centre and any state or states on one side and one or more states on the other; or
 3. between two or more states.
2. **Appellate Jurisdiction:** It is the highest court of appeal in the country. It hears appeals from lower courts and tribunals, both civil and criminal, ensuring uniformity in the interpretation and application of laws.
3. **Advisory Jurisdiction:** The President of India can seek advice from the Court on questions of law or fact that may appear before him/her.
4. Apart from this, it has the power of **judicial review** (reviewing the constitutionality of laws passed by the legislature and executive actions), the power to **punish for its own contempt**, as well as the **power to issue writs** (such as habeas corpus, mandamus, etc.) for the enforcement of the fundamental rights.

What are Constitution Benches?

Article 145(3) provides for the setting up of a Constitution Bench. It says a **minimum of 5 judges** need to sit for deciding a case involving a “**substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution**”. This provision is also applicable to the Court hearing any reference under **Article 143**, which deals with the power of the President to consult the Court.

What are the issues with the working of the Court?

1. **Backlog of Cases and Overburdening:** There are 79,813 cases pending before the Supreme Court. It has been reduced to an appeals court, with only 4 of the 1,263 decisions issued in 2022 were issued by a Constitution Bench.
2. **Lack of Access to The Supreme Court:** It is reported that appeals in the Supreme court mostly comprised matters from High Courts that are geographically closer to the Supreme Court. Courts far away from the apex court had fewer appeals filed, due to both difficulties in accessibility and costs.

Due to this, there has been a demand for a structural change regarding accessibility, reducing workload, giving importance to Constitutional cases, etc. in the top court.

What are some suggestions to address these structural gaps in the Supreme Court?

- 1. 10th Law Commission (1984):** It proposed that the Supreme Court be split into two divisions: **Constitutional and Legal Division**, with the Constitutional Division handling only issues pertaining to constitutional law. **11th Law Commission (1988)** reiterated the same.
- Supreme Court, in **Bihar Legal Support Society v. CJI Case (1986)**, stated that it was “desirable” to establish a **National Court of Appeal** that would be able to entertain **special leave petitions**. This would allow the Supreme Court to only entertain constitutional and public law-related questions.
- 229th Law Commission Report (2009)** recommended **4 regional benches** in Delhi, Chennai or Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai which would take up **appellate responsibility**, with a Constitution Bench in New Delhi working on a regular basis. This would divide the heavy backlog of non-constitutional cases among regional benches while also making them accessible.

What should be the way forward?

Constitution of regional benches, and a separate Constitution Bench should be the way forward, in line with the CJI's recent announcement regarding his intent to create Constitution Benches as a permanent feature of the Court.

Terminology Used:

Special Leave Petition: Under this, the aggrieved party is provided a special permission to be heard in Apex Court, in appeal against the order or judgment of any court or tribunal in the territory of India, when any substantial question of law is involved, or gross injustice has been done.

Master of Roster: It refers to the privilege of the Chief Justice to constitute Benches to hear cases.

On Transfer of Judges – Collegium’s opacity is injurious to the institution’s health

News: The article discusses issues with the procedure of transfer of judges by the Collegium. It also suggests reforms that can be undertaken to resolve these issues.

Recently, various judges of High Courts have raised questions on their abrupt transfers by the Supreme Court (SC) Collegium.

What are the issues with the procedure of transfer of judges by the Collegium?

- 1. Lack of Transparency:** There is no official procedure or any written manual for the functioning of the Collegium. The parameters considered for transfers are not public, Moreover, the reasons for transfer are not communicated to the judges.
- 2. Impact on Judicial Efficiency:** Frequent or abrupt transfers of judges can disrupt the functioning of courts, impacting the efficiency of the judicial system.
- 3. Lack of Constitutional Backing:** The Collegium system is not prescribed by the Constitution. Article 124 only mentions consultation, which the SC interpreted as ‘concurrence’ in Second Judges Case (1993). Many consider this as judicial overreach.
- 4. Lack of Checks & Balance:** There are no checks on the whole process (by the Executive or the Legislature).
- 5. Accusations of Impartiality:** Critics of the system argue that near relatives, kith and kin of sitting Judges receive favorable treatment leading to nepotism (also called ‘**Uncle Judges Syndrome**’).

In which scenarios are transfers usually recommended by the Collegium?

One, a transfer is used for appointing Chief Justices or ensuring elevation to the SC.

For instance, a potential candidate for SC judgeship is usually sent to a large high court to be tested on judicial performance.

Two, Transfer of a judge is sometimes done as punitive action to deal with judges who do not conform to the

expected or proper course of action as part of the judiciary.

This is because impeachment is the only remedy when questions of propriety are raised against a judge. Since it requires a very high degree of evidence and political will, judiciary sometimes resorts to transfers.

What should be done going ahead?

1. **Establish a Defined Procedure:** The Government and Judiciary should cooperate to finalize a defined procedure regarding judicial transfers. The Memorandum of Procedure should have clear guidelines for transparency like criteria, disclosure of reasons for transfer, mechanism for raising concerns, etc.
2. **Reviving the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC):** NJAC was proposed as an alternative to the collegium system to ensure checks and balances. It would have representation from the judiciary, executive and eminent jurists and will be responsible for appointment and transfer of judges.

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.
- 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.

government intervention in content regulation.

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

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 3/4th 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.

Topic: E-governance – applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential

DPI could help unlock a massive opportunity in the purple sector

News: The article highlights the massive opportunity that Digital Public Infrastructure presents when applied in the purple sector. Disability-inclusive infrastructure using DPI can generate a special market boom and help India's economy.

What is the Purple Sector of an Economy?

The term "purple sector," symbolizing disability with the color purple, encompasses a diverse workforce. This includes individuals with disabilities, as well as special educators, rehabilitation professionals, healthcare workers, and entrepreneurs and innovators who focus on developing products and services for individuals with special needs. It constitutes a substantial and intricately segmented sector.

For more information on DPI- [Read here](#).

What is the significance of DPI in the purple sector?

1. **Enhanced employment opportunities to disabled-** Transportation Apps, educational apps for disabled, etc, based on DPI platform enhances employment opportunities for the disabled. **For ex-** Namma Yatri app for providing accessible transportation to the disabled.
2. **Increase in government revenues-** Increased employment opportunities to the disabled community, which constitute around 150 million population in India (WHO), increases the tax base of the government.
3. **Increased expenditure in the economy-** Persons with disabilities, along with their friends and families, command large quantum of spending power. Disability friendly shopping apps based on [Open Network for Digital Commerce \(ONDC\)](#), enhance the economic stature of disabled people as both customers and value-creators.
4. **Social benefits like Health care and Education-** Disabled focussed apps for health and education based on the Open Network for Education and Skilling Transactions (ONEST) and Unified Health Interface (UHI) platforms, can help people with disabilities take up skill development courses, find specialist healthcare experts, etc.

What Measures has the government taken for increasing accessibility for the disabled?

1. **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016:** The Act has several provisions for benefit of persons with disabilities like it has increased the magnitude of reservation for Persons with Disabilities in government jobs and education institutes.
2. **Accessible India Campaign:** The aim of the Campaign is to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Persons with Disabilities, with a focus on built up environment, transportation, and ICT ecosystem.

For more information on govt initiatives [Read Here](#)

What should be the way forward in building disability friendly apps?

- 1. Discoverability-** Products and services meant to cater to their special needs as well as those offered by persons with disabilities must be made available to a wider market.
- 2. Trust-** We must ensure that right persons are identified for various services and initiatives to instil trust in these apps. Data privacy must be of paramount importance.
- 3. Access-** Products and services should be accessible in both physical and digital formats.
- 4. Cost of Innovation-** We should focus on lowering the cost of innovation or developing novel products and services for persons with special needs.

What is e-FIR?

News: This article discusses the concept of e-FIR. It also highlights the benefits and challenges associated with e-FIRs and suggests steps to tackle the same.

What is an e-FIR?

The concept of 'e-FIR' includes obtaining information/complaint through electronic means using a common national portal and then getting the information/complaint signed by the complainant physically within a stipulated time to convert the complaint into an actual FIR.

Read more about **First Information Report (FIR)** [here](#).

What does the Law Commission say about e-FIR?

Law Commission of India Report No. 282 recommended that "in cases **where the accused is not known**, registration of an e-FIR should be allowed for all cognisable offences".

If the **accused is known**, as a preliminary step, registration of an e-FIR may be allowed for cognisable offences wherein the punishment provided under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and other laws is up to 3 years. In other cases (punishable with more than 3 years of imprisonment), the conventional method prescribed under the IPC needs to be followed.

In the next step, the police officer is required to get the signature of the complainant within 3 days to register an e-FIR. Otherwise, the e-FIR shall not be registered.

Read about **Cognizable Vs Non-Cognizable Offences** [here](#).

What are the benefits of e-FIR?

First, the police will have to take cognisance of the complaint as the system will automatically generate receipt. This will ensure almost free registration of crime.

Second, the police will not be able to change the contents of the complaint.

What are the issues with the debate around e-FIR?

- 1. Lack of clarity and awareness:** The Commission has not clarified the concept of an 'e-FIR' in detail. The procedure in the report is given only for cases where the accused is known.
- 2. State models not discussed:** Though the Commission mentioned that 8 States are lodging an e-FIR, it did not discuss any of the models adopted by those States.
- 3. No automatic registration of FIR:** 'e-FIR' does not mean an automatic registration of an FIR using electronic means.
- 4. Lack of e-authentication technique:** In case a paper-based signed complaint is to be replaced by an

equivalent document in electronic form, one must affix electronic signature or use an e-authentication technique, for instance, like the one notified in the IT Act, 2000.

However, the Commission has not discussed using the 'e-authentication technique or digital signature' as defined in the IT Act, 2000, for signing complaints.

What should be done?

1. **Mandating an e-authentication technique:** It would be better if the use of an e-authentication technique is mandated for the verification of complainant.
2. **Immediate registering of an e-FIR through e-authentication** (and not the current delay of 3 days, which may impact the case).

Subject: Social Justice

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

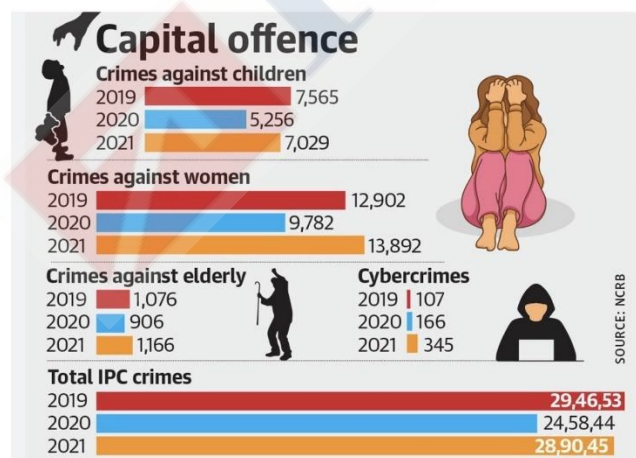
Domestic Violence in India

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 is 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, in domestic violence cases.

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.

Topic: Issues relating to Education

Importance of Sex education- Social justice, sexual education, the need of our times

News: The article highlights the importance of sexual education, the role of teachers, and government initiatives like ARSH and RKSK. It also mentions challenges like cultural resistance and the need for better resources and training.

What are the social issues that affect Indian adolescents the most?

Gender Inequality: Gender issues, including discrimination and stereotypes, are prevalent. This impacts the way adolescents interact and form relationships.

Sexual Education Gaps: Lack of comprehensive sexual education contributes to misunderstandings and poor handling of gender and sexual health issues among adolescents.

What are the benefits of sexual education in India?

Promotes Gender Respect: Sexual education fosters respect for different gender identities, crucial for healthy interpersonal relationships. It aids in developing a deeper understanding and respect for LGBTQA+ communities.

Reduces Risky Behaviors: Educating adolescents about consent and boundaries not only helps prevent sexual abuse but also reduces sexual activity and risky behaviors. Additionally, it can delay the age at which adolescents first engage in sexual intercourse.

Strengthening Democracy: Sexual education encourages empathy and understanding of diverse identities and experiences, crucial for a democratic society that values all its members.

What are the challenges in providing sexual education in India?

1. **Cultural Resistance:** The cultural hesitation to discuss topics like sex and relationships openly in Indian society poses a significant challenge.
2. **Teacher Training:** A lack of trained teachers who are comfortable and skilled in teaching sexual education is a major obstacle.
3. **Resource Constraints:** There's a scarcity of adequate teaching materials and curricula specifically designed for comprehensive sexual education in schools.

For more information on challenges of sex education in India [read here](#).

What government initiatives are in place regarding sexual education in India?

1. **Union government initiatives:** Recent initiatives include the **Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Strategy (ARSH) of 2005** and the **National Adolescent Health Programme (Rashtriya Kishore Swaasthya Karyakram or RKSK)**.
2. **Legal Recognition of Sexual Education:** The Calcutta High Court's judgment emphasized that children have the right to access sexual education and sexual and reproductive health services.
3. **Committee for Removing Discriminations in Schools:** The Government of Tamil Nadu established a committee headed by Justice K. Chandru. This committee's aim is to suggest ways to eliminate caste and community discrimination in educational institutions, thereby fostering a more inclusive setting for sexual education.

What should be done?

1. **Enhance Teacher Training:** As per the UNESCO 2021 report, train teachers in participatory pedagogies for effective sexuality education.

2. **Incorporate Legal Awareness:** Implement the Kerala model of including POCSO awareness in curricula from 2024-25 to educate students on legal aspects of sexual offences.
3. **Reconsider Age of Consent:** Reflect on the observations of the Madras, Delhi, and Meghalaya High Courts, and the Chief Justice of India regarding the criminalization of consensual adolescent relationships, suggesting a reevaluation of the age of consent.
4. **Develop Regional Vocabulary:** Create specific terms in regional languages for discussing sexual consent, addressing the gap for non-English speakers, and ensuring wider understanding and inclusivity in sexual 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.

On challenges of Higher Education Institutes – The IITs are overcommitted, in crisis

News: The article discusses the challenges faced by the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), including their expansion in India and abroad, the struggle to maintain high standards, and difficulties in hiring and retaining qualified faculty members.

What is the status of expansion of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)?

Domestic Expansion: The IITs have expanded to 23 institutes, with over 120,000 students currently enrolled, with 25,237 students graduating in the 2022-23 academic year.

Global Expansion: IIT Delhi has plans for a campus in Abu Dhabi, UAE. IIT Madras has inaugurated a branch in Zanzibar, offering programs in Data Science and AI.

What are the challenges faced by the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs)?

1. **Quality:** Newer IITs struggle to uphold the high standards of the original institutes, with **vacant seats** indicating potential quality issues.
2. **Faculty Vacancies:** The IITs face a significant faculty shortage, with 4,370 out of 10,881 faculty positions vacant as of 2021.
3. **Lack of Competitive Salaries:** Low salaries compared to international standards make it difficult to attract and retain top academic talent.
4. **Location of New Institutes:** The seven new IITs established after 2015, often located in remote areas, are less appealing to both prospective faculty and students.
5. **Issues of Prestige:** There is a concern about a developing hierarchy within the IIT system, where some IITs may be perceived as less prestigious than others.
6. **Overseas Challenges:** The expansion to international campuses, like in Zanzibar raises questions about the timing and investment priorities amidst domestic challenges.

What should be done?

1. **Focus on Quality at New IITs:** Addressing the issue of unfilled seats by enhancing the quality and reputation of the newer IITs to match that of the original institutions.
2. **Rationalize Expansion Plans:** Re-evaluating the decision to establish overseas campuses, ensuring that domestic challenges are prioritized, and quality is not compromised.
3. **Invest in Resources:** Allocating sufficient funds to improve infrastructure and resources, especially in remote IIT locations, to attract both faculty and students.
4. **Standardize Admission Processes:** Maintaining consistent and rigorous admission standards across all campuses, including international ones, to preserve the IIT brand of excellence.

5. **Review Faculty Policies:** Revising policies that affect faculty recruitment and retention, aiming to fill the high number of vacancies and reduce turnover.
6. **Clarify Overseas Objectives:** Clearly defining the goals of international campuses, ensuring they align with the broader objectives of the IIT system and India's educational ambitions.

Vocational education should be an integral aspect of schooling

News: The article discusses the inclusion of Vocational Education in India's new National Curriculum Framework, starting from early schooling. This initiative is designed to equip students for work and life, giving it the same importance as traditional subjects and tailoring it to fit local needs and resources.

What is the National Curriculum Framework?

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) serves as an educational blueprint in India, revised five times—in 1975, 1988, 2000, 2005, and 2023. It aligns with the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to reform school education.

In 2023, the latest update integrates Vocational Education (VE) into the school curriculum, which is a shift from the National Policy on Education (1986), which limited VE to the Higher Secondary Stage.

To embed VE in the school system, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 4.0 has been initiated (2023 budget), mandating CBSE schools to create skill hubs, following the directives of the 2020 National Education Policy.

Earlier, vocational training in India only comprised full-time programs via ITIs under National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) recognition and part-time courses through state boards and universities.

For more information on **National Education Policy 2020**, [read here](#)

How will vocational education (VE) be taught?

Until grade 5, children will develop basic work capacities through play. For instance, they might learn to safely use a tool or focus on completing a task.

In grades 6-8, students get hands-on experience with a variety of vocations via projects.

By grades 9-10, students learn specific vocations, treated with equal importance as traditional academic subjects.

In the final school years, **grades 11-12**, there's an option to specialize in chosen vocations.

What are the benefits of integrating vocational education (VE) into schools?

1. **Preparation for Employment:** VE equips students with practical skills needed for jobs right after school, increasing their employment prospects.
2. **Life Skills Development:** Even for those not immediately entering the workforce, VE imparts crucial life skills like critical thinking and problem-solving.
3. **Broad Educational Foundation:** VE being given equal importance to other subjects ensures a well-rounded education. For instance, students learn to value all types of work, from manual to intellectual.
4. **Local Relevance:** The choice of VE subjects is made based on local needs and job opportunities, making education more relevant to the students' own communities.

5. **Social Equality:** Integrating VE combats societal and educational biases, promoting equality and respect for all kinds of work.

What are the challenges of integrating vocational education (VE) into schools?

1. **Practical Implementation:** Implementing VE requires careful planning on how to include it practically within the existing school system.
2. **Societal Perceptions:** There's a challenge to change the societal view that VE is lesser than mainstream education.
3. **Philosophical Bias:** Overcoming the bias in the education system that has historically seen VE as non-essential or less intellectual is a challenge.

Topic: Issues relating to poverty and hunger

PMGKAY extension

News: This article discusses the impact of the recently proposed extension of PMGKAY on India's food subsidy bill. It also highlights the challenges associated with this extension.

Recently, the PM announced an extension of the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), providing free food grain to 810 million beneficiaries, for **5 more years**.

What is PMGKAY?

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 heavily subsidised price). Its current annual cost (or food subsidy bill) would be over **~ Rs. 2 trillion (Rs. 2 lakh crore)**, and it should increase in the next 5 years.

What will be the impact of this on India's food subsidy bill?

The food subsidy bill is certain to rise due to the following:

1. **Downward revision of Central Issue Price:** The **central issue price** was last revised in 2013. With this announcement, the issue price has been abolished.
2. **Upward revision of MSP:** There is continuous **pressure to raise the MSP for agricultural crops**, raising FCI's economic costs in procuring grains every year for the central pool.
3. **Higher procurement by FCI:** Even though the annual requirement for the PDS is estimated at 50-60 million tonnes, FCI's procurement is on the higher side to prevent any supply shortages.

What are the issues with this extension?

1. **Poor Targeting:** According to a World Bank report, India's poverty level declined to **10%** in 2019. In contrast, PMGKAY covers **57%** of India's population.
2. **Leakages and diversions of food:** According to the **Shanta Kumar Committee**, **nearly 50%** of the

foodgrains are siphoned off from PDS system (**NSSO, 2011**).

3. **Issue of freebies:** Free schemes once announced do not have a sunset clause (an ending date).

What should be done?

1. **Rectifying inclusion and exclusion errors:** The urgent need is to redefine the number of beneficiaries that are truly deserving of a free food grain supply scheme.

2. **Revision of central issue price:** The government must revise the central issue price for food grain, fixed more than 10 years ago. This can decrease the government's food subsidy bill.

3. **Explore alternatives:** A better option could be a **direct cash transfer** to the deserving beneficiaries, equivalent to the cost that the government incurs on procuring them.

Terminology used:

Central Issue Price: It is the price at which foodgrains under NFSA are being made available to the beneficiaries (Subsidized prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for Rice, Wheat and Coarse-grains (Nutria-cereals) respectively).

Sunset clause: It is a part of a law or rule that states it will expire on a specific date unless lawmakers decide to keep it going. Many laws don't have this, so they can last indefinitely.

On the Poshan Tracker – Mother, child and the Poshan Tracker

News: This article discusses the important features and significance of the Poshan Tracker. It also highlights challenges that will need to be tackled in order to ensure its success and suggests steps for the same.

A detailed article on **India's hunger situation** can be [read here](#).

What is the Poshan Tracker?

The rollout of the **Poshan Tracker** represents the largest mobile-phone nutrition monitoring system in the history of global health.

The Poshan Tracker is a **centralised ICT-enabled platform**, developed to **promote transparency and accountability** of nutrition service delivery, as part of the new **Poshan 2.0 guidelines**.

Its features include:

- i. **Last-mile delivery of nutritional services**
- ii. **Real-time feedback loop** for frontline functionaries to prevent malnutrition by better identifying, targeting and monitoring of ICDS services.
- iii. **Precursor for targeted investments** in healthcare for women and children.

More on the **Poshan 2.0 Scheme** [here](#).

What is the significance of the Poshan Tracker?

1. **Universal uptake** — Anganwadi workers are using the app across **all states and Union territories**.
2. **Massive scale** — Real-time monitoring of **more than 50% children** in the country is being undertaken. Moreover, 94% of beneficiaries have been Aadhar verified.
3. **Holistic coverage** — It captures 3 more indicators.

- a. Anganwadi infrastructure.
- b. Beneficiaries of take-home rations and hot cooked meals.
- c. Monitoring nutritional outcomes.
4. **Highly detailed data (or Granularity):** The granularity of Poshan Tracker data is key in addressing the huge variability in malnutrition rates estimated through household-level surveys.
5. **Better utilisation:** It makes beneficiary-wise data that is observed on the ground, available for decision-makers for local and timely action.
6. **Accuracy:** The app automatically calculates nutritional levels based on the WHO growth charts. It can reduce errors in their manual calculations.
7. **Timeliness:** It avoids paper-based reporting, enabling real-time transmission of data. For instance, it is easier to retrieve information from it as compared to bulky paper-based registers.

What are the challenges associated with the Poshan Tracker?

1. **Quality of data:** Doubts about data quality have been identified as a major hindrance to using nutrition monitoring data for informed nutritional policies.
2. **Limited Window of data utilisation:** Global experience shows that decision-makers do not place a high value on data that are 3-5 years old.

What needs to be done?

1. **Feedback mechanisms:** It must be ensured that the Poshan Tracker is **routinely updated** based on the feedback of Anganwadi workers to **improve user-friendliness**.
2. **Skill-building and technical assistance:** It will be needed to ensure the sustainability of this new monitoring system.
3. **Investments in service delivery:** Adequate investments in delivering essential services when malnutrition is detected.

Topic: 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.

TB in India: A fight to the end

News: The article discusses India's tuberculosis (TB) situation, with a particular emphasis on the findings and suggestions presented in the WHO report. It highlights the high number of TB cases in 2022 and notes some progress in reducing TB mortality and improving case detection. Additionally, the article discusses challenges such as multi-drug resistant TB and underscores the significance of the WHO's recommendations in addressing these issues.

What is TB?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious airborne bacterial disease caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis. It most commonly affects the lungs but can also damage other parts of the body.

For more information on TB [read here](#)

What are the findings of the WHO report on the TB situation in India?

Positive Findings:

1. **Mortality and Incidence Reduction:** The WHO report acknowledges a reduction in TB mortality and incidence in India over the past eight years, indicating progress. For instance, India recorded a staggering 28 lakh TB cases in 2022.
2. **Improved Case Detection:** The report highlights improvements in India's TB case detection system, ensuring more timely diagnosis and treatment. This progress is essential in addressing the TB burden.
3. **TB Reporting Resilience:** Despite challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, India's TB reporting rebounded to 2019 levels, demonstrating the resilience of surveillance programs.

Negative Findings:

1. **Multi-Drug Resistant TB Challenge:** The report mentions that India faces a substantial challenge with multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB, with only slightly over half of the estimated 1,19,000 new cases reported annually.
2. **Undiagnosed Cases:** The WHO report raises concerns about the possibility that some "new cases" might actually be undiagnosed patients from the pandemic years.
3. **Missed Elimination Target:** Despite progress, India is likely to miss its target of eliminating TB by 2025.

What are the suggestions provided in the WHO report on the TB situation in India?

1. **Utilize Molecular Diagnostics:** The WHO recommends the use of molecular diagnostic tests for TB, similar to those used for COVID-19 detection. These tests have been effective in the pandemic and can be repurposed for TB diagnostics, as they provide more accurate results.
2. **Address MDR TB Epidemic:** The report suggests improving prescription practices, drug quality, and completion of medications to tackle the MDR TB epidemic effectively.
3. **Enhance Patient Care:** TB treatment is challenging, with side effects like nausea and jaundice. The report emphasizes the need for dedicated and caring physicians to support patients throughout their treatment, improving treatment completion rates.

What steps have been taken to combat TB in India?

India has taken significant steps to combat tuberculosis (TB) as part of its National Strategic Plan (NSP) for TB Elimination:

1. **Setting Ambitious Targets:** India aims to eliminate TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global goal. The NSP targets no more than 44 new TB cases or 65 total cases per lakh population by 2025.
2. **Expanded Testing:** The government has increased access to molecular test kits like CB-NAAT and TureNat across all districts, facilitating faster and more accurate TB diagnosis.
3. **Community Engagement:** Ni-Kshay Mitras engage in community programs, offering nutritional support to TB patients.
4. **Free Medication:** Essential medicines like Bedaquiline and Delamanid are provided free by the government for TB treatment.
5. **Vaccine Research:** Ongoing research on vaccines such as Immuvac and VPM1002 demonstrates India's commitment to finding more effective ways to combat TB.

For additional details on the government's efforts to combat TB in India, [read here](#)

Impact of social media on mental health

News: The article discusses lawsuits against Meta regarding Instagram affecting young users' mental health. Meta is accused of creating addictive platforms that harm teens. There's pressure globally for more social media regulation, and Meta may face heavy fines.

Background:

In 2017, London teen Molly Russell took her own life after viewing self-harm content on social media. The issue of social media's impact on youth mental health was later spotlighted in "The Social Dilemma," a 2020 Netflix show.

On 30th September 2023, a London coroner ruled that the exposure to harmful social media content had contributed to her death "in a more than minimal way." This ruling marks a potentially unprecedented acknowledgement of the direct impact social media can have on child safety.

What is the issue with social media?

Harmful Effects on Youth: Meta's social media platforms, particularly Instagram, are accused of damaging teens' mental health.

Addiction and Exploitation: Lawsuits allege that Meta's platforms are designed to be addictive, making young users spend more time online. This is due to the exploitation of the brain's dopamine responses, which are tied to the rewarding feeling from likes and interactions.

What are government actions in this regard?

Numerous lawsuits have been filed against Meta over issues potentially harmful to youth, which may lead to hefty fines, while President Biden's call for regulation and global attention from the UK, EU, and India signal a tightening grip on social media practices.

What should be done?

1. **Reform Business Models:** Considering a shift from an advertising-based model to a subscription model, similar to what OpenAI uses for ChatGPT. It could reduce the dependence on data monetization and user engagement for profit.
2. **Tools and Support:** Meta should continue developing and implementing tools that support teens and their families in navigating social media safely.
3. **Accountability and Transparency:** Social Media Platforms should be held accountable for the content hosted and the psychological effects of their algorithms on young users.
4. **Global Cooperation:** Meta might need to work with global regulators proactively to manage the concerns around social media's impact on youth.

Threats of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

News: The article discusses the global commitment to fight Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) during India's G20 presidency, highlighting the need for research, prevention, and equitable access to treatments. It emphasizes the necessity of global and local actions, including stronger surveillance, responsible antibiotic use, and international collaboration.

What is Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)?

Antimicrobials are agents intended to kill or inhibit the growth of microbes. They include antibiotics, fungicides, antiviral agents and parasiticides.

AMR occurs when microbes such as bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungi become resistant to antimicrobial treatments to which they were previously susceptible.

Superbugs are strains of micro-organisms that are resistant to most of the medications.

For more details on AMR [read here](#)

What are the implications of AMR?

High Mortality: AMR is currently linked to approximately 4.95 million associated deaths annually.

Health Threat: AMR jeopardizes the treatment of infectious diseases, cancer care, and transplant success due to increased difficulty in treating resistant infections.

What initiatives have been taken to address AMR?

1. **National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2017-21):** It highlighted the importance of sanitation initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which can indirectly reduce the need for antibiotics by preventing infections.
2. **The National Health Policy 2017:** It provides specific guidelines for the prudent use of antibiotics, including **restrictions on over-the-counter sales** and limitations on antibiotic usage in livestock, aiming to control the misuse and overuse of antibiotics.
3. **Adoption of the Muscat Manifesto:** Manifesto stressing the need for enhanced political commitment to implement **One Health actions** to control AMR. India pledged to decrease antimicrobial usage in agriculture by up to 50% by 2030 and to stop using medically important antimicrobials in animals and food production.
4. **Reporting to WHO GLASS:** India is strengthening the engagement of its private sector in reporting antimicrobial use and resistance to the **WHO Global Antimicrobial Resistance and Use Surveillance System (GLASS)**.

For more details on India's initiatives to address AMR, [read here](#)

What is the Delhi Declaration, and how will it be helpful in tackling AMR?

The Delhi Declaration is an agreement by countries during India's G20 presidency focusing on strengthening health systems to fight health challenges like AMR.

It would be helpful in tackling AMR through:

1. **Combating AMR with a Unified Approach:** The Declaration commits to the One Health approach and enhancing pandemic preparedness, crucial for tackling the complex issue of AMR.
2. **Prioritizing AMR:** The Declaration seeks to reduce the estimated 4.95 million deaths associated with AMR, akin to diseases like HIV/AIDS.
3. **Supporting Low-Income Countries:** It aims to provide equitable access to medical resources, essential for countries with higher AMR death rates, like those in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
4. **Implementing National Action Plans:** The Declaration encourages the adoption and implementation of National Action Plans, drawing from India's efforts like the NAP-AMR for research and surveillance.
5. **International Collaboration and Funding:** It proposes an international funding mechanism for AMR research and development and promotes patent reforms to make treatments more affordable.

What should be done to combat AMR?

1. **Reform Antibiotic Patents:** Discuss patent reforms to enhance innovation while maintaining new antibiotics' affordability, looking at models like the Medicines Patent Pool.
2. **Engage Academia and CSOs:** Involve academic institutions and civil organizations in research, education, and policy advocacy for AMR containment.
3. **Support Global Health Infrastructure:** Pledge support for equitable access to medical resources in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, recognizing the shared risk AMR poses.
4. **Educate the Public:** Increase awareness of the risks associated with the overuse of antibiotics.

Subject: International Relations

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 the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework- IPEF agreement: India has played its cards quite well

News: The article discusses India signing the Supply Chain Resilience Agreement of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) to diversify trade and reduce dependence on China. It also highlights the IPEF's challenges, such as limited market access and internal conflicts among member countries.

What is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)?

The IPEF was started in May 2022 by the United States along with 13 countries including Australia, India, and Japan. This group represents about 40% of the global GDP and 28% of world trade. The IPEF focuses on **four areas:** trade, supply chains, clean energy, and creating a clean economy. It's unique because member **countries can choose which of these areas they want to be involved** in, without

needing to commit to all four. This flexibility sets the IPEF apart from other international agreements. India had joined Pillars II to IV of IPEF while it has an observer status in Pillar-I.



What are the key outcomes of the 3rd IPEF Ministerial Meeting?

The 3rd Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) Ministerial Meeting in San Francisco produced significant outcomes:

1. **Supply Chain Agreement:** Signed in San Francisco, this first-of-its-kind agreement aims to

enhance the resilience and responsiveness of supply chains.

2. **Clean Energy, Decarbonisation and Infrastructure:** Commitment to accelerate clean energy technologies and decarbonize economies, supporting sustainable livelihoods and aligning with Paris Agreement goals.
3. **Trade Pillar:** Progress has been made towards a mutually beneficial outcome that emphasizes strong labor standards and fair trade.
4. **IPEF Critical Minerals Dialogue:** Launched to foster closer collaboration on strengthening IPEF critical mineral supply chains and boosting regional economic competitiveness.
5. **Financing Initiatives:** Emphasis on mobilizing financing for supply chain resilience and sustainable development.
6. **Future Meetings:** Plans for an annual ministerial-level IPEF Council from 2024 and biennial leaders' meetings.

What challenges does the IPEF face?

1. **US Domestic Politics and Trade Barriers:** The United States, despite advocating for free trade, has been implementing trade subsidies and erecting trade barriers in the name of quality, labor, and environmental standards. This creates a challenge for IPEF, as the US's own policies might contradict the framework's objectives.
2. **Concerns about the Stability:** The scrapping of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) by former US President Donald Trump adds to the skepticism around the IPEF. This past action raises concerns about the stability and commitment of the US towards such international trade agreements.
3. **Differing Member Interests:** The diverse interests of IPEF member countries can lead to conflicts, making it difficult to reach a consensus, particularly on trade issues. This challenge became evident during the recent San Francisco dialogue, when members failed to reach an agreement on the trade pillar, resulting in its deferment.

What is the significance of IPEF for India?

1. **Counterbalancing China's Influence:** Through the IPEF, India is diversifying its trade and supply chains, reducing its dependency on China. This strategic move not only improves India's supply stability but also serves as a countermeasure to China's growing regional influence.

2. **Economic Growth:** The IPEF, representing about 40% of global GDP, opens up significant new trade and economic opportunities for India.
3. **Strategic Positioning:** Participation in IPEF strengthens India's position as a reliable partner in regional supply chains, boosting its role in global value chains.
4. **Navigating Geopolitical Challenges:** India's involvement in IPEF helps it manage complex geopolitical dynamics, such as the Ukraine-Russia conflict, while maintaining beneficial relationships and economic 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.

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.

On the India-UK Trade Deal – Prospects & challenges

News: The article discusses the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the UK. It looks at how this deal could help various sectors by reducing tariffs, easing visa rules for Indian professionals, and addressing investment. It also highlights challenges like environmental standards and data protection.

What is the current status of India-UK trade relations?

India and the UK are finalizing a free trade agreement, expected to be signed by year-end. Bilateral trade between the countries exceeded \$44.3 billion in the 2022-23 financial year. India exported goods and services worth \$25.8 billion to the UK, enjoying an **\$8 billion trade surplus**.

What are the benefits of an FTA between India and the UK?

Benefits for India:

- Increased Export Competitiveness:** Indian exports facing high UK tariffs, such as textiles and apparel, will benefit from tariff elimination. These sectors contribute \$5 billion in exports and stand to become more competitive in the UK market.
- Services Sector Expansion:** Indian IT services could see growth with eased UK visa processes, crucial for the sector that caters significantly to the UK market.
- Investment Inflows:** The simultaneous negotiation of a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) promises better investment protection, potentially leading to increased UK investment in India.

Benefits for the UK:

- Tariff Reduction in India:** UK products like cars and Scotch whisky, currently taxed heavily in India (100-125% for cars, 150% for whisky), could see reduced tariffs, lowering costs and enhancing their market position.
- Level-Playing Field:** The FTA aims to give UK companies access to India's government procurement market, leveling the playing field against Indian firms and opening new business avenues.
- Industrial Benefits:** UK exports such as silver, which faced a 12.5% tariff, and other heavily taxed goods, will gain from reduced Indian tariffs, increasing their competitiveness in the Indian market.

What are the challenges associated with this FTA?

- Tariff Negotiation Challenges:** Indian goods like pharmaceuticals, which already have zero tariffs, won't benefit from the FTA. While UK exports to India, such as cars and whisky, are highly taxed (cars at 100-125% and whisky at 150%), this may be reduced but not fully eliminated.
- Environmental and Labor Standards:** India is cautious about committing to stringent sustainability criteria and labor standards within the FTA, fearing they may become non-tariff barriers.

3. **Market Access and Equal Treatment:** The UK desires equal market access in all sectors, a demand that India is expected to resist. In particular, the competitive and restrictive nature of India's government procurement market may hinder UK firms seeking a level playing field.

What should be done?

1. **Negotiate Social Security Contributions:** A **totalization agreement** should be included to exempt Indian workers from UK social security payments, acknowledging their short stays.
2. **Treaty Alignment:** The FTA and BIT (Bilateral Investment Treaty) negotiations should be aligned to complement each other effectively.
3. **Safeguard Digital Economy:** India should maintain its stance on data protection to preserve its digital sovereignty, avoiding unfettered cross-border data flows.
4. **Prepare for Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism:** India should negotiate FTA terms that consider the potential impact of the UK's proposed carbon border adjustment mechanism on Indian exports.

Terminology used:

Totalization Agreements: It serves as bilateral deals to stop double payment of social security taxes by workers abroad. They ensure that employees don't pay these taxes to both their home country and the country where they work on the same earnings.

Supreme Court's MFN verdict

News: This article discusses the issues with the recent Supreme Court verdict on the application of MFN status.

A detailed article on the **MFN verdict controversy** can be [read here](#).

Read more about **MFN Status** [here](#).

What are the issues with the ruling?

According to the author, the verdict has the following lacunae:

1. Harms Ease of Doing Business in India:

a. **Tax Burden:** This ruling will impose a tax burden estimated to be ₹11,000 crore on foreign investors.

b. **Retrospective application of laws:** It may also lead to opening past cases.

c. **Uncertainty in Tax Policy:** By both legislative and judicial pronouncements.

2. **Defeats the purpose of MFN status:** MFN status, by definition, refers to non-discriminatory standards in economic treaties. It ensures that future benefits given to a third country by one of the treaty-signing countries become automatically available to its treaty partners.

For instance, if country A and country B have signed a treaty and country A later signs a treaty granting certain benefits to country C, these benefits should automatically be made available to country B.

3. **Issues with the Doctrine of Dualism:** The Supreme Court had moved away from this principle in cases such as the *Vishakha* and *Puttaswamy* case. It meant that domestic law would be interpreted to not contradict India's obligations under international law.

This approach ensured that progressive international law is given effect by the courts to protect the rights of citizens even if there is no domestic law.

Terminology used:

Doctrine of dualism: It implies that international law is not enforceable domestically till it is transformed into municipal law through enabling legislation.

On India's stance in the UN on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

News: This article discusses the implications of India's vote at the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the war in Gaza considering the complex geopolitics of the Middle East.

A detailed article on the **Israel-Palestine Conflict** can be [read here](#).

What is the Israel-Palestine Conflict?

It is one of the world's longest running and most controversial conflicts. It is a conflict between two self-determination movements - the Jewish nationalist project and the Palestinian nationalist project, in the same territory.

Recently, on October 7th, 2023, Palestinian militant organization Hamas attacked Israel. The ongoing retaliatory attacks from Israel in the Gaza Strip have led to a huge loss of life and property.

What was India's stance in the UN?

India **abstained (chose not to vote)** on the Arab resolution calling for a **humanitarian truce in Gaza**. Additionally, India **supported** a Canadian resolution **condemning the Hamas attack** on Israel.

What does India's stance at the UN signify?

1. **Departure from the earlier stance:** In the past, India voted in favour of Arab resolutions against Israel as a matter of routine and avoided the question of terrorism emanating from the Arab world.
2. **Condemning terrorism:** With its latest vote, India has underlined its **concerns on international terrorism**. India was right in pointing out that the Arab resolution did not condemn the October 7 attack by Hamas on Israel.
3. **Two-state solution:** India also reiterated its support for a **two-state solution** between Israel and Palestine.

This replaces the **traditional defensive political correctness** with a policy rooted in a **hard-headed realistic assessment** of the shifting regional dynamic.

Why is India's stance right with respect to terrorism?

With respect to Israel: The world's fight against terrorism cannot be successful if countries targeted by terrorism respond in a violent way (like Israel), which will birth another generation of terrorists.

With respect to Hamas: Terror groups often have **transnational links** and being selective, serves no purpose.

What diplomatic and political efforts can help India protect its geopolitical interests?

1. **Diplomatic and political outreach to the Arab world:** India should explain its commitment to Palestine's full statehood, press Israel to respect the laws of war, and increase humanitarian assistance to Gaza. PM's recent **telephone calls to moderate leaders** of the Arab world was a good step.
2. **Ensure all-party consensus:** The government needs to invite Opposition leaders for a full briefing and explain the considerations shaping its regional policy.
3. **Regulate fringe groups:** India needs to crack down on the extremist groups that are spreading disinformation and undermining its strategy of interest-based realism in the Middle East.

Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora

On the functioning of the IMF – Act with urgency to reform

News: The global economy faces challenges like climate change, pandemics, and debt. To address this, the article suggests reforming the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The proposed changes focus on making the IMF fairer, updating its responsibilities, and improving its decision-making process. This will help stabilize the global financial system.

Why is there a need to reform the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?

1. **Limited Resources:** The global economy's challenges, from climate change to debt burdens, require more resources than are currently available.
2. **Addressing Inequalities:** Current IMF practices risk increasing global inequalities and shortages, necessitating reforms for a fairer system.
3. **Quota Discrepancies:** Quotas in the IMF don't reflect the current economic significance of member countries. For example, China's quota (6.40 % of total) is disproportionately small compared to its economic stature, while the U.S. (17.43%) enjoys outsized influence. Whereas India's quota is (2.75%).
4. **Decision-making Power:** An 85% majority is needed for crucial IMF decisions, effectively giving the U.S. a veto. This was highlighted as an issue by the Palais Royal Initiative.
5. **Special Drawing Rights (SDR) Allocation:** The \$ 650 billion Special Drawing Rights (SDR) allocation in 2021 was distributed based on quotas, benefiting richer countries more than those in need.
6. **Uneven Surveillance:** Currently, the IMF's scrutiny is primarily on countries seeking its funds, leaving influential nations unchecked.

What are the reforms required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?

1) Fairness:

- a. **Quotas:** Adjust quotas to reflect true economic importance of the present.
- b. **Composition of Board of Directors:** Modify for a balanced representation. Propose reducing the 85% majority criterion for important decisions. It currently grants the U.S. a de facto veto power.
- c. **Distribution of Special Drawing Rights (SDR):** Change the system for fairness. For instance, earmark 20% of future SDR allocations for the poorest countries, contrasting the 2021 \$650 billion distribution based on quotas.
- d. **In IMF Surveillance:** Focus on countries with significant external reserves or systemic influence, ensuring an even-handed approach.

2) Mandate:

- a. **Surveillance of Capital Flows:** Monitor capital movements closely to manage economic stability.
- b. **Role of a Global Central Bank:** Use SDRs to manage global liquidity, effectively functioning as a global central bank.
- c. **Role of Lender-of-Last-Resort:** Explicitly recognize this role, providing security against capital-flow fluctuations.

3) Governance:

- a. **Strengthen the Decision-Making Role:** Empower the International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC) for enhanced decision-making.
- b. **Review the G20's Composition:** Ensure universal and equitable representation. Example: Steps taken under India's G20 presidency for broader representation.

Terminology used:

Special Drawing Rights (SDR):

1. The SDR is an international reserve asset created by the IMF to supplement the official reserves of its member countries.
2. The SDR is not a currency. It is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members. As such, SDRs can provide a country with liquidity.
3. A basket of currencies defines the SDR: the US dollar, Euro, Chinese Yuan, Japanese Yen, and the British Pound.

Palais Royal Initiative:

1. The Palais-Royal Initiative is a response to the global financial crisis.
2. A group of 18 experts wanted to understand if the international monetary system caused the crisis. They met at the Palais Royal in Paris. They wrote papers and sought advice from institutions like the IMF. They made proposals to improve the global finance system.
3. These were given to the G-20 president in 2011.
4. The initiative is private and aims to promote international cooperation.

On the shortcomings of UN – Is the United Nations toothless in ending wars?

News: This article discusses the reasons behind the inability of the United Nations to prevent violent conflicts. It also highlights reasons for the lack of diplomatic efforts to curtail the ongoing violence in Gaza.

A detailed article on the **Israel-Palestine Conflict and India** can be [read here](#).

The recent conflicts in Gaza and between Russia-Ukraine have led to questions about the inability of the United Nations in bringing about peace.

How does the United Nations maintain peace and prevent conflict?

1. **Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation:** UN plays an important role in conflict prevention, using diplomacy, offices and mediation.
2. **Peacekeeping Operations:** Peacekeeping operations are called upon to maintain peace and security, and also to facilitate political processes, protect civilians, assist in disarmament, etc.
3. **Peacebuilding Efforts:** These are aimed at assisting countries emerging from conflict.
4. **Countering Terrorism:** 18 universal instruments against international terrorism have been elaborated.
5. **UNGA: The General Assembly** makes recommendations in the form of resolutions. Decisions on important questions, such as those on peace and security, are taken here.
6. **UNSC: The Security Council** can take enforcement measures to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such measures range from economic sanctions to international military action.

Why is the UN ineffective in bringing in a ceasefire in violent conflicts?

1. **Disagreement among the major powers:** The major powers in the UN have differences, it has made it impossible for the UN with its frozen membership of decision-making bodies, such as the UNSC, to be able to undertake any meaningful action.
2. **Unipolarity due to lack of a counterbalancing power:** The end of the Cold War saw the demise of the Soviet Union and chaos. Post the Cold War, we saw a gradual decline in the ability of the UN to undertake any kind of meaningful role (in resolving conflicts).
3. **Issues with the Veto Power:** The UNSC, in its present veto model, does not provide any hope for addressing any international issue, since the national interests of the permanent 5 are in conflict.
4. **Myth of the Liberal international order:** During the Cold War, we had a liberal Western order led by the USA, not an international order. **For instance**, the USA's actions in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, reflected

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

the ineffectiveness of the UN and the USA did what it wanted. There was no UN sanction to any of these conflicts.

Why is there a lack of diplomatic willingness to control the violence in this conflict?

1. **Delicate domestic political situation:** There have been sustained protests in Israel over controversial judicial reforms. The continuation of the conflict may serve a political end.
2. **Lack of sympathy from the Arab World:** Within the Gulf Arab states, there is little sympathy for the Palestinian cause. Even in Egypt and Jordan, there is little sympathy.
3. **USA's domestic political situation:** The USA is also caught up with an election. The progress on the Abraham Accords has been stalled.

What is India's foreign policy stance on the recent Israel-Palestine conflict?

1. India's interests in the West Asian region have grown. India has **strong ties** with the Gulf Arab states and with Israel, and a **large diaspora**. In addition, India gets **energy supplies** from the Gulf Arab states.
2. In the recent Gaza Conflict, Hon'ble **Prime Minister tweeted in a pro-Israel manner** at the beginning of the conflict.
3. A few days later, the official spokesperson balanced it out by reiterating **India's traditional position** on the Israel-Palestinian issue, stressing the **two-state solution**. Thereafter, we have sent **aid to Palestinians** and the Prime Minister has talked to various Arab leaders.

Topic: India and its neighborhood - relations.

Shift in Maldives' foreign policy- With Mohamed Muizzu's India-out policy, Turkey's inroads into Maldives

News: The article talks about how the Maldives, under its new President Mohamed Muizzu, is changing its foreign policy by choosing Turkey as a key partner.

There is a big shift in Maldives policy from its previous focus on India and China. Turkey, under President Erdogan, is becoming more influential in the region. The Maldives is using its strategic position to balance between different powerful countries. This change challenges India, which needs to adjust its strategy.

What is the new shift in Maldives' foreign policy?

1. **Historical Context:** Previous President Abdulla Yameen favored China, while his successor Ibrahim Solih adopted an "India First" policy. Now, Muizzu's decision reflects a new direction.
2. **Strategic Position of Maldives:** The Maldives, with its critical location in the Indian Ocean, is leveraging its position to form new alliances, as seen in its pivot towards Turkey.
3. **Geopolitical Implications:** This shift highlights the changing dynamics in South Asian geopolitics, with smaller states like the Maldives playing major powers against each other for strategic advantages.

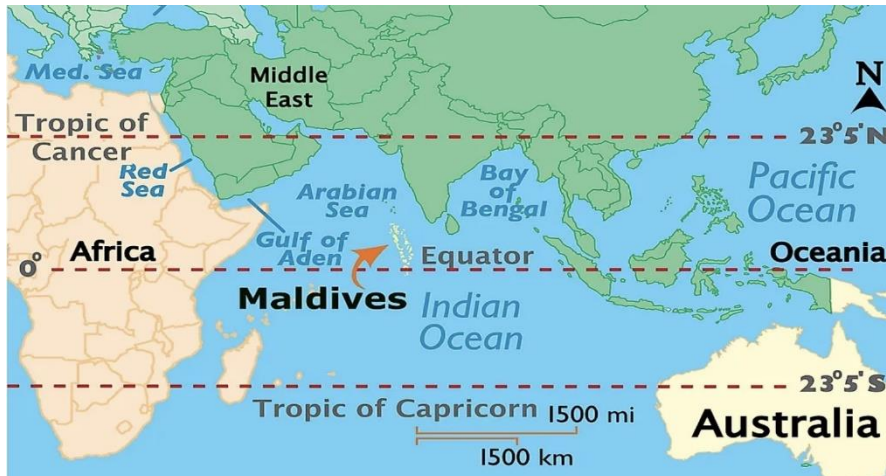


Figure 2. Source: World Atlas

For more information on India- Maldives relations, [read here](#).

Why is Turkey's role important?

Turkey's Multi-dimensional Role: Turkey is broadening its influence due to its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East and NATO membership. It is involved in strengthening its influence in Middle East, Asia

and Africa. This is evident in Turkey's deepening relations with Pakistan and its stance on issues like Kashmir, as well as in the Maldives' recent choice to make Turkey the destination for President Muizzu's first official visit.

What are the implications for India?

1. **Strategic challenge:** The Maldives' position in the Indian Ocean is crucial for major powers, including India, for controlling sea lines of communication. Maldives foreign policy shift could impact India's strategic interests.
2. **Potential for Regional Instability:** India needs to be wary of the potential destabilization in the region due to Turkey's rising influence. It is because Turkey is closer to other regional players like Pakistan.

What should be done?

1. **Acknowledging Small States' Agency:** India should recognize the growing influence and strategic leverage of smaller nations like the Maldives. It's important for India to remain patiently engaged, leveraging its geographical proximity and historical ties.
2. **Engagement in Domestic Politics:** Understanding and involving itself in the internal political dynamics of the Maldives is crucial for India.
3. **Collaborating with Gulf Nations:** To counter Turkey's influence in the Maldives, India could collaborate with Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
4. **Expanding Strategic Outreach:** India should look to broaden its foreign policy reach beyond South Asia. Actively engaging in regions like the Middle East and Central Asia could serve as a counterweight to Turkey's growing influence.

On India-Bhutan Relations - Closer together

News: This article discusses the outcomes of the recent meeting of India's Prime Minister and Bhutan's King Wangchuck. It also discusses Bhutan's Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji's visit to China, marking progress in resolving border disputes and potentially normalizing relations between the two nations. India remains quiet but watchful, as these developments could impact the regional dynamics and its relationship with Bhutan.

A detailed article on **India-Bhutan relations** can be [read here](#).

What are the various development initiatives being planned by India and Bhutan?

1. **Rail Links:** Discussions are ongoing for establishing rail connections between Kokrajhar in Assam and Gelephu in Bhutan; and between Banarhat (West Bengal) and Samtse (Bhutan).
2. **Infrastructure Upgrades:** Checkpoints along the India-Bhutan border are being upgraded to facilitate easier trade and movement.
3. **Special Economic Zone:** Bhutan plans to set up a Special Economic Zone at Bhutan's southern border with Assam to drive growth and investment.
4. **Airport Development:** A new airport at Gelephu is proposed to increase accessibility and promote economic development.
5. **Energy Integration:** An 'energy exchange' is planned to share hydropower resources between Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, promoting intra-regional growth.

What are the implications of these initiatives?

1. **Regional Development:** The infrastructure projects like rail links could transform the economies of West Bengal, Bhutan's southern and eastern districts, and northern Bangladesh.
2. **Economic Diversification:** Bhutan's reliance on hydropower and tourism might reduce with the proposed Special Economic Zone and new trade routes.
3. **Reduced Emigration:** Enhanced job opportunities from these initiatives could stem the outflow of Bhutan's educated youth and professionals.
4. **Increased Exports:** The Preferential Trade Agreement with Bangladesh may raise the export of Bhutanese goods.
5. **Energy Distribution:** The energy exchange program aims to distribute Bhutanese and Nepali hydropower across the region, increasing revenues and energy security.
6. **Strategic Stability:** The projects serve as a strategic counter to China's influence and help secure India's northeastern corridor, contributing to regional stability.

What was the significance of Bhutan's FM visit to China?

1. **Historic visit:** Tandi Dorji made a historic visit to China as Bhutan's first foreign minister to do so, marking a potential turning point in long-standing border disputes.
2. **Border Negotiations:** The visit concluded the 25th round of border talks, moving closer to resolving territorial disagreements that have lasted for decades.
3. **Cooperation Agreement:** Bhutan and China signed a cooperation agreement to create a joint technical team responsible for the demarcation of disputed boundaries. Diplomatic Progress: The visit indicates a move towards normalizing diplomatic relations between Bhutan and China, which has been a cautious and gradual process over the years.
4. **Economic Considerations:** Bhutan's economic engagement with China has grown, with Chinese exports to Bhutan increasing significantly from ₹200 crore in 2020 to ₹1,500 crore in 2022, reflecting a shift in Bhutan's economic alliances.

Why is Bhutan changing its approach to China?

1. **Strategic Pressures:** Bhutan is responding to China's new territorial claims and border activities, which include intrusions and settlement promotions in disputed areas, driving Bhutan to seek a resolution.
2. **Economic Shifts:** The growth in trade with China, from ₹200 crore to ₹1,500 crore in two years, and Bhutan's increasing imports of Chinese capital goods and appliances, reflect a deeper economic bond influencing Bhutan's foreign policy.
3. **Societal Changes:** With the challenge of a youth exodus and the need for economic reform, Bhutan views China as a crucial partner for development and stability.

4. **Global Realignment:** Bhutan acknowledges China's significant place in global affairs and is realigning its diplomatic stance to match the changing geopolitical landscape.

How would it impact India?

1. **Strategic Silence:** India has remained quiet, suggesting it trusts Bhutan to respect mutual interests despite its new engagements with China.
2. **Trade Dynamics:** India's significant trade with Bhutan, which includes importing 70% of Bhutan's exports and has grown to ₹13,400 crore in 2022, might face changes with Bhutan's increased economic ties with China.
3. **Hydropower Projects:** India's involvement in Bhutan's hydropower sector, critical for both economies, could be impacted by Bhutan's economic diversification.
4. **Security Cooperation:** India trains Bhutanese soldiers, and any shift in Bhutan's foreign policy might require adjustments in this longstanding cooperation.

For more information on **India-Bhutan relations**, [read here](#)

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment

On demands for reservation – Maratha reservation: Why everyone wants a 'sarkari naukri'

News: The article discusses three different groups in India: Yadav men demanding an Ahir regiment, skill development trainees in Ranchi wanting government jobs, and Maratha protestors seeking reservations. All these groups, despite living in a time of increasing private enterprise, are looking towards the state for social and economic mobility. The state appears more powerful and secure, especially in contrast to the precarious private sector.

Why do a very large number of people desire state jobs in India?

1. **Perceived Power of the State:** The state is seen as more powerful than ever. People feel that being within the state system offers protection against arbitrary actions.
2. **Job Security, Stability and Respect:** Government jobs offer a higher standard of "respectability", Stability and security compared to private sector jobs.
3. **Economic and Social mobility:** Even with the rise of private enterprise, the state's role in economic and social mobility remains attractive, making government jobs more desirable.
4. **Market Regulation:** The state has been lax in regulating the market, leading to potential vulnerabilities for those in private jobs. The weakening of labour laws has also tilted preference towards state jobs.

How is the market failing the people?

1. **Lack of Regulation:** The state hasn't adequately regulated the market, leaving many exposed to its vulnerabilities. Persistent efforts to **dilution of labor laws** have left workers without protection. This shows the state siding with private employers over individual workers' needs.

2. **Lack of Trust in the Private Sector:** Despite the push for private enterprise, many see state jobs as more desirable due to their security and respectability. This suggests a lack of trust in the private sector's ability to provide stable employment.
3. **Unlimited Market Power:** The market's unchecked power determines many aspects of life, yet without the necessary protections, it fails to ensure the well-being of all its participants.

On Currency in Circulation – Cash questions

News: The article discusses the issue of currency in circulation increasing in India despite a significant growth in digital payments at the same time.

What is the status of digital payments in India?

One of the most significant developments of recent years is the widespread adoption of digital payments. Facilitated by the Unified Payments Interface, **between 2016-17 and 2022-23**, digital payments expanded at a **CAGR of 51% in volume** terms, and **CAGR of 27% in value**.

What are the benefits of using digital payments?

1. **Instant and convenient mode of payment:** Unlike cash, money can be instantaneously transferred to the beneficiary's account using digital modes like using mobile number or easy-to-remember virtual payment address (email-like address).
2. **Enhanced financial inclusion:** People who may have been deterred by the time, and travelling cost involved in physically accessing a bank outlet can now conveniently access the bank account digitally and get various benefits of being part of the formal banking system.
3. **Increased transparency in government system:** Earlier government cash transfers were subject to "leakage" and "ghost" (fake) recipients. Now, benefits are directly transferred to target beneficiary's account through digital modes of payments.
4. **Safe and secure:** Recipients of cash payments are vulnerable to theft. Digital payments are secure as multiple levels of authentication are required for making transactions.
5. **Formalization of Economy:** Unlike cash payments, digital payments automatically establish a user's financial footprint. This leads to formalization of the economy because of increased access to Financial Services, Reduction in informal Cash Transactions, ensuring Tax Compliance, etc.

However, despite the adoption of digital payments, demand for cash, as reflected by Currency in Circulation, has also been growing.

What is meant by Currency in Circulation (CiC)?

Currency in circulation is the value of all the banknotes and coins that a country's monetary authority has issued, minus the amount that has been removed from circulation. It is a key part of a country's money supply.

What is the status of currency circulation in India?

The demand for cash increased significantly during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020-21, CiC increased by 16.6% of GDP, against an annual average of 12.7% during the past decade.

In 2021-22, this has come down to 13.2% of GDP.

Notably, CiC is higher than the 11.5-12% of GDP in the pre-demonetisation period.

ON STRONG NOTE

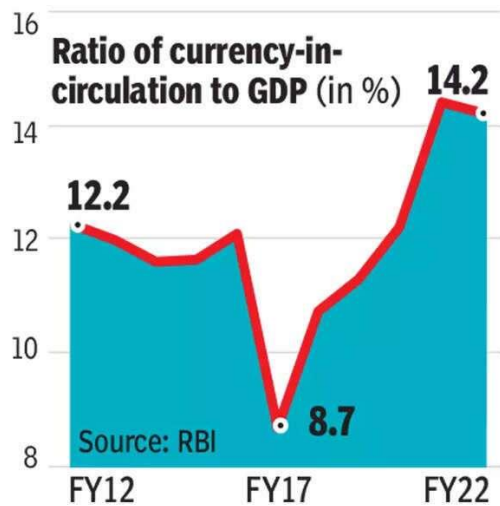


Figure 3. Source: Times of India.

What are the factors influencing the increasing demand for cash in the economy?

- 1. Disruption caused by the Pandemic:** This may have led to a behavioural changes with people now keeping more cash to deal with uncertain situations.
- 2. Growing Informalisation of the Workforce:** The informal sector depends on cash for settlements, which may be driving the demand. Higher CiC may be an indication of the growing informalisation of the workforce.
- 3. Higher Inflation:** The rise can also be attributed to higher inflation in recent years. CiC tends to grow during episodes of high inflation (since it necessitates more spending).
- 4. Direct benefits received digitally but used as cash:** The benefits are transferred through digital modes, but their actual usage is in cash because of a variety of factors (such as village shopkeepers not having the option of digital payment).
- 5. Tax Evasion and Black Money:** It is possible that cash is still being used in large transactions to avoid taxes in sectors such as real estate. Recent reports of cash seizure, especially at the time of elections, suggest that illicit cash is still being generated in the system.

On India's inclusion in Global Bond Index – Caution: The watch word for bond index inclusion

News: The article discusses the pros and cons of India's recent inclusion in Global Bond Index.

JPMorgan announced in September that India would be included in its Global Bond Index **GBI-EM Global Index suite** starting 28 June 2024. However, neither RBI nor the Centre has been overly enthusiastic about it.

What are Global Bond Indices?

Global bond indices include emerging debt markets that closely monitor local currency bonds that are issued by governments of various developing nations.

When a country's government bonds are added to one or all of these indices, they can get a safe entry into the buy zone of foreign portfolio investors. This enhances the liquidity and ownership base of the bonds.

One such global bond index is the **JPMorgan Govt Bond Index-Emerging Markets (GBI-EM)**.

What are the pros of India's inclusion in a major global bond index?

- 1. Expansion of investor base for Government Security:** An expansion of the investor base for Govt-Securities will improve the govt's fiscal situation.
- 2. Strengthening of Rupee:** Appreciation of Indian Rupee due to an influx of dollars in the economy (the dollar will require conversion to the rupee, thereby increasing its demand).
- 3. Increased Capital Inflows:** With India's inclusion in the index, additional inflows to the tune of \$20-25 billion are expected.
- 4. Lower Borrowing Costs:** Inclusion in global indices will reduce bond yields and can lead to lower borrowing costs for the Indian government and corporates.
- 5. Less Risk:** Investments expected are in rupee-denominated securities and hence not that risky (compared to dollar debt).

India has sufficient forex reserves and RBI has a track record of handling large-scale inflows and large-scale outflows to manage any associated risks. However, the move requires close consideration due to the following reasons.

What are the cons of India's inclusion in a major global bond index?

1. **Risk of Capital Flight:** According to the RBI Governor, there are lots of passive investors who are mainly influenced by the weightage in the index. Any reduction in India's weightage, for reason such as, say, the government's refusal to toe a line laid down by major Western powers, could see an exodus of funds from the country.
2. **Risky dependency on foreign funds:** The risk of being held hostage to the whims of foreign funds (often subject to political pressures, as we saw in the context of Russia's ouster from Western capital markets).
3. **Pressure on Forex Market:** As holdings will be converted into foreign currency for withdrawal from India, enormous pressure will be built on our relatively thin forex markets.
4. **Depreciation of the Rupee:** A sudden bulk demand for dollars would put downward pressure on the rupee, resulting in its depreciation. This will have further implications such as:
 - a. **Inflation** (as oil imports become costlier).
 - b. Increase in **current account deficit** (as import bills swell).
 - c. Increase in **fiscal deficit** (as the government is compelled to subsidize petroleum products that become costlier).

Apart from this, reasons given against a move to more capital account convertibility apply to GBI inclusion as well. This includes factors such as:

1. **Vulnerability to External Shocks:** It makes a country more susceptible to volatile international financial flows. Sudden inflows or outflows of capital can destabilize the economy, leading to currency volatility, financial crises, and macroeconomic instability.
2. **Impact on Domestic Industries:** A sudden influx of foreign capital can impact domestic industries. For example, it may lead to the appreciation of the domestic currency, making exports more expensive and imports cheaper, potentially harming local industries.

Thus, India should approach this inclusion with caution, taking the risks into consideration.

On Currency Substitution – Can dollarisation save an economy?

News: The article discusses the possible advantages as well as the challenges of currency substitution (dollarisation by Argentina, in this case).

Background:

Javier Milei, the recent winner of Argentina's presidential election, has plans to replace the country's currency of peso with the dollar (**dollarisation**). Argentina has been suffering under inflation levels greater than 100%, high rates of poverty and declining purchasing power.

What is dollarisation?

Dollarisation is the term for when US Dollar is used in addition to or instead of the domestic currency of another country. It is an example of **currency substitution**. Dollarization usually happens when a country's own currency loses its usefulness as a medium of exchange, due to hyperinflation or instability.

What are the benefits of dollarisation?

1. Tackles Hyperinflation: If the domestic currency is replaced by dollars, the money supply in the economy can no longer be controlled by vested political interests who can increase spending (and hence the money supply) for political ends (such as unsustainable freebies).

The rise of prices would be forced to moderate since consumers would no longer be able to access currency easily, thus slowing down consumption demand.

2. Accelerate Growth: This can be achieved through:

a. **Increase Investments & Exports:** To access dollars through foreign trade and/or capital inflows, the economy will have to focus on increasing exports and easing conditions for the movement of foreign capital.

b. **Ensure Financial Stability:** The stable value of the dollar ensures that economic agents, both foreign and domestic, would be able to make long-term plans regarding economic activity.

c. **Loss of the Ability to Manipulate Currency:** It would ensure the government resorts to productive methods to increase exports, instead of merely artificially depreciating the currency.

What are the challenges with dollarisation?

1. Loss of the ability to control money supply: The adoption of dollars implies that the economy loses its hold on monetary policy (controlling the money supply in the economy).

For instance, **Greece**, in the wake of the **Eurozone crisis** (the struggle faced by Eurozone countries in paying off debts they had accumulated over decades), was left without the ability to control both fiscal and monetary policy.

2. Loss of the ability to depreciate one's currency: On the foreign trade front, countries would no longer be able to take recourse to depreciation of currency to boost exports.

3. Not enough on its own: For instance, after dollarisation, the Ecuadorian economy showed considerable progress on economic indicators. However, dollarisation was not the sole reason for success. Policy decisions such as new contracts with oil exploration companies, social spending, restructuring of debt, etc. played an important role in its economic success.

What should be done?

The achievement of economic prosperity is a complex affair that requires sustained engagement with policy-making. Thus, dollarisation, if used well in conjunction with smart domestic policy, can offer a route to economic success.

Migrant Workers in India - The hypocrisy of our concern for workers trapped in Uttarkashi tunnel

News: The article highlights the difficulties faced by migrant workers in India, who are vital for development yet frequently overlooked. It uses the tragic incident of a collapsed tunnel in Uttarakhand as an example of their dangerous working conditions and societal neglect.

Who are the migrant workers in India?

Migrant workers in India are people who move within the country for work. This movement includes rural-to-urban migration, rural-to-rural, within and between states, and circular or seasonal relocations.

They typically come from poor states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand, seeking jobs in richer regions such as Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, and Karnataka.

About 35-40% of Indians are part of this internal migration. Their migration is influenced by the low level of formal sector employment in India, which is around 22% as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2021-2022.

What challenges do migrant workers face?

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

1. **Unsafe Working Conditions:** Instances like the Uttarakhand tunnel incident underscore the risks they face, including building collapses and industrial accidents due to inadequate safety measures.
2. **Inadequate Legal Protection:** The only law addressing their needs, the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act of 1979, is poorly implemented. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and neglect.
3. **Discrimination and Social Exclusion:** They are often treated as outsiders and face discrimination in their host cities. There are no policies specifically designed to protect their rights and well-being.
4. **Poor Living Conditions:** Migrant workers frequently live in substandard housing and lack access to basic healthcare and education for their children.

What are the government initiatives for migrant workers in India?

1. **National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW):** Aims to create a comprehensive database with Aadhaar-seeded information like name, occupation, and skills, enhancing employability and social security access.
2. **Schemes for Welfare:** Includes Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri SVANIDHI Scheme, Aatm Nirbhar Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, One Nation One Ration Card, and financial assistance for construction workers.
3. **All India Survey on Migrant Workers:** Conducted by the Labour Bureau for detailed insights into migrant workers' conditions.
4. **Education and Scholarships:** Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan provides free education to children of migrant workers. Scholarships are offered through the National Scholarship Portal.
5. **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (OSH Code) 2020:** This code replaces the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act (1979), ensuring better working conditions, wages, and social security for migrant workers.

What should be done?

1. **Develop Comprehensive Policies:** Create specific policies addressing the unique needs of migrant workers, including healthcare, housing, and education for their children.
2. **Enhance Safety Measures:** Implement stricter safety protocols in workplaces, especially in high-risk environments like construction sites, to prevent incidents like the Uttarakhand tunnel collapse.
3. **Build Thoughtful Cities:** Develop urban areas that prioritize the dignity and needs of migrant workers. Move beyond just "smart cities" to create spaces that are accommodating and respectful of those who migrate for work.

Political parties promising "freebies" - What elite critics of freebies don't understand

News: The article discusses the trend of Indian political parties promising expensive welfare schemes, or "freebies," during elections. This practice is criticized for being financially irresponsible and potentially harmful to state finances. The article also explores why parties rely on such tactics.

What are freebies?

According to the Reserve Bank of India report in 2022, freebies are defined as items or services provided free of charge as a public welfare measure. They can be differentiated from broader welfare goods, like health and education, but such a distinction poses significant challenge.

What are the reasons for the use of freebies by political parties?

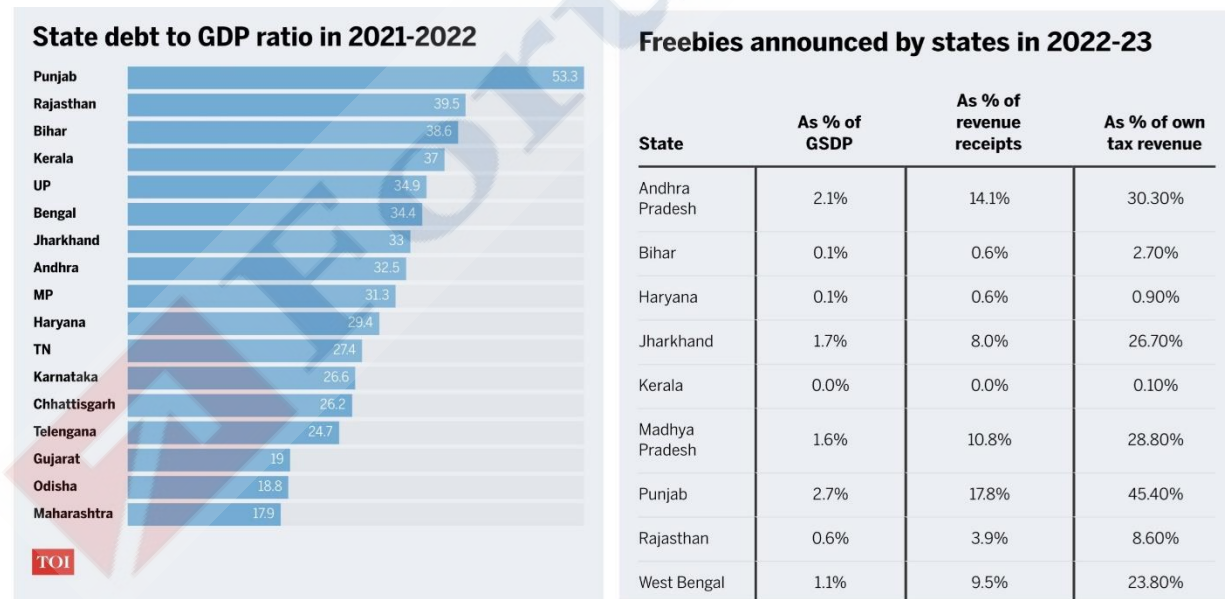
1. **Freebies as welfare measures:** Political parties consider freebies as part of welfare measures. As such, they view it as a part of their political mandate and include it in their election manifesto.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

2. **Voter appeal:** Freebies like cash transfers and smartphones are attractive to voters. They offer immediate and tangible benefits, making them effective for winning support.
3. **Simplification of messaging:** In the complex arena of electoral politics, freebies provide a simple, easily communicable message. Compared to nuanced policy discussions, direct benefits are straightforward to explain and understand.
4. **Show quick results:** Implementing long-term developmental projects is complex and time-consuming. Freebies, on the other hand, are easier to deliver and show quick results, which is advantageous for parties in power seeking to demonstrate their effectiveness.
5. **Freebies are not a form of corrupt practice under the Representation of People's Act:** In *S. Subramaniam Balaji vs. State of Tamil Nadu* case, the Supreme Court ruled that political parties are within their rights to make electoral promises, including the distribution of consumer goods. The court determined that making such promises does not constitute corrupt practice. This has further supported the arguments made by political parties in favour of freebies.

Why are freebies harmful to the nation?

1. **Financial Strain on State Finances:** Offering freebies can lead to fiscal irresponsibility. It strains state budgets, as highlighted by RBI. This may even hinder the government's ability to provide basic amenities.
2. **Undermining Party Platforms:** Excessive reliance on freebies can erode the ideological framework of political parties. It shifts focus from comprehensive policy-making to short-term benefits, weakening the party's foundational principles.
3. **Creating Unsustainable Expectations:** The trend of offering larger benefits with each election creates unsustainable expectations among voters. This cycle can lead to a fiscal race to the bottom, where parties continuously promise more without regard for long-term fiscal health.
4. **Reducing Credibility:** Overemphasis on freebies can diminish a party's credibility. It suggests a lack of substantial policies and hence, reliance on short-term tactics for voter appeal.



What should be done?

1. **Fiscal Responsibility:** The Election Commission of India has proposed that political parties disclose the financial impact of their manifesto promises. This will enable evaluation of such freebies against their trade-offs to ensure fiscal health and avoid straining budgets.

2. **Clear Distinction:** Make a clear distinction between what constitutes a public good and a freebie. This distinction is crucial to avoid misuse of public funds for short-term electoral gains.
3. **Attitudinal change: Eradication of unnecessary freebie culture requires an attitudinal change** in the masses. This warrants delivery of robust political and moral education at all levels.
4. **Governance Focus:** Focus on governance and execution of policies that offer long-term benefits, such as infrastructure development and job creation, rather than short-term giveaways.

For more information on **Freebies**, [read here](#).

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.

On NITI Aayog's Vision @2047 - India in 2047

News: This article discusses the NITI Aayog's goal for India's economy to hit \$30 trillion by 2047, requiring a 9% yearly growth. It also highlights the major challenges in achieving this target, and the importance of investing in education and renewable energy.

What is India's vision@2047?

India's Vision@2047:

Amrit Kaal: Period between 75th and 100th independence anniversaries symbolizing transformative growth.

Viksit Bharat@2047: Aim to become a developed nation by 2047 through a collective 'Team India' approach.

Balanced Economic Growth: Focus on both macro-economic growth and micro-level welfare.

Technological Advancements: Promote digital economy, fintech, and technology-enabled development.

Environmental Commitment: Prioritize energy transition and proactive climate action.

Investment Strategy: Public capital investment to stimulate private investments.

Saptarishi Principles:

- 1) Ensure Inclusive Development.
- 2) Benefit even the most remote areas.
- 3) Develop infrastructure and encourage investment.
- 4) Tap into national strengths.
- 5) Advocate for sustainable, green growth.
- 6) Empower the youth.
- 7) Strengthen the financial sector.

What will NITI Aayog's Vision @2047 document include?

Based on India's vision for 2047, NITI Aayog is preparing a document to ensure that India can achieve their goal within the given time.

1. **Economic Target:** Aim to become a \$30 trillion economy by 2047 with a per capita income between \$18,000-20,000.
2. **Sectoral Focus:** It includes 10 sectors like rural and agriculture, infrastructure, technology, and governance.
3. **Structural Changes:** Highlight reforms to achieve the economic target and address overlaps in roles of different ministries and departments.
4. **Global Engagement:** Details of India's role in global trade, investment, technology, research, and development will be included.
5. **Indian Companies:** Identify potential Indian businesses that could become global leaders and strategize their growth ecosystem.
6. **Human Capital:** Insights on developing human resources and leveraging India's market size.
7. **Addressing Disparities:** Strategies to address regional economic disparities.
8. **Milestones:** Provide a roadmap detailing India's positions in 2030 and 2047.
9. **Governance:** Recommendations to modernize bureaucracy, emphasizing strategic ideation over traditional paperwork.

What challenges lie ahead in achieving a \$30 trillion economy by 2047?

1. **Global Economic Factors:** Global growth is expected to remain below average. Additionally, some economists predict higher U.S. interest rates for longer durations due to structural factors.
2. **Manufacturing Constraints:** Despite numerous attempts, India hasn't achieved the desired manufacturing output levels. This limitation affects quality job creation, essential for boosting consumption and sustaining growth.

3. **Trade Hurdles:** India's trade strategy, characterized by higher tariffs with fiscal incentives for big producers, might be ineffective in the long run. There's an anticipated trade deficit of over \$3 trillion by 2047.
4. **Infrastructure and Finance:** The government's increased post-pandemic capital expenditure is improving infrastructure but delaying fiscal consolidation. Such continuous high budget deficits and public debt could restrict government interventions.

What should be done?

1. **Review Growth Strategy:** Policymakers should conduct regular reviews and make necessary adjustments to achieve the 9% annual growth target.
2. **Invest in Education and Health:** Allocate more resources to education and health sectors. A skilled workforce is key for long-term growth.
3. **Focus on Renewable Energy:** Increase investments in renewable energy. This will reduce import dependence and make growth sustainable.
4. **Monitor Fiscal Consolidation:** While post-pandemic capital expenditure is crucial, there's a need to balance it with fiscal consolidation to manage deficits and public debt.

India Finance Report on NBFCs

News: The article covers a CAFRAL report on India's NBFCs, noting their improved capital and asset quality. It also expresses worry about increased bank funding for NBFCs, emphasizing potential systemic risks. This underscores the need for regulatory action due to recent monetary policy shifts and the NBFC sector's significance in India's economy.

What are NBFCs?

A Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) is a registered entity under the Companies Act, 1956, specializing in activities such as lending, investing in financial securities, leasing, and insurance. It excludes primary operations related to agriculture, industry, goods trading, or property transactions. NBFCs are commonly referred to as "shadow banks" because they operate similarly to banks but have fewer regulatory restrictions.

[Read more](#) about NBFCs.

What is CAFRAL?

Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning (CAFRAL) is an independent body established by the Reserve Bank of India. It conducts research and provides insights into India's financial sector, including non-bank financial companies (NBFCs). The CAFRAL report on India's NBFC sector reveals noteworthy trends:

1. **Stronger Capital Position:** The report indicates a significant rise in the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR), soaring from 22.9% in 2019-2020 to 27.6% in 2022-23. This shows improved financial stability.
2. **Enhanced Asset Quality:** Both gross and net non-performing asset (NPA) ratios have consistently decreased, indicating healthier loan portfolios.
3. **Economic Importance:** The NBFC sector's vital role in supporting India's economy, particularly MSMEs, is emphasized. It served as a crucial support system post-2008 Global Financial Crisis, providing credit when banks struggled with NPAs.

What concerns does the CAFRAL report raise?

- 1. Rising Bank Financing for NBFCs:** The report is concerned about the increasing reliance of NBFCs on bank financing. This means that NBFCs are borrowing more from traditional banks to fund their operations. The concern here is that if these NBFCs face financial stress or defaults, it could potentially impact the stability of the banking sector as well, leading to a broader financial crisis.
- 2. Systemic Contagion Risk:** The report emphasizes the need for preventive measures to address the risk of systemic contagion. This means that problems in one NBFC could spread to other financial institutions or even the broader economy. For example, if one NBFC faces a crisis, it might trigger a chain reaction of financial problems across the sector, affecting the real economy and people's livelihoods.
- 3. Monetary Policy Shocks:** The report recognizes the recent shifts in monetary policy, from loose to tight, in response to rising inflation. These abrupt policy changes can catch businesses off-guard and impact the sector.

Terminology used:

Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR): It represents a bank's capital in relation to its risk. In essence, it measures a bank's capital against its risk-weighted assets and present liabilities. This ratio plays a crucial role in safeguarding depositors and enhancing the effectiveness and stability of global financial systems.

NPA: A non-performing asset (NPA) is a loan or advance where the borrower has not made the principal or interest payment for a duration of 90 days or more.

SC Ruling on Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code of India

News: The article discusses how India's Supreme Court upheld laws allowing creditors to claim personal guarantees from defaulting company owners, emphasizing the need to improve debt recovery systems.

What is the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)?

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) is a legal framework in India, introduced in 2016 to address the rising issue of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and debt defaults.

Its key aims include a) Revamping India's corporate distress resolution system. b) Consolidating laws for a time-bound resolution process. c) Shifting control from debtors to creditors.

Objectives of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

- Consolidate and amend all existing insolvency laws in India.
- To simplify and expedite the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Proceedings in India.
- To protect the interest of creditors including stakeholders in a company.
- To revive the company in a time-bound manner.

Created by | ForumIAS®

For more information on IBC, [read here](#)

What is the significance of the Supreme Court ruling on IBC?

- 1. Upholds IBC Provisions:** The Supreme Court ruling supports the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code's inclusion of personal guarantors, allowing creditors to claim from company owners' personal assets if their companies fail to repay debts.
- 2. Closes Loopholes:** This decision plugs legal gaps, ensuring that company promoters can't easily avoid their debt responsibilities.

3. **Promotes Contract Sanctity:** The ruling reinforces the importance of respecting contractual obligations in the business world.

What are the challenges faced by IBC?

The IBC faces challenges in speed and efficiency. The resolution process is slow, averaging 724 days between April and September 2023, far beyond the 330-day limit set by the IBC.

For more details on **Challenges faced by IBC**, [read here](#)

What should be done?

1. **Speed Up Resolution Process:** The current average resolution time is 724 days, significantly more than the IBC's 330-day limit. This needs to be reduced to preserve company value.
2. **Increase Recovery Rates:** With only 5.2% recovery from personal guarantor cases, efforts must be intensified to improve this rate, making it closer to the 31.6% rate in corporate insolvency cases.
3. **Timely Appointments to NCLT:** The Government of India should focus on making timely appointments to the National Company Law Tribunal to handle cases more efficiently.

Key Terminology

- **Insolvency:** It is a situation in which a debtor is unable to pay his/her debts.
- **Bankruptcy:** It is a legal proceeding involving a person or business that is unable to repay their outstanding debts.
- **Liquidation:** It is a process of bringing a business/company to an end. It involves distribution of company's assets among creditors and other claimants.
- **Haircut:** It refers to the reduction in the value of an asset. For example, if haircut is 80%, then 80% of credit owed to its creditors will not get recovered.
- **Moral Hazard:** It is a situation where an economic actor has an incentive to increase its exposure to risk because it does not bear the full costs of that risk.

Created by | ForumIAS®

On Tax demands from the Gaming industry – On gaming industry rules

News: The article discusses how Indian tax authorities have made huge and potentially unlawful tax demands on various entities over the years, including gaming companies. This is causing legal disputes and damaging India's reputation as an investment-friendly country.

What is online gaming?

An online game is available on the internet, accessed through a computer. Players make a deposit and aim to win prizes based on their performance.

What is the current legal status of the online gaming industry in India?

1. **“Game of skill” Vs “Game of chance”:** In India, skill games (like quizzes) are mostly legal (Public Gambling Act, of 1867) and one can bet on them. Chance games (like dice) usually aren't allowed for betting.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

2. **Judicial view:** Supreme Court in the Chamarbaugwala case set a standard called 'preponderance of skill.' This test helps decide if a game is mainly about skill (which is usually legal) or mostly about luck (which could be banned). High Courts in various states have tried to stop online games that involve betting money.
3. **Federal jurisdiction:** State have the sole authority to create laws about betting and gambling, as granted by Entry No. 34 of List II in the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
4. **Central Legislations:**

The **Indian Penal Code of 1860** can punish people for showing or promoting obscene content in public, which can include ads for gambling.

The **Prize Competitions Act of 1955** outlines what qualifies as a competition prize.

The **Lotteries Regulation Act of 1998** says lotteries in India are okay if the state government manages them and the draw is within the state.

Under the **Foreign Exchange Management Act of 1999**, sending lottery or race winnings abroad is illegal.

The **Information Technology Rules of 2011** forbid internet services from hosting gambling content.

Lastly, the **Income Tax Act of 1961 and Central goods and services (GST) Act, 2017**, ensures that legal gambling is taxed, adding to India's GDP.

What were the recent tax demands by the government from the gaming industry?

Indian law and court decisions traditionally exempt games of skill from being taxed as gambling. However, gaming companies have been issued show-cause notices for a huge GST demand totaling Rs 1.5 lakh crore for the period between 2017-2022.

Tax authority demands 28% GST on the full amount pooled by gamers, not just on the service fee.

What are the issues with the gaming industry?

1. **Misclassification:** The gaming industry is inaccurately labeled as gambling by authorities, challenging the CGST Act 2017, and is burdened by a harsh 28% GST, which could cause business closures.
2. **Retrospective Taxation and Legal Volatility:** Unexpected backdated tax claims and legal inconsistencies, are creating a financially and legally unstable environment for gaming companies.
3. **Threat to the Emerging Industry:** The gaming industry's survival is at risk due to excessive tax demands, which not only threatens India's reputation as a secure investment destination but also risks an industry exodus to unregulated foreign portals if tax standards don't align with global norms.

What should be done?

1. **Comprehensive Legislation:** There is a need for specific laws that clearly define the legality, taxation, and regulatory mechanisms for online gaming.
2. **Establishment of a Regulatory Authority:** A central Gaming Authority could monitor industry practices, classify games based on skill or chance, enforce consumer protection, and address potential issues related to crime and societal impact.
3. **Protection of Minors:** Enforcing age limits and verifying user age would prevent underage access to online gaming, especially games involving real money.
4. **Responsible Gaming Measures:** Limiting the amount and time spent on gaming, offering counseling services, and allowing players to self-exclude could mitigate addiction and financial ruin.
5. **Transparency and Fairness:** Removing anonymity and establishing a grievance handling mechanism would enhance user trust and fairness.

On Rural Economic Distress – RBI governor's growth optimism masks rural distress

News: The article discusses how the Reserve Bank of India may be overly optimistic about economic growth, despite evidence of struggling rural demand, poor agricultural conditions, and inflation which are affecting rural consumers more than those in urban areas.

What are the reasons for low rural demand?

1. **Climate and Agricultural Output:** Erratic monsoons and unseasonal rains have affected crop sowing and output, directly impacting rural incomes.
2. **Inflation's Impact:** Rural areas experienced higher inflation, with a September rate of 5.3% compared to urban inflation at 4.65%, squeezing rural consumers' budgets.
3. **Low Employment and Income levels:** The legacy of demonetization and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to hurt rural income and employment recovery.

How is the RBI reacting to rural issues?

1. **Disregarding Rural Distress:** Despite various indicators of rural market weakness, RBI reports seem to overlook these, instead indicating a readiness for rural consumers to "join the party" of economic recovery.
2. **Contradiction in Data and Statements:** The RBI's statements about a decrease in joblessness and potential rural recovery conflict with data from market research and corporate reports that show ongoing rural consumption issues.
3. **MPC's Stance on Rural Demand:** In the minutes from the Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) meeting, there was no significant mention of rural distress, suggesting that the RBI may not be fully acknowledging the rural sector's challenges in their policy discussions.

What should be done to address these challenges?

1. **Acknowledgment of Rural Distress:** RBI should openly recognize the specific challenges facing rural areas, instead of presenting an overly optimistic view of the economy.
2. **Targeted Monetary Policy:** The Monetary Policy Committee needs to consider the distributional effects of its policies and focus on how to support rural demand and mitigate inflation there.
3. **Data-Driven Policy-making:** Policymaking should integrate findings from market research and corporate insights which highlight persistent rural market weakness.

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:

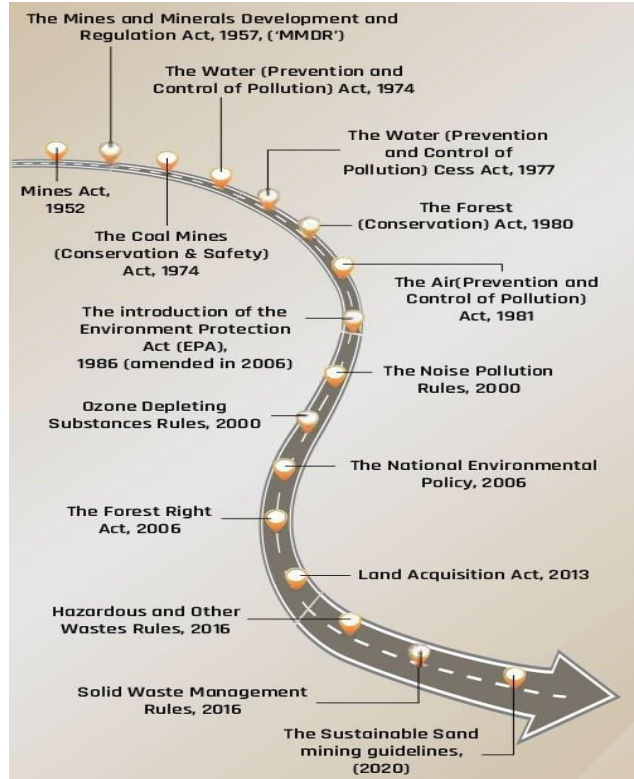


Figure 4. Source: TERI

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: Government Budgeting

On the issues with Old Pension Scheme – Pension bloat

News: This article discusses the problems of returning to the Old Pension Scheme. A detailed article on the **Old Pension Scheme (OPS) vs National Pension System (NPS)** can be [read here](#). In recent times the issue of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) vs National Pension System (NPS) has been a hotly debated topic. The demand for returning back to OPS is gaining traction. States such as Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have already announced a shift back to the OPS.

What are the issues with the Old Pension System?

1. **Inequitable distribution of benefits:** Only 3.2% of the workforce has a claim over 18% of government revenue.
2. **Against fiscal prudence:** Fiscal prudence implies using limited resources for investments like health, education, law-and-order, roads, bridges, hospitals, etc. OPS imposes an unsustainable burden on the public exchequer.
3. **Unfunded Liability:** It means that no contribution is made by employees during their work lives but must be paid out of current government revenue.
4. **Constant Increment:** The OPS is both wage-indexed (i.e. linked to compensation of the existing workforce and hence hiked with each Pay Commission recommendation) and also indexed to inflation.
5. **Issue of inter-generational equity:** Future generations will be burdened with higher taxes to service the debt incurred for pension payouts.
6. **Rising life expectancy of the population:** It will lead to a steady increase in pension emoluments.

Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

India's economic growth and inequality- A \$5 trillion economy, but for whom?

News: The article discusses India's economic growth and inequality. It compares India's situation to Japan's economic history, highlighting issues like wealth distribution and social challenges. It questions if India's growth will benefit all citizens or just a few.

What is India's current economic plan?

1. **Aim for a \$5 Trillion Economy:** India's goal is to become the world's third-largest economy by 2028 with a GDP target of \$5 trillion.
2. **Emphasis on Advanced Sectors:** The Indian government has identified key sectors for growth, including the digital economy, fintech, energy transition, and addressing climate change.
3. **Reforms and Incentives:** The government has implemented reforms like GST, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, and reduced corporate taxes. It also promotes initiatives like Make in India, Start-Up India, and Production Linked Incentives.
4. **Focus on Inclusive Growth:** The government's plan is anchored around the concept of "inclusive growth," ensuring the economic development benefits a wide range of citizens.

What are India's economic challenges?

1. **Significant Wealth Inequality:** In India, the richest 1% own about 41% of the country's wealth, while the poorest 50% have only a 3% share.
2. **High Tax Burden on Poor Population:** Around 64% of the total Goods and Services Tax (GST) is paid by the bottom half of the population, while the top 10% contribute only 3%.
3. **Limited Benefits from Economic Growth:** Despite India's push for a \$5 trillion economy, most benefits seem skewed towards the affluent. This is reflected in India's low inequality index score of 21.9, indicating a large disparity in wealth distribution and economic gains.
4. **Challenges in Capital, Productivity, and Labor:** India's economic growth faces hurdles due to uneven capital distribution, questionable educational and skill levels, and nascent digital literacy.
5. **Gap in Per Capita Income:** India's per capita income, a key indicator of well-being, is low. In 2022, India ranked 149th among 194 countries, with a per capita income of \$2,400, far below that of countries like Japan (\$34,000) and China (\$13,000).
6. **Continued Need for Food Security:** The extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojna until 2028 underscores the persistent challenge of food security in India.

What can India learn from Japan's experience?

1. **Importance of Economic Diplomacy:** When Japan dropped to the world's third largest economy, it adopted ego-free economic diplomacy. By embracing China as a key trading partner, Japan demonstrated the benefits of positive international relations for economic progression.
2. **Balancing Industrial Growth with Social Stability:** Japan's transition to a high-value industrial economy played a role in the emergence of **hikikomori phenomenon**, where individuals isolate themselves from society. This phenomenon is characterized by people staying indoors for long periods, often in their homes. This situation underscores the importance of adopting a balanced approach to industrialization, one that takes into account its effects on personal and social relationships.
3. **Inclusive Economic Strategies:** Japan's experience emphasizes the importance of growth strategies that include all societal segments. Despite facing social issues and rank demotion, Japan's high per capita income, at \$34,000, compared to China suggests a relatively broad distribution of economic benefits. This highlights the need for policies that ensure economic gains reach beyond just the wealthy or technologically advanced sectors.

On Inequality – The world must fight inequality to safeguard ideals of democracy

News: The article discusses how recent crises have highlighted the growing instability in politics worldwide – due to populism, technological advances, and increasing inequality. It emphasizes the extreme wealth disparity and its damaging effects on democracy. It suggests economic interventions as potential solutions to mitigate inequality and preserve democratic values.

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:

1. Economic Inequality: This refers to disparities in economic assets and income among individuals or groups.

Inequality of Outcomes: Here, individuals face differences in actual material wealth and living conditions. It includes variations in income, education, health, and other standards of living.

Inequality of Opportunity: Here, disparities arise from uncontrollable factors, such as ethnicity, family background, or gender.

2. Inequality of Rights: Some people lack legal and political power, leading to disparities in how they're treated by legal systems or in their political influence.

3.Sen's Capability Framework: Introduced by **Amartya Sen**, this perspective emphasizes well-being, focusing on **personal freedoms and capabilities** rather than just income.

What does data say about inequality?

Data from 1995 to 2021 reveals significant disparities:

1. The world's **richest 1% accumulated 38% of the increase in global wealth.**
2. In contrast, the **bottom 50% only secured a mere 2%** of this growth.
3. Global wealth grew at an annual rate of 3.2%. However, the **wealth of the top 0.000001% surged by 9.3%** annually.

What are the implications of Inequality?

1. **Democracy at Risk:** Concentrated wealth can grant a few individuals, an excessive political power. Billionaires can dominate public discourse by controlling major media platforms.
2. **Global Power Dynamics:** Wealthy nations, like the US, can impose decisions affecting countries far away. For instance, choices by the US significantly impact people in Burkina Faso, despite them having no say in US elections.
3. **Technology and Wealth:** The tech age has further empowered the ultra-rich. They can sway public opinion by controlling major digital platforms.
4. **Historical Perspective:** Future generations might condemn our tolerance of extreme inequality, just as we disapprove of past societies accepting slavery and feudalism.

What should be done?

1. **Taxing the Ultra-Rich:** Significant taxes on the rich can help, especially if their relative standings among the wealthy remain unchanged.
2. **Profit Caps and Patent Waivers:** The goal is to design mechanisms that limit excess profits without hurting innovation and efficiency.
3. **Commodity Tax Strategy:** Use a commodity tax to cap the profit of a group of companies. This can increase competition within the group.
For instance, there are several companies that make smartphones. When their profits are capped, they will need to compete more with each other to sell their products. This means they might lower their prices or make better products to win customers.

Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

From fossil fuels to cleaner energy - Clean energy share in India and its States' electricity mix

News: The upcoming U.N. climate summit in Dubai highlights the varying progress and challenges faced by different countries in transitioning to clean energy.

What is the status of Indian states in their transition towards clean energy?

The share of clean and fossil fuel sources in power generation of select Indian States between 2019 and 2022 are:

Gujarat: Reducing fossil fuel usage from 80% in 2019 to 60% in 2022.

Rajasthan: Like Gujarat, it has seen a decline in fossil fuel use.

Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh: Leaders among the top 15 power-producing states, with a higher share of clean energy.

Tamil Nadu: Approaching a 50:50 clean-to-fossil fuel ratio, but progress has stagnated recently.

Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar: High dependence on fossil fuels (over 90%), with no significant change in the last four years.

Odisha and Punjab: Contrarily, these states have seen an increase in fossil fuel usage in recent years.

What government initiatives are in place to promote clean energy?

To promote clean energy, the government has implemented several key initiatives are **a) 100% FDI-** under the automatic route encourages global investment, **b) Waiver of ISTS Charges-** Exempting solar and wind power projects from Inter State Transmission System charges if commissioned by June 30, 2025, **c) Establishing Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO)** trajectory up to 2022 ensures a consistent demand for renewable energy, **d) Payment Security Mechanisms-** Mandating dispatch against Letter of Credit or advance payment ensures timely payments to renewable energy generators.

For more information [read here](#)

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 is Solar energy mini-grid?

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 energy 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-grid?

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.

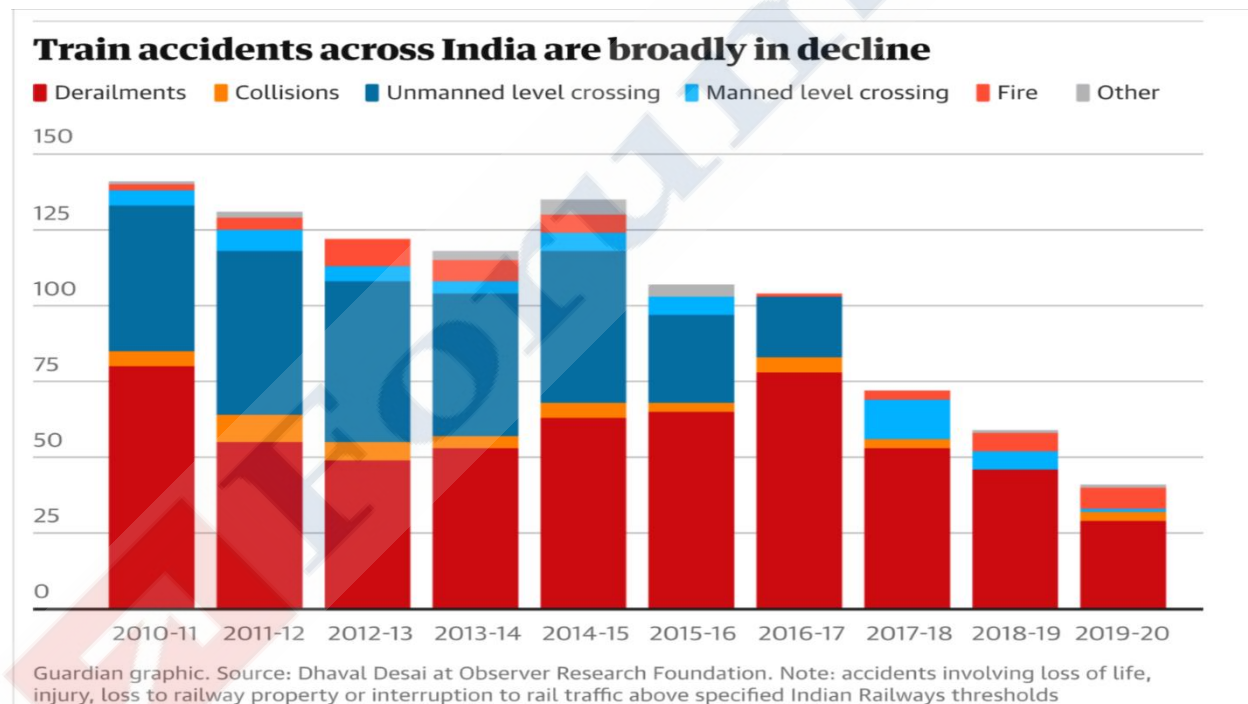
3) International Support: Initiatives like the ISA's Global Solar Facility aim to catalyze investments in solar projects, especially in underserved regions. Similar initiatives are required for mini grids as well.

Train accidents in India - Track Changes

News: The article discusses recent train accidents in India, highlighting the increasing number of such incidents due to pressure on the railway system. It also mentions efforts to improve safety, like the Kavach system, and suggests a need for better maintenance and regulatory measures.

Background:

In recent years, India's railways have seen a decline in overall consequential accidents, but the severity of incidents remains a concern. For instance, the first half of this financial year witnessed 20 serious accidents, including the Buxar derailment and the Vizianagaram collision. This trend, compared to the 48 consequential accidents in the entire previous year, suggests a need for ongoing and enhanced safety measures in the railway network.



What are the reasons for the increase in train accidents in India?

- 1. Increased Traffic:** Post-COVID-19, there's a 30% rise in consequential train accidents due to higher passenger and freight traffic.
- 2. Maintenance Challenges:** Pressure on punctuality leads to reduced maintenance blocks. For instance, the Buxar accident in October was linked to a broken rail, potentially preventable with better maintenance.
- 3. Equipment Failures:** There's an increase in equipment failures, such as wagon detachments and signal issues. In the first half of this financial year, these failures were higher compared to the previous year.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

4. **Human Errors:** Long working hours and lack of accountability contribute to accidents caused by human error.
5. **Slow Capacity Expansion:** Delayed infrastructure upgrades strain the system. For example, the Bahanaga Bazar accident in Odisha was due to faulty wiring and signaling.
6. **Incomplete Safety Systems:** The Kavach (Train Collision Avoidance System), though promising, covers only 1% of the rail network, insufficient to significantly reduce accidents due to human errors.



What initiatives have been taken to address railway safety in India?

1. **Railway Safety Fund:** The Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK) was set up with a corpus of ₹1 trillion for five years starting 2017-18. It focuses on replacing, renewing, and upgrading critical safety assets. By 2021-22, a gross expenditure of ₹1.08 trillion was made on RRSK works.
2. **Kavach System:** Indian Railways introduced Kavach, an indigenous automatic train protection system. It's designed to prevent accidents due to signal passing and over-speeding.
3. **Maintenance and Renewals:** The railway ministry plans railway maintenance in advance. By November 2023, around 3000 kilometers of track renewals were completed, meeting 66% of the annual target.
4. **Audit reports and recommendations:** The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) periodically conducts audits of Indian Railways, identifying shortcomings and making recommendations to address safety concerns.

For more information [read here](#)

What should be done?

1. **Increase Accountability and Training:** Address human error by enforcing stricter accountability and providing better training. For instance, the Andhra Pradesh collision due to signal overshooting highlights the need for better crew training.
2. **Establish a Safety Regulatory Body:** This would oversee safety standards, especially with the increasing inclusion of private operators and new high-speed corridors.
3. **Leverage Technology and AI:** Adopt more advanced technologies and artificial intelligence to reduce human error and enhance overall safety operations.

For more information, [read here](#).

On increasing Indian Railways' revenue – Easing the transport of cargo by Railways

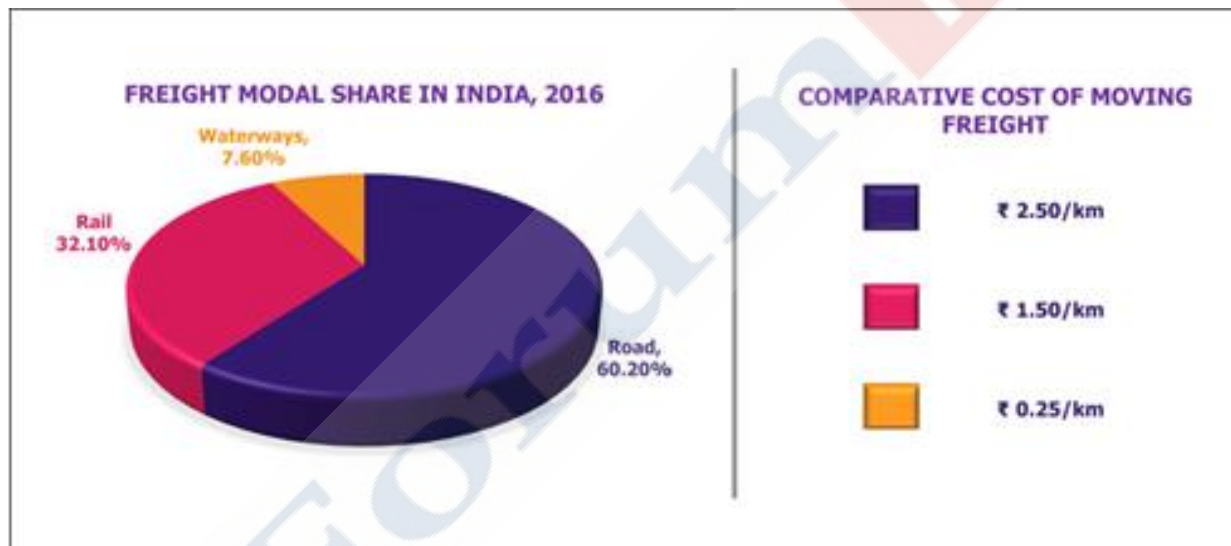
News: This article discusses the actions taken by Indian Railways (IR) to increase its share in moving bulk cargo. It also suggests steps that IR can take in order to achieve this.

What policy actions have been taken to improve Railways infrastructure?

1. **PM GatiShakti (PMGS) policy for a National Master Plan (NMP):** The PMGS aims to bring synergy to create a seamless multi-modal transport network with the NMP employing technology tools for coordinated planning.
2. **National Logistics Policy (NLP):** The NLP focuses on building a national logistics portal and integrating platforms of various ministries.
3. **Integration of postal and railway networks.**
4. **One station – one product.**
5. Introduction of **400 Vande Bharat trains.**

What is the modal share of freight (cargo) in India?

India's modal share of cargo movement:



Source: Automotive World.

The Railways is one of the cheaper modes of transportation for moving bulk cargo. However, it only has a ~30% share.

What is the distribution of Indian Railways' revenue?

1. **Earnings from goods traffic:** Out of Indian Railways' ₹2.4 lakh crore revenue that it earned in the financial year 2022-23, the freight revenue was ₹1.62 lakh crore (~67.5%).
2. **Earnings from passenger traffic:** Its passenger revenue reached ₹63,300 crore in 2022-23 (~26%).
3. **Other earnings:** These include earnings from rents from retiring rooms, rest houses, land leasing, bridge tolls, receipts from catering department, etc.

How does Railways try to increase its revenue from the passenger segment?

According to the author, Indian Railways increases fares through tricks such as:

1. Reclassifying a train from express to superfast (for which the fare is higher)

2. Reducing the number of coaches for cheaper classes of travel and providing more coaches for higher categories.

What are the initiatives for increasing bulk cargo?

The IR has taken some initiatives in the bulk cargo arena:

1. **Relaxation of rake movement rules:** It provides a facility to load from/to multiple locations, permitted mini rakes and introduced **private freight terminals (PFTs)**.
2. **Gati Shakti Terminal (GCT) policy:** It will lead to all PFTs and private sidings being converted into GCTs. **A private siding is a railway line that is owned by a company and is connected to a railway.**
3. **Partnership with private freight operators:** IR has encouraged them to invest in wagons thus helping in the induction of privately-owned wagons to facilitate specialised traffic like automobiles and fly ash.

What are the outcomes of the Railways' poor revenue from the passenger segment?

1. **Increase in Freight Charges:** To offset the losses on its passenger service, Railways pushes up freight rates for goods transport (**Cross-Subsidization Policy**). This is why Railways has lost out on goods traffic to roadways. Railways accounts for only a quarter of the total goods traffic and is restricted to mostly bulk items like coal and iron ore.
2. **Investment fuelled by Debt:** With expenditure almost equal to the annual revenue, most of the massive investments being done has necessarily been funded by borrowings and increasingly through support from the Budget. This adversely impacts the government's fiscal position and pushes the burden on the public.
3. **Lack of Expansion in the Passenger Segment:** Railways has no financial incentive to increase passenger transport (since it loses money in this segment). Freight traffic has grown 40 per cent in a decade, while passenger traffic has been static.
4. The situation is further aggravated due to a **growing pension bill**. With revenues not growing as much as required, the pension bill (increasing due to periodic Pay Commissions) is eating up 23% of its revenue.

What should IR do?

1. **Reducing barriers:** IR should reduce non-price barriers to entry of private players.
2. **Developing common-user facilities at cargo aggregation and dispersal points:** Especially in mining clusters, industrial clusters and large cities.
3. **Collaboration with State governments:** The knowledge of these clusters rests with the States, and thus collaboration with State governments is necessary.
4. **Transport new commodities as well:** For instance, fly ash.
5. **Wagon-design reforms:** IR should encourage and liberalise the design of new wagons amenable to higher and efficient loading.
6. **Parity in environmental regulation:** Absence of stringent environmental regulations in road sector has led to some users moving cargo by road. There should be no such disparity in regulation between modes of transport.

On merger of railway budget and union budget – The Indian Railways' revenue problem

News: The article discusses the issue of the declining revenues of Indian Railways and the various reasons which have led to this situation.

Why was Indian railway budget merged with Union budget?

In 2017, the two budgets were merged, simplifying financial processes and increasing efficiency. The reasons behind this decision were:

1. **Historical Context:** The separate Railway Budget started in 1924 under British rule.
2. **Global Uniqueness:** India was the only country with a separate Railway Budget.
3. **Size Reduction:** Over the years, the Railway Budget has shrunk.
4. **NITI Aayog's Recommendation:** NITI Aayog suggested that a separate budget wasn't needed anymore.
5. **Clear Financial Picture:** A combined budget offers a complete overview of the government's finances.
6. **Integrated Planning:** The merger promotes joint planning across railways, highways, and waterways.
7. **Financial Flexibility:** It allows the Ministry of Finance to better allocate resources mid-year.

Why is Indian Railways spending more?

1. **Budget Merger:** Indian Railways combined its rail budget with the main budget. This merger allows for greater Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) from the central government, leading to increased spending without much oversight.
2. **Lack of Surplus:** Indian Railways doesn't have enough surplus from its earnings. To fund projects, they've had to seek additional funds from both GBS and Extra Budgetary Resources (EBS).
3. **Debt Accumulation:** Repayment costs for principal and interest have risen, accounting for **17% of their revenues**.
4. **Possible Economic Boost:** The increased capital expenditure is based on the belief that investing in railways will stimulate the country's economy. Which can lead to gains in manufacturing, services, tax revenues, and job opportunities.

What are the issues with the business performance of Indian Railways?

1. **Freight Growth Lag:** Between April-July 2023, freight volume grew by only 1%, and revenue by 3%. This is low considering the economy grew by 7%.
2. **Decreasing Market Share:** Once handling over 80% of India's freight business at the time of independence, it's now down to **just 27%**.
3. **Declining share in Coal Transport:** The share of coal transported by railways remains below past levels.
4. **Lack of share in Container Transport:** Only 13% of containers moving in and out of ports use the railways.

Terminology used:

Gross Budgetary Support (GBS): This is the money the government sets aside to support its annual spending plan, which aligns with its long-term (5-year) development goals. The spending goes towards a variety of sectors, from agriculture to education to justice administration.

Extra Budgetary Borrowings (EBRs): These are essentially loans taken out by government-owned companies to fund various schemes initiated by the government. Even though these loans are used for government projects, they aren't directly included in the official budget numbers. So, while these borrowings don't impact the fiscal deficit directly, they do increase the overall debt of the government.

Subject: Agriculture

Topic: E-Technology in the aid of farmers

Significance of factors of Technology for agriculture- Producing more from less

News: This article discusses how technology has transformed agriculture in India. It mentions four key factors of technology: genetics, crop nutrition, crop protection, and agronomic interventions. These advancements

have led to higher agricultural productivity, reducing the reliance on factors like land and labor. The article highlights the significant role of technology in India's agricultural growth.

What are the Traditional Factors of Agricultural Production?

Agriculture originally depended on four key factors: land, water, labor, and energy.

1. **Land:** Initially, farming's growth relied heavily on the extent of land available. For instance, in India, agricultural growth of 2.8% per year from 1950-51 to 1961-62 was largely due to an increase in cultivated land, from 118.75 lakh to 135.40 lakh hectares. (as per NITI Aayog paper)
2. **Water:** Water's availability, crucial for land quality, varied across regions. The fertility of agricultural land was directly influenced by soil fertility and water availability.
3. **Labor:** Traditional farming depended significantly on human labor. More farmhands meant more production.
4. **Energy:** Before modern machinery, energy in farms primarily came from bullocks, used for plowing fields and other tasks, demonstrating the reliance on animal power in traditional agriculture.

How do the factors of technology transform Agriculture?

Modern agriculture integrates four technological factors: genetics, crop nutrition, crop protection, and agronomic interventions.

1. **Genetics:** The development of new, high-yielding seed varieties was crucial. These seeds, bred by scientists such as Henry Beachell, Gurdev Singh Khush, and others. They incorporated dwarfing genes that enabled the plants to support heavy, fertilizer-fed grains without falling over. This genetic innovation was fundamental in transforming agricultural productivity.
2. **Crop Nutrition:** The transition to chemical fertilizers marked a significant change. For example, synthetic fertilizers like Urea (46% nitrogen) and di-ammonium phosphate (18% nitrogen, 46% phosphorus) provided nutrients more efficiently than traditional farmyard manure.
3. **Crop Protection:** Advances in crop protection chemicals ensured that gains from improved genetics and nutrition were fully realized. These products protected crops from pests, diseases, and weeds, contributing to higher yields.
4. **Agonomic Interventions:** Mechanization (like tractors) and water-saving technologies (such as drip irrigation) replaced traditional labor and energy sources, enhancing farming efficiency and productivity. Practices like intercropping also contributed to more effective land use.

What is the Impact of Technology on Farming?

1. **Higher Yields with Less Land:** Despite a modest increase in farmland (just 3.3% between 1961-62 to 2019-20), technological advances have significantly boosted production.
2. **Growth in Agricultural Sector:** The agricultural growth rate in India from 2005-06 to 2021-22 reached 3.7% annually, the highest recorded in different phases. This increase is attributed to the faster adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies, alongside improvements in rural infrastructure like roads, electricity, and irrigation.
3. **Improved Efficiency:** The integration of technology in farming has led to more output from the same or even fewer resources. This is a shift from traditional input-based growth to efficiency-driven production.

What are the Government initiatives to modernize agriculture?

1. **National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture (NeGP-A):** This program funds state and UT projects that employ advanced technologies like AI, Machine Learning, Robotics, Drones, Data Analytics, and Blockchain for developing agricultural solutions.
2. **Digital Public Infrastructure for Agriculture:** This open-source initiative aims to provide farmers with information services for crop planning, health, input access, credit, insurance, crop estimation, and market

intelligence. It includes establishing core registries for farmers, geo-referencing of village maps, and crop sown registries. A pilot digital crop survey has been launched in 12 states.

3. **Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM):** Promotes farm mechanization, benefiting small and marginal farmers through high-tech equipment and awareness programs.
4. **Technological Initiatives under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:** Includes Yield Estimation System based on Technology (YES-Tech), Weather Information Network Data Systems (WINDS) portal, and the AIDE/Sahayak door-to-door enrollment app for crop insurance.
5. **ICAR Mobile Apps and Kisan Sarathi:** Offers over 100 mobile apps and a digital platform for agricultural information and advisories.

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 Beneficiaries:** 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, yielding 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

Food safety

News: The article discusses how food safety has declined in India according to a recent report. Most states scoring lower in safety tests and having weak enforcement, even as the government promotes food industry investment.

What is the State Food Safety Index (SFSI)?

State Food Safety Index is an annual assessment released by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

Started in: 2018-19

Purpose: It is a dynamic quantitative and qualitative benchmarking model that provides an objective framework for evaluating food safety across all States/UTs.

STATES WITH STEEPEST INDEX FALL		
State	2019	2023
Maharashtra	74	45
Bihar	46	20.5
Gujarat	73	48.5
Andhra Pradesh	47	24
Chhattisgarh	46	27

Source: SFSI reports; all scores out of 100

SAFETY MEASURE	
Parameter	Weight
Compliance	28
Consumer Empowerment	19
Human Resources and Institutional Data	18
Food Testing Infrastructure	17
Improvement in SFSI Rank (added in 2023)	10
Training and Capacity Building	8
TOTAL	100

Significance: The index is meant to create a competitive and positive change in the food safety ecosystem in the country. The step was also taken to galvanize states and union territories to work towards ensuring safe food for citizens.

What are the key findings of the SFSI 2022-23 Report?

The SFSI 2022-23 report highlights a concerning decrease in food safety across Indian states.

- Downward Food Safety Trend:** 19 out of 20 large Indian states saw their SFSI scores drop.
- Worsening Food Testing Infrastructure:** Food testing infrastructure average score across states sent from 13 to 7 out of 20.

3. **Compliance and Human Resources:** There was also a significant fall in compliance, human resources and institutional data scores.

What is the Government's Initiative for the Food Industry?

1. **PLI Scheme for Food Processing:** Government launched the Production Linked Incentive Scheme for the Food Processing Industry (PLISFPI) with a financial outlay of Rs. 10,900 crores.
2. **Support for SMEs:** Special emphasis is on SMEs with 16 applications approved for innovative and organic products, as well as **millet-based** products.
3. **Domestic Production:** Guidelines mandate that the manufacturing, including primary processing of eligible products, must occur in India, supporting local production and ensuring farmers, particularly small-scale, receive fair compensation.

What should be done?

1. **Efficient Regulatory Framework:** To ensure food safety and attract investment, states must urgently develop and enhance regulatory and enforcement mechanisms.
2. **Strengthen Food Testing:** The decline in food testing infrastructure scores necessitates investment in upgrading state food testing facilities.
3. **Investments in Infrastructure:** There is a need for continued and increased investment to address infrastructure deficiencies, like cold chains, to minimize waste and enhance efficiency
4. **Maintain Global Market Standards:** This is a necessity for India to remain competitive in the global market.

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 *swabhimani ki kheti* (agriculture of dignity) in the Mewar region. Some families have been doing this for as long as 200 years.

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.

Basics of electricity transmission

News: This article discusses the mechanism of electricity transmission. It also highlights the factors which determine transmission losses in power transmission.

A **Power supply system** has 3 broad components:

1. **Generation:** Electricity is generated at power plants as well as at smaller renewable-energy installations.
2. **Transmission:** It is transmitted using a distributed network of stations, substations, overhead and underground cables, and transformers.
3. **Distribution:** Finally, it is distributed to consumers in a standardised way.

A **Power Grid** performs the above 3 functions.

What is the role of a power grid?

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

A national power grid includes all 3 components: production, transmission and distribution. Apart from this, it also does the following:

1. **Storage of Energy:** Grids also have **storage facilities** that store electrical energy when there's a surplus supply and release it in times of deficit, such as in the case of renewable energy sources.
2. **Manage fluctuations in demand:** They also have **automated systems** which increase or decrease the output of power sources in response to fluctuating consumer demand.
3. **Handle emergency situations:** They are also **connected to sources like gas turbines** that can **provide power on short notice**, such as during emergencies.

How is power transmitted as part of a power grid?

Step I: From a **power station**, the wires are routed to **transformers** that step-up (increase) their voltage.

Step II: These wires eventually lead to **substations**.

Step III: **Distribution substations** step-down (decrease) the voltage in power lines and prepare them for consumption.

What are the challenges of power transmission in India?

1. **Aging Infrastructure:** Many transmission and distribution lines and equipment in India are old and in need of modernization. This leads to energy losses due to inefficiencies in the system.
2. **Overloading and Unbalanced Loading:** Overloading transformers and unbalanced loading can lead to technical losses as well as reduce the lifespan of distribution infrastructure.
3. **Theft and Pilferage:** Unauthorized tapping and theft of electricity is a significant issue in many parts of India.
4. **Voltage Fluctuations:** Variations in voltage levels can result in energy losses, as excessive voltage can cause appliances to consume more power.
5. **Inadequate Investment:** Many DISCOMs face financial constraints that limit their ability to invest in modern technology and equipment.

Terminology used:

Insulators: Insulators in contact with the wires draw away some current if there is a surge of current in the line.

Dampers: Dampers prevent vibrations in the wires from affecting the towers' stability.

Switches: They are used to control the availability of current and to move currents between different lines.

Wide-area synchronous grid: If all the generators connected to a grid are producing an AC current at the same frequency.

Alternating Current: Alternating current (AC) is an electric current which periodically reverses direction and changes its magnitude continuously with time, in contrast to direct current (DC), which flows only in one direction.

On regulating AI - World leaders have a long road ahead

News: The article discusses the first global summit on AI safety held at Bletchley Park, where major agreements were made to address AI risks, but with varying opinions on the severity of these risks and the effectiveness of future regulations.

What is the Bletchley Declaration?

Overview: The Bletchley Declaration is an international agreement signed at the AI safety summit held at Bletchley Park, UK.

Purpose: The declaration aims to address the risks associated with the rapid development and deployment of AI technologies.

Signatories: There were 28 signatories to the declaration, indicating a commitment from a significant number of countries, though not the entire world.

Three key results came from the summit:

1. **Tech Companies and Government Collaboration:** There was an agreement among tech companies to work with governments on the safety testing of advanced AI models.

2. **International Declaration on AI Risks:** A declaration was made to address the potential risks associated with AI, particularly highlighting immediate threats such as the technology's misuse in electoral processes.

3. **UN Support for Expert AI Panel:** The United Nations expressed its support for the establishment of an expert panel on AI, which would function similarly to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to oversee AI safety protocols.

What are the concerns raised after the Bletchley Declaration?

1. **Long-term Risks Consensus:** Founders and chief executives of major tech companies did not reach an agreement on the severity of long-term risks posed by AI.
2. **Regulatory Challenges:** The rapid pace of AI development makes it difficult to establish effective regulatory measures, and there's a concern that regulations might not effectively control individual developers.
3. **Global Consensus Difficulty:** With AI's international spillovers, reaching a worldwide agreement on AI use and safety is complex, highlighted by the fact that only 28 countries signed the Bletchley Declaration.
4. **Equality in AI Development:** The declaration doesn't fully address how smaller countries will engage in AI development and regulation, despite stating that all countries have equal rights to develop and use AI.

What is the significance of the declaration?

1. **Global Dialogue Initiation:** The summit started a worldwide conversation on AI safety, signaling the beginning of international cooperation.
2. **Short-term Risks Agreement:** There was a consensus on immediate short-term risks, such as AI's role in manipulating elections and spreading misinformation.
3. **US-China Agreement:** It is a positive sign that typically competitive nations like the US and China are on the same page regarding AI safety concerns.
4. **India's Progressive Stance:** India's commitment to developing safe and trustworthy AI platforms suggests that it can be a significant player in shaping global AI standards.

On international AI Regulation – AI Summit: Why new global pact on tackling Artificial Intelligence risks is a big deal

News: This article discusses the various kinds of risks associated with Frontier AI and the international regulatory mechanisms being put in place by various countries. It also analyses India's policy stance on AI.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

Recently, 28 major countries met at Bletchley Park in the UK for the **world's first ever Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Summit** and agreed to collaborate **to minimize risks from 'Frontier AI'**.

These 28 countries included the United States, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and India, and the European Union.

Read in detail about the **Bletchley Park Declaration** [here](#).

What is Frontier AI?

"Frontier AI" is defined as highly capable foundation generative AI models that could possess dangerous capabilities that can pose severe risks to public safety.

For example, **Biometric Authentication, Automation, etc.**

What are the challenges posed due to Frontier AI?

Frontier AI models pose a distinct regulatory challenge:

1. **Inability to Predict Outcomes:** Dangerous capabilities can arise **unexpectedly**. According to various tech industry leaders, AI labs are in an uncontrolled race to develop systems that no one can fully control.
2. **Misuse:** It is difficult to robustly prevent a deployed model from **being misused**.
3. **Proliferation:** It is difficult to stop a model's capabilities from **proliferating** broadly.
4. There are also concerns regarding: **privacy, system bias, and violation of intellectual property rights.**

For more information of the **impact of AI on IPR**, [read this](#).

What are the approaches on AI taken by different countries?

The policy response has varied across countries. For instance:

1. **EU:** The EU has taken a **tough approach**, proposing to bring in a **new AI Act** that classifies artificial intelligence according to use-case scenarios, based broadly on the degree of invasiveness and risk.
2. **UK:** The UK is at the other end of the spectrum, with a **"light-touch" approach** that aims to foster, and not stop innovation in this field.
3. **USA:** The US approach is seen to be somewhere in between. It is planning on defining an AI regulation rulebook ultimately becoming an **AI 'Bill of Rights'**.
For instance, a new rule seeks to codify the use of watermarks that alert consumers to a product enabled by AI, which could potentially limit the threat posed by **deepfakes**.

What is India's stance on AI and AI regulation?

As per the Union Minister of State for IT, India's stance on AI includes the following:

1. India looks at AI and technology, in general, through the prism of **openness, safety, trust and accountability**. AI represents a big opportunity.
2. India believes that steps should be taken to ensure **AI safety and trust**. For instance, the Hon'ble Prime Minister had called for a **global framework on the expansion of "ethical" AI tools**.
3. India also maintains that steps should be taken to mitigate the downsides of AI or any emerging technology. India's position is of **actively formulating regulations** based on a "risk-based, user-harm" approach.
4. As per Telecom **Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)**, the Centre should set up a **domestic statutory authority to regulate AI in India**.
5. The **NITI Aayog** has also published papers on **Responsible AI for All**.

However, the government is not considering bringing a law or regulating the growth of artificial intelligence in the country, according to the Union Minister of IT.

Terminology used:

Red teaming: In cybersecurity, “red teaming” refers to the practice of emulating real-world adversaries and their tools, tactics, and procedures to identify risks, uncover blind spots, validate assumptions, and improve the overall security posture of systems.

Subject: Environment

Topic: Environment – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Transition to electric trucks - Fleet electrification to tackle urban pollution

News: This article discusses the severe air pollution problem in Indian cities, mainly caused by PM2.5 and PM10 pollution from trucks and construction. It emphasizes the need to transition to electric trucks, create green freight corridors, and attract private investment to tackle the pollution crisis.

Why is there a need to transition to electric trucks?

1. **Growing Truck Fleet:** About 9 lakh new trucks are added annually in India, increasing PM2.5 pollution. The existing fleet is already large, with 70 lakh trucks.
2. **High Fuel Consumption and Emissions:** Trucks consume over a quarter of India's oil imports and are responsible for over 90% of road transport CO2 emissions.
3. **Electric Vehicles Penetration:** While electric vehicle use has crossed 6%, electric trucks are still limited, mainly due to cost and infrastructure challenges.
4. **Need for Decarbonization:** To meet the 2070 net zero target, decarbonizing the transport sector, especially through truck electrification, is crucial.

What are the steps taken by the government to facilitate the shift towards electric vehicles?

1. **FAME Schemes:** The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles initiative offers incentives for purchasing EVs and establishing charging stations.
2. **National Electric Mobility Mission Plan:** Launched in 2020, it targets having 30% electric vehicles on roads by 2030.
3. **Tax Incentives:** An additional tax deduction of INR 1.5 Lakh is provided for the interest on loans for electric vehicle purchases.
4. **Public Transport Enhancement:** Financial support is given for electric buses in cities like Delhi.
5. **Transformative Mobility Mission:** This focuses on the manufacturing of EVs, components, and batteries.
6. **NITI Aayog's Battery Manufacturing Subsidy:** Proposes a \$4.6 billion subsidy to boost domestic lithium battery production.

What should be done to facilitate this transition?

1. **Address High Upfront Costs:** Tackle the issue of e-trucks being expensive (₹1.5 crore for electric vs. ₹40 lakh for diesel trucks) through subsidies or financial incentives.
2. **Accelerate E-Truck Adoption:** Increase the pace of transitioning to electric trucks, aiming beyond the 7,750 e-truck targets for 2030.
3. **Public-Private Investment:** Mobilize funding by combining public and private investments, aiming for a high ratio of private to public funds.
4. **Expand Electric Rail Freight:** Utilize India's electrified rail freight more, as it currently covers only 20% of freight.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

5. **Set Electrification Targets:** Establish clear targets for electrifying trucks, similar to what's being done for buses.
6. **Create Green Freight Corridors:** Designate specific highways as green corridors to demonstrate the effectiveness of e-trucks.
7. **Innovative Financing and Incentives:** Innovative financial tools, incentives for charging infrastructure, support for entrepreneurial initiatives, and a favorable regulatory environment can help achieve the essential breakthrough in India's truck electrification.

Terminology used

Particulate Matter (PM): It is a type of air pollution made up of tiny particles and droplets in the air. It's categorized mainly into two types: **a) PM10-** These particles are inhalable, with diameters of 10 micrometers or smaller. They come from sources like construction sites, unpaved roads, and fields. **b) PM2.5-** Even smaller, these fine particles have diameters of 2.5 micrometers or less. They can come from smokestacks, fires, and other similar sources. PM, especially PM2.5, poses significant health risks. Due to their tiny size, these particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and even enter the bloodstream.

Climate-smart agriculture (CSA)- Need for climate-smart agriculture in India

News: The article discusses climate-smart agriculture (CSA) as a way to address climate change and improve farming. CSA helps increase farm productivity, adapt to climate changes, and reduce greenhouse gases. It's important for sustainable development, food security, and meeting global climate goals.

What is Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)?

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), CSA is an approach designed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to support sustainable development and secure food security in the face of climate change.

It focuses on 1) increasing agricultural productivity and incomes, 2) adapting and building resilience to climate change, and 3) reducing or removing greenhouse gases.

CSA includes various practices like water-smart (efficient water use), weather-smart (responding to weather

changes), energy-smart (using energy efficiently), and carbon-smart (reducing carbon footprint) methods.

What are the benefits of CSA?

1. **Increased Agricultural Productivity:** CSA sustainably boosts farm productivity; crucial as global food demand is projected to increase by 60% by 2050.

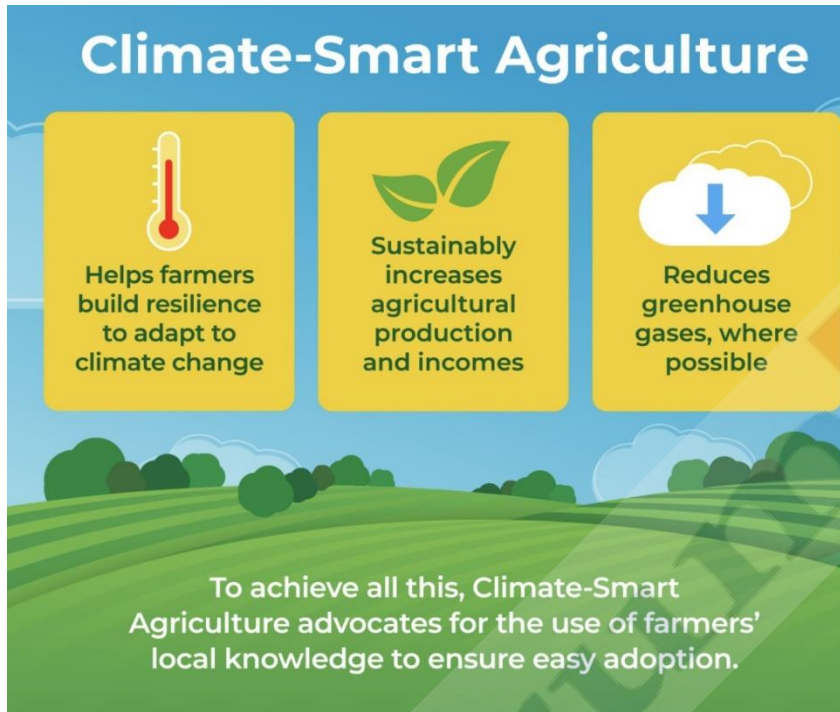


Figure 5. Source: FAO

2. **Enhanced Adaptation to Climate Change:** CSA promotes crop diversification and integrates drought-resistant crops, increasing water efficiency.

3. **Greenhouse Gas Reduction:** CSA plays a crucial role in reducing greenhouse gases, which is vital considering agriculture contributed 17% to global emissions in 2018.

4. **Sustainable Food Security:** CSA contributes to long-term food security, which is essential in a world with a growing population and changing diets.

5. **Environmental Protection:** CSA ecosystem-based approach helps in coexisting croplands with wild areas, protecting native species and pollinators.

6. **Flexibility and Broad Application:** CSA is not a rigid set of rules but a flexible approach with a wide range of applications. This adaptability allows it to be effectively implemented in various agricultural contexts and regions.

7. **Socio-Economic Transformation:** CSA provides access to climate-resilient methods and information, greatly benefiting farmers, especially those in disadvantaged positions.

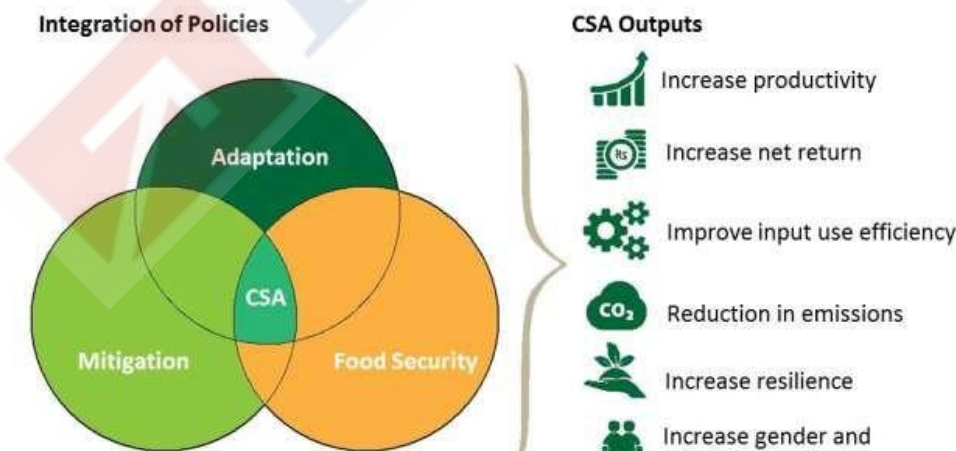


Figure 6. Source: FAO

What are the challenges of CSA?

1. **Novelty and Limited Scope:** CSA is relatively new, particularly in countries like India. For example, the scope of initiatives like precision farming is still limited.

2. **Localizing Responses:** Each region has unique

climatic and agricultural conditions that require tailored approaches.

3. **Balancing Economic and Environmental Goals:** Balancing the economic needs of farmers with environmental sustainability is complex and requires careful planning and support.

For more information on challenges of CSA [read here](#)

What initiatives have been taken to implement CSA?

Global Initiatives for CSA:

Sustainable Development Goals: CSA aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in ending hunger and enhancing environmental management through sustainable agriculture.

Paris Agreement: CSA practices like agroforestry and carbon sequestration support the Paris Agreement's objective to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Initiatives in India:

National Action Plan on Climate Change: Emphasizes the role of climate-resilient agriculture in India's adaptation strategies.

Government Programs: Includes National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change, National Innovation on Climate Resilient Agriculture, and Soil Health Mission, focusing on sustainable farming practices.

Private Sector Involvement: Private companies and farmer-producer organizations are actively working towards CSA adoption in India.

For more information on Indian government initiatives, [read here](#).

What should be done?

1. Increase efforts to educate farmers about CSA practices, especially in areas like India where these methods are still emerging.
2. Strengthen capacity-building programs to support the widespread adoption of CSA, including training and resource allocation.
3. Strengthen the collaboration between government initiatives and private sector efforts to ensure a cohesive approach towards CSA adoption and practice.

On solving the Air Pollution problem – Who is in charge of my 'air'?

News: The article discusses the various steps that can be taken to deal with the challenges of air pollution in India.

A detailed article on **Air Pollution** can be [read here](#).

What should be done to deal with the challenges of air pollution issue in India?

1. **Real-Time Pollution Statistics:** A complete grid of air quality measurement stations is required across India; these stations need to work accurately, and their data needs to go out in real time.
2. **Research along with Data:** A vibrant research community is required, which puts out papers on the problem. This environment of facts and research will ensure evidence-based measures to deal with air pollution.
3. **Identifying the Sources of Pollution:** Specialized instruments are required to continuously monitor the air and break down the sources of pollution.
4. **Removing Harmful Policies:** The issue of stubble burning is a consequence of various bad policies in the agriculture/food domain. This includes an over-emphasis on cereals (through MSP and public

procurement) and the shortening of the sowing window which compels farmers to burn stubble (Punjab Preservation of Subsoil Water Act, 2009).

5. **Tackling Jurisdictional Issues through Collaboration:** The problem of air quality is not limited to legal jurisdictions and thus requires collaboration between multiple governments beyond the state and national borders. For instance, around 30% of Indian Punjab's pollution originates in Pakistan. World Bank has identified 6 relevant regional airsheds for India, covering multiple urban, provincial, and national jurisdictions. 4 of the 6 span national borders. All authorities in a given airshed need to cooperate on data, research, and policy formulation.

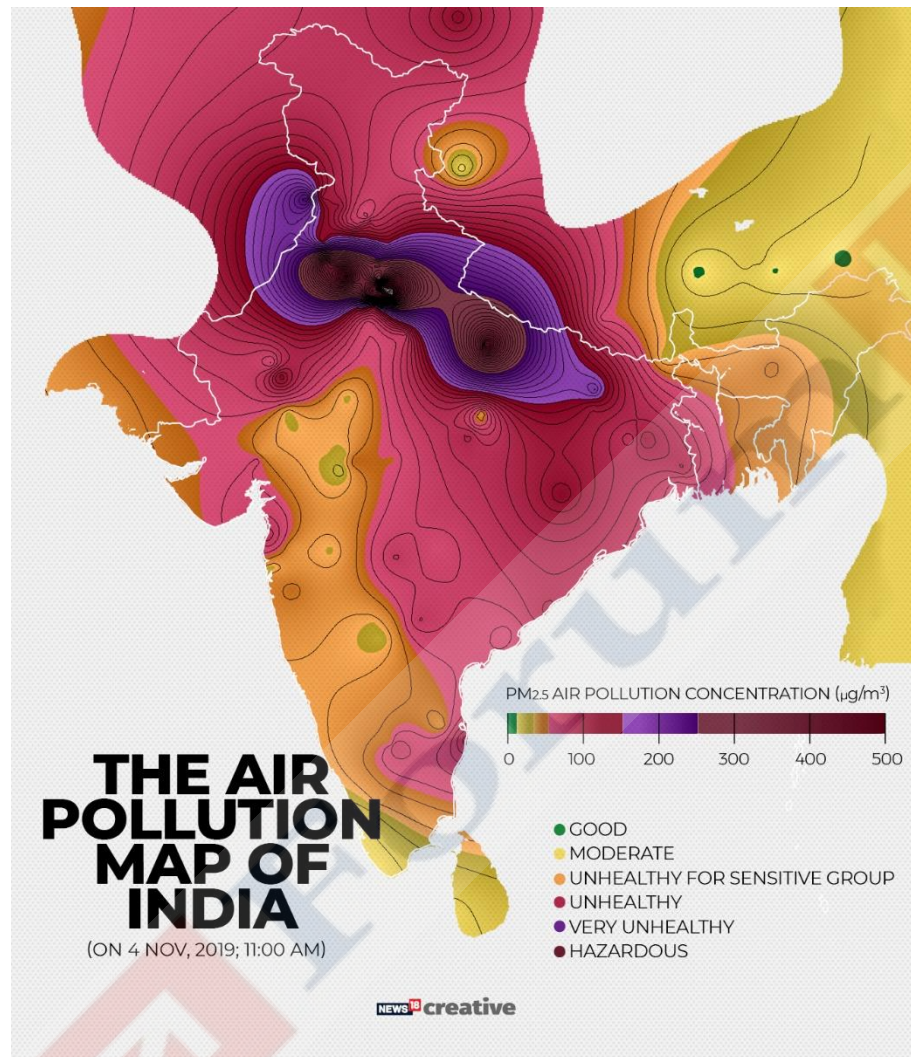


Figure 7. Air Pollution across Jurisdictions. Source: News18.

Terminology Used:

Airshed: An airshed is a geographical area where local topography and meteorology limit the dispersion of pollutants away from the area. They are formed by air masses moving across a landscape, thus influencing the atmospheric composition of that area. These airsheds usually do not overlap with legal-political boundaries.

On the Impact of Climate Change on Health - Recognising the impact of climate change on health

News: The article discusses how climate change negatively impacts health in India, emphasizing the need for action at various levels to address the challenges posed by rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and the related increase in diseases and mental health issues.

About Impact of climate change on health:

WHO's Assessment of Climate Change Impact on Health: a) Climate change is humanity's biggest health threat, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). b) It estimates that climate change will cause an additional 250,000 deaths annually from undernutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress between 2030-2050. c) The direct health-related costs of climate change are projected to be USD 2-4 billion per year by 2030. The **Lancet Countdown report** links increased disease and food insecurity to fossil fuel reliance, impacting health due to heat.

How does climate change affect health in India?

The impact of climate change on health is a multifaceted issue, with both direct and indirect consequences:

1. **Vector-Borne Diseases:** Warmer climates favor the spread of diseases like malaria and dengue fever, as they create more hospitable environments for vectors like mosquitoes.
2. **Water and Food-Borne Diseases:** Flooding and higher temperatures can lead to outbreaks of diseases like cholera and diarrhoea.
3. **Increased Sickness and Deaths:** Extreme weather events, like the record heat waves in India in 2023, directly contribute to higher rates of illness and mortality.
4. **Nutrition and Food Security:** Climate change affects agriculture, leading to reduced food availability and quality. This can cause malnutrition, especially in vulnerable populations.
5. **Exacerbation of Chronic Conditions:** Increased pollution and heat can worsen respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and other chronic conditions.
6. **Urban Heat Islands:** Dense urban areas with minimal greenery can become significantly hotter than surrounding areas, intensifying the health impacts of heatwaves.
7. **Mental Health:** The stress of dealing with climate change impacts, including financial strain and displacement, can exacerbate mental health issues.

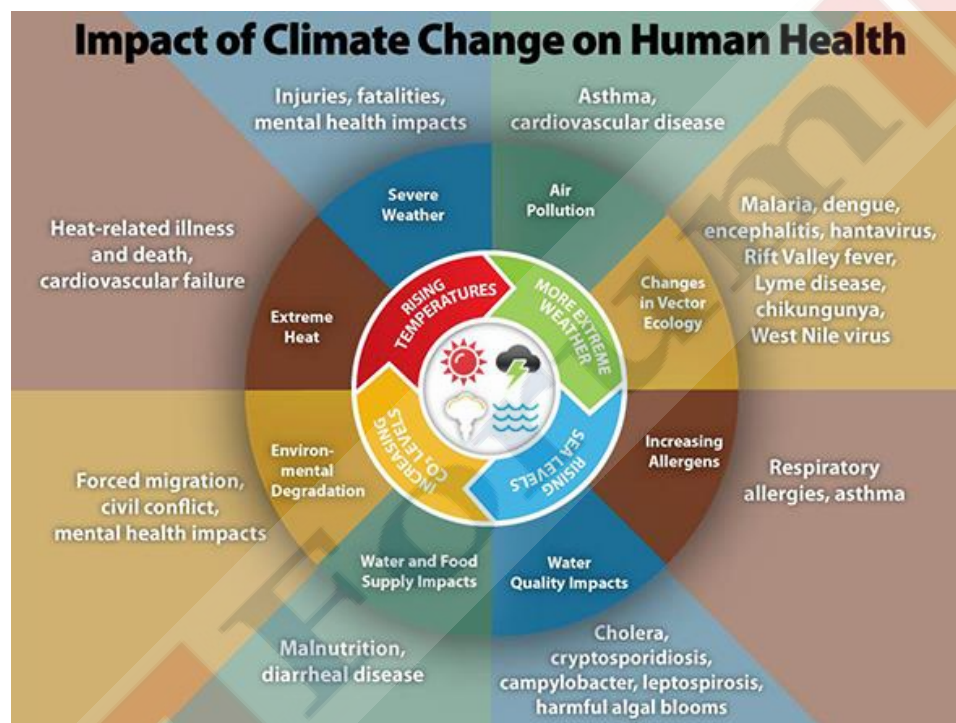


Figure 8. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What are some government initiatives to overcome this issue?

India is actively addressing climate change and its health impacts through several initiatives:

1. **Climate Change and Health Hub in Delhi:** India, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank, launched this hub with an aim to enhance knowledge sharing, foster partnerships, and drive innovations in managing climate-related health

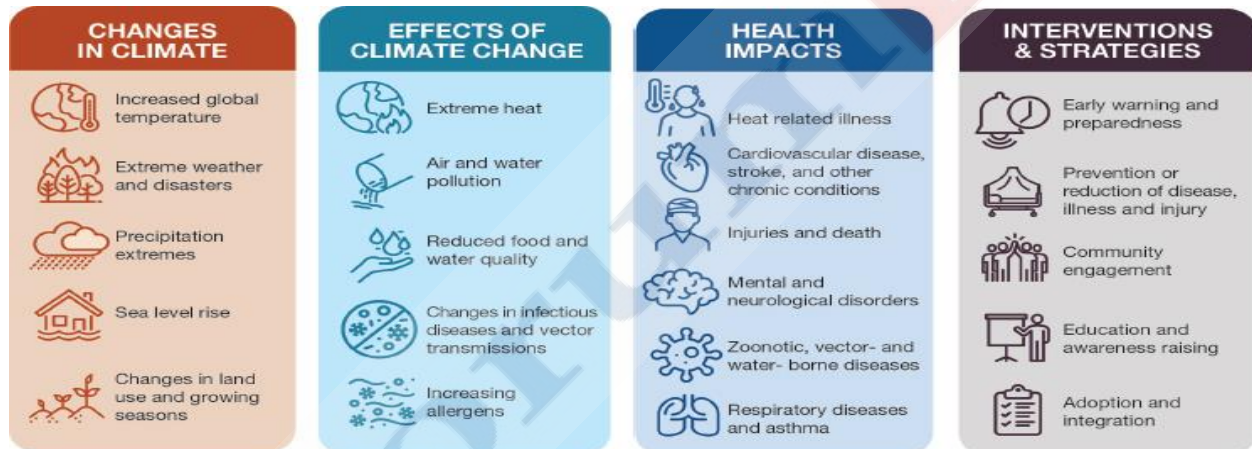
challenges.

2. **National Health Mission:** Targeted at underserved areas, this mission combats communicable and non-communicable diseases, including those exacerbated by climate change, through prevention and control measures.
3. **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY):** In 2018, the government introduced the AB-PMJAY, a major health initiative aimed at providing universal healthcare coverage to the economically weaker sections. This scheme seeks to revolutionize healthcare in India, with goals of reducing poverty, boosting productivity, and enhancing social justice.
4. **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC):** Aimed at fulfilling India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the action plan addresses various dimensions of climate change. This plan

encompasses missions focused on solar energy, water management, sustainable agriculture, sustainable habitats, greening initiatives, etc.

What should be done?

1. **Reducing Emissions:** Implementing policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as the National Biofuel Policy and Vehicle Scrappage Policy.
2. **Strengthening Disease Surveillance:** Enhancing technologies for real-time tracking of disease outbreaks and adopting a One Health approach.
3. **Socio-Economic Support Systems:** Develop systems for social support and health services, considering the socio-economic factors that accentuate climate change impacts.
4. **Policy Development:** Researchers should focus on creating policy options to combat the health impacts of climate change.
5. **Government Action:** National, state, and local governments need to act on the policy options provided by research.
6. **Urban Planning:** Implement better urban planning strategies to mitigate the urban heat island effect. This includes increasing urban greenery and water conservation measures.
7. **International Collaboration:** Coordinating with global partners for funding and effective management of health and climate initiatives.



Source: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences

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

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

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.

On noise pollution due to firecrackers – More light, less sound

News: This article discusses India's noise pollution regulations in light of the rising challenge of noise pollution in India, especially due to firecrackers.

What are the regulations regarding noise pollution?

The **Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules 2000** under the **Environment Protection Act 1986** mandate that firecrackers cannot be used in '**silence zones**', and anywhere after **10 PM**.

From 6AM to 10PM, firecracker noise cannot exceed **75 dB**. The thresholds in commercial and residential areas are 65 dB and 55 dB, respectively.

The rules allow people to register a complaint if the noise overshoots by 10 dB during daytime. An increase of **10 dB implies a 10-fold increase** in acoustic pressure.

What are the issues with loud noise?

Noise pollution is a public health crisis. Research has found links between loud environments and **sleep disorders, stress, anxiety, hearing loss, and cardiac health**.

More than 80 dB in offices has been associated with **hypertension**.

Above **50 dB** at night, when the body is unaccustomed to loud noises, could **increase cortisol levels ('stress hormone')**.

What are the causes of noise pollution?

1. **Horn usage:** Traffic noise has increased in cities where haphazard development has forced motorists to overuse horns.
2. **Religious occasions:** For instance, during Deepavali, firecrackers (even 'green' ones) routinely produce more than 90 dB of sound.

What are the issues with noise pollution regulation?

1. **Demarcation of zones:** Different loudness zones are also seldom publicly demarcated. Some places are both residential and commercial.
2. **Ambiguity of rules:** The rules are unclear about the sanctions to be meted out to offenders.
3. **Lack of enforcement.**

What should be done?

1. Governments must **prevent the production of firecrackers**.
2. Cities must **improve public access to noise data** and **adopt noise mitigation targets**.
3. In 2018, CSIR launched less harmful and less noisy 'green' crackers, whose use various statutory bodies have mandated.

Terminology used:

Silence zone: It is usually defined as areas around premises such as hospitals, educational institutions and courts. These are designated by State governments.

Air Pollution in Indian cities

News: These articles discuss the issue of air pollution in cities in India. It highlights the multiple issues behind the worsening of air pollution in Indian cities as well as the steps required to tackle these challenges. A detailed article on **Air Pollution** can be [read here](#).

What is the status of air pollution in India?

According to Energy Policy Institute at Chicago (EPIC), out of the 50 most polluted cities in the world, **39 are in India**.

Not just in the Indo-Gangetic plains, air quality is worsening even in India's coastal cities.

An average Indian **loses 5.3 years of his life expectancy** due to air pollution. For the residents of Delhi, it is 11.9 years.

Why is the problem of air pollution worsening in Indian cities?

1. **Urban development strategy in India** — The current strategy focuses on real estate development, a widening of roads and allowing large fuel guzzling vehicles which are major reasons for increased pollution.
2. **Anthropogenic factors** — Road dust, polluting industrial units and vehicular emissions are key factors too.
3. **Expansion of 'Grey' infrastructure** — Water bodies, urban forests, green cover, and urban agriculture have all reported shrinkage, and "grey" infrastructure has seen rapid expansion.
4. **Crop residue burning** — During winter in North India, the burning of paddy straw (*parali*) is a major cause for smog (smoke and particulate matter).
5. **Land use change** — The handing over of open spaces to real estate developers and lack of any meaningful afforestation affects the city's ecology.
6. **Promoting car sales** — Widening roads induces people to buy more cars, thus leading to more pollution levels.
7. **Construction activities** — It contributes roughly 10% of air pollution in Delhi-NCR. There are hardly any steps being taken to monitor construction activities.
8. **Lack of people's participation in urban policy** — City residents hardly have any participatory role in the urbanisation process.
9. **Issues with CAQM** (Commission for Air Quality Management) — Its powers are limited to recommendations only.

What should be done?

1. **Alternative strategy of city building:** A "sustainable and ecological urbanization" is required.
2. **Focusing on public transport:** There needs to be **accessible and affordable public transport**, with investment in buses for towns and cities.
3. **Controlling private vehicular movement:** A congestion tax can be levied on private car owners. 'Odd-even' or a 'no-car day' can be put into practice. Transitioning to green vehicles is also important.
4. **Adoption of a Graded Response Action Plan:** These are different sets of actions that get activated based on the air quality air in Delhi. This mechanism must be adopted in other Indian cities too.
5. **Monitoring of industrial Pollution:** Real-time monitoring should be done alongwith street supervision by residents.
6. **Preserving urban commons:** These include ponds, water bodies, urban forests, parks, playgrounds.
7. **Strengthening urban governance:** Pollution guides and standard operating procedures for various departments and agencies must be made readily available to the people.
8. **Increasing Coordination:** Bodies such as the CAQM should ensure greater coordination and compliance.

Terminology Used:

Grey Infrastructure: It involves engineered assets that provide one or multiple services required by society, such as transportation or wastewater treatment.

On Air Quality Standard of India – Indians are choking on pollution. How can it be stopped?

News: The article discusses India's severe air pollution problem. It highlights health risks, compares Indian air quality standards to WHO's, and identifies major pollution sources. The article also suggests solutions and emphasizes the impact on life expectancy, especially in cities like Delhi.

What are the major causes of air pollution?

Ambient (Outdoor) Sources:

1. **Vehicular Emissions:** Cars, trucks, and buses release pollutants.
2. **Industrial Emissions:** Factories and power plants contribute significant pollutants.
3. **Construction and Road Dust:** Building activities and unpaved roads add particulate matter.
4. **Stubble Burning:** Seasonal agricultural residue burning worsens air quality.
5. **Natural Events:** Forest fires and volcanic eruptions release pollutants.
6. **Waste Disposal Sites:** Garbage dumps and sewage treatment plants emit harmful gases.

Household (Indoor) Sources:

1. **Biomass Fuels:** Using wood, crop waste, and animal dung for cooking releases smoke.
2. **Open Fire-Cooking:** Traditional stoves emit large amounts of particulate matter.

What are the different Air Quality Standards used?

India's Air Quality Standards:

National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS):

Established by CPCB, applicable nationally.

Revised in 1982, 1994, 1998, and 2009.

Monitors 12 pollutants including PM10, PM2.5, NO2, and SO2.

Air Quality Index (AQI):

Launched in 2014 by CPCB, with IIT-Kanpur's consultation

Tracks 8 major pollutants like PM10, PM2.5, NO2, and SO2.

The index ranges from 'Good' to 'Severe' across a 0-500 scale.

WHO Air Quality Standards:

WHO Tightened global standards in 2021.

The new annual limit for PM2.5 is 5 micrograms per cubic meter, down from 10.

24-hour ceiling for PM2.5 reduced to 15 micrograms from 25.

How do Indian air standards differ from WHO standards?

1. **PM 2.5 Levels:** The WHO has a limit of 5 microns for PM 2.5, whereas India's limit is much higher at 40 microns.
2. **AQI Categories:** India uses a six-category AQI system, ranging from "good" to "severe". Even at an AQI of 126, Delhi's air quality far exceeds both the national and WHO standards.
3. **Health Impact:** Health issues can arise even when the AQI is within what India considers "satisfactory". This indicates that Indian standards are less protective of public health compared to the WHO's guidelines.

How severe is the air pollution problem in India?

1. **Life Expectancy Impact:** Indians lose an average of 5.3 years of life due to air pollution. For Delhi residents, this number rises to 11.9 years.
2. **World Rankings:** Delhi often ranks at or near the top of the world's most polluted cities. In a 2022 list by IQAir, out of the 50 most polluted cities globally, 39 are in India.
3. **Rural Pollution:** Even rural areas face pollution from dust, burnt biomass fuels, and vehicular emissions.
4. **Pollutants:** India monitors pollutants like PM 10, PM 2.5, nitrogen dioxide, and others. PM 2.5 levels in places like Delhi far exceed both national and WHO standards.

What are the health impacts of air pollution in India?

1. **Immediate Effects:** Acute symptoms include burning eyes, irritation of the nose and throat, cough, and a feeling of choked breath.
2. **Cardiovascular Threats:** Air pollution can provoke heart attacks and strokes, as pollutants disrupt atherosclerotic plaques, triggering blood clots.
3. **Chronic Illnesses:** Prolonged exposure results in hypertension, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes, dementia, and cataracts.
4. **Respiratory Issues:** Pollution heightens the risks of chronic lung diseases and asthma.
5. **Organ Damage:** Air pollution-induced inflammation can damage various organs and lower immunity.
6. **Reproductive Concerns:** PM 2.5 particles have been found in maternal placentas and fetal brains. Pollution exposure during pregnancy heightens risks of stillbirths, neonatal deaths, low birth weight, and birth defects.
7. **Children's Health:** Kids exposed to pollution suffer from respiratory infections, are more susceptible to asthma attacks, and can experience reduced learning and physical growth.

On the challenges of mobilising Climate Finance – On Stocktaking climate finance

News: This article discusses the challenges associated with mobilising climate finance. It also highlights in brief the purpose and amount of climate finance required.

A detailed article on **Climate Finance** can be [read here](#).

What is Climate finance?

According to the **UNFCCC**, Climate finance refers to “local, national or transnational financing, drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing, that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change”.

In simpler words, climate finance relates to the money which needs to be spent on the activities (like renewable energy generation) which will contribute to slowing down climate change and help the world to reach the target of limiting global warming to an increase of **1.5°C above pre-industrial levels**.

Under the **Paris Agreement**, developed countries have to meet the goal of a mobilization of \$100 billion climate finance per year to fund the climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts of the developing world.

However, at the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference in 2021, the developed countries could mobilise only a total of **~\$80 billion**.

What are the issues related to mobilising climate finance?

1. **Inadequate amount:** The sum of \$100bn per year is inadequate in terms of switching over to a low carbon development path and climate resilient development.
2. **Lack of strong political will and sense of urgency** in the Global North.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

3. **Lack of a clear criteria:** Without any mandatory formula for collecting money, it is difficult to predict how climate finance will be mobilised. Neither the UNFCCC nor the Paris Agreement mention the criterion for mobilisation.
4. **Lack of agreement on division of financial burden:** There is no agreed approach among developed countries to share the burden of this goal.

What is the legal backing of climate finance?

Providing finance to developing countries is the operationalisation of the principle of **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities**.

The developed countries are required, in accordance with the decision accompanying the **Paris Agreement**, to collectively mobilise **\$100 billion** through 2025.

After this, a **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)** is to be set at the end of 2024. Read more about NCQG [here](#).

What are the institutional mechanisms for climate financing?

1. **Global Environment Facility (GEF):** UNFCCC-designated funding agency providing grants and concessional loans to developing countries.
2. **Green Climate Fund (GCF):** It is also within the ambit of UNFCCC. It administers a portion of the \$100 billion for developing country parties to switch over to a low-emissions and climate resilient development path.

What is the quantum of climate finance needed?

1. **Global South:** Going by the needs of countries in the Global South expressed in their NDCs, the amount required touches close to **\$6 trillion until 2030**.
2. **India:** Its financial needs derived from its NDCs for **adaptation and mitigation purposes** for 2015-30 are **\$206 billion** and **\$834 billion**, respectively.

Why is climate financing required?

1. Most of the financial needs are required in **transitioning towards low-carbon, cleaner energy systems** from traditional systems.
2. Alternate livelihood for **people involved in the fossil fuel economy** through direct or indirect jobs related to the coal mining and power sector.

On the importance of Biosphere Reserves – Biosphere reserves are evolving as pockets of hope

News: This article discusses the importance of Biosphere Reserves in areas ranging from protection of biodiversity to combating climate change. It also highlights the threats faced by BRs along with the conservation efforts being undertaken to counter these threats.

On the **World Biosphere Reserve Day, November 3**, it is important to reflect on the progress made in conserving and sustainably using these vital ecosystems.

World Biosphere Reserve Day is celebrated each year to raise awareness of the importance of biosphere reserves and to promote their conservation and sustainable use.

What is the anatomy of a Biosphere Reserve (BR)?

1. **Core Zone:** In the centre lies the strictly protected core zone, providing habitat for flora and fauna, and protecting water, soil, air, and biota as a whole ecosystem.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

2. **Buffer Zone:** This surrounding the core zone, where people live and work in harmony with nature; scientists can study nature here.
3. **Transition Zone:** The outermost edge is the transition zone where communities practise sustainable human activities.

How are BRs designated internationally?

1. BRs are designated by **UNESCO** to promote the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable development, and research.
2. They are also supported by other United Nations agencies, for example the **United Nations Development Programme**, the **United Nations Environment Programme**, as well as the **International Union for Conservation of Nature**.
3. According to UNESCO, there are currently **748 biosphere reserves across 134 countries**. **12 sites** can be found in India.

List of **India's Biosphere Reserves** can be found [here](#).

What is the importance of BRs?

1. **Support wide variety of ecosystems:** They are home to a wide variety of ecosystems — from tropical rainforests to alpine deserts.
2. **Home to countless species:** They provide home to countless unique and endangered plants and animals species.
3. **Sustainable development:** In addition to playing a vital role in the protection of biodiversity, they also provide opportunities for sustainable economic development.
4. **Combating climate change:** BRs are home to many of the world's carbon sinks helping to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

What are the threats to BRs?

1. Deforestation
2. Invasive species
3. Land use changes such as mining.
4. Increasing urbanisation and constant growth of the world population leading to exploitation.

What are the conservation efforts being undertaken at the local level?

In the **Sundarban Biosphere Reserve** in India, local communities are working together to manage mangrove forests and protect the biodiversity of the region.

In the **Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve** in India, local communities are contributing towards conservation efforts by forming **self-help groups**, while the youth are getting engaged in **eco-tourism**. **It has also introduced the concept of 'plastic checkpoints'**. Community members check all vehicles and tourists for plastic waste, which is collected, recycled and used for the construction of roads.

What are the global initiatives being undertaken to conserve BRs?

1. **UNESCO in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change** and the **National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management**, concluded the 10th South and Central Asian Biosphere Reserve Network Meeting (SACAM).
2. The **UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme** aims to improve livelihoods, safeguard ecosystems, and promote sustainable economic development.

Subject: Internal Security

Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism, Terrorism

Long-term effects of terror attack-

News: The article reflects on the 15-year anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. It examines long-term effects of terror attack (like 26/11 or the 9/11 attacks in the US, or 7/7 in London) such as economic burdens due to heightened security, inefficiencies in security practices, and the psychological impact on society. It advocates for a reassessment of these security measures.

What are the long-term impacts of terror attacks?

1. **Economic Drain on Governments:** Post-attack, governments spend heavily on security, diverting funds from other vital areas like healthcare. This results in a significant shift from productive investments.
2. **Inefficient security expenses:** Equipment like baggage scanners, metal detectors, and additional personnel lead to high operational costs. These are necessary but often inefficient responses to terror threats.
3. **Indirect Economic Impacts:** Terror attacks result in higher insurance premiums, lower tourism, and reduced investor confidence.
4. **Societal and Psychological Effects:** The pervasive security measures and constant vigilance create a psychological impact on society, contributing to a sense of fear and impacting daily life.

What should be done?

1. **Allocate Resources Wisely:** The diversion of substantial funds to security measures should be balanced. This means ensuring that essential sectors like healthcare are not neglected.
2. **Innovate and Adapt:** Embrace new technologies and strategies that enhance security efficiently. This involves moving away from traditional, less effective methods to more sophisticated, data-driven approaches.
3. **Critical Reevaluation of Security Measures:** It's essential to assess the effectiveness of security protocols in place, moving away from ritualistic practices like routine vehicle checks at hotels, which may not significantly enhance security.

On the Issues with UAPA – J&K High Court underlines that criticism of a government can't be called a terrorist act

News: The article discusses the challenges associated with the UAPA and the observations of the courts in this regard.

Recently, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court granted bail to journalist Fahad Shah and quashed the charges framed against him under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

What is the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967?

UAPA aims at effective prevention of unlawful activities and associations in India. **Unlawful activity** refers to any action taken by an individual or association intended to **disrupt the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India**. The Act assigns absolute power to the central government, by way of

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, through an Official Gazette, declare it so. Till 2004, "unlawful" activities referred to actions related to secession and cession of territory. The 2004 amendment added "terrorist act" to the list of offences to ban organisations for terrorist activities.

What are the issues with UAPA?

- 1. Broad and Vague Definitions:** The Act's definitions of "unlawful activities" and "terrorist acts" are broad and vague. This can potentially lead to misuse, allowing authorities to target individuals or organizations without clear criteria.
- 2. Violation of Civil Liberties:** The Act allows for **pre-charge arrest (arrest occurring prior to a formal charge being made against a suspected criminal)** of suspects for a prolonged period, which violates the right to liberty and due process.
- 3. Misuse for Political Purposes:** Critics argue that the Act has been used to target political dissenters, activists, and minorities, rather than focusing solely on combating terrorism or unlawful activities.
- 4. Impact on Freedom of Speech:** There are concerns that the Act's provisions regarding speeches, writings, or actions that could be interpreted as supporting unlawful activities might impinge on freedom of speech and expression.
- 5. Harsh Bail Conditions:** The UAPA has provisions that make it difficult for people charged under the act to obtain bail, as it requires that the accused show that they are not guilty, shifting the burden of proof from the prosecution to the accused.
- 6. Low Conviction Rates:** Less than 3% of the arrests made under UAPA between 2015 and 2020 have resulted in convictions as per the People's Union of Civil Liberties.

What have been the judiciary's observations?

1. Observations by the J&K High Court:

- a. It said that an investigative agency must justify the arrest of an accused under UAPA based on a "**clear and present danger**" of the accused to the society at large, if enlarged on bail".
- b. It rejected the argument that honour and dignity of India is a property under the anti-terror law, the destruction of which is a terrorist act. The court stated that any criticism of the central government could then be described as a terrorist act under this interpretation. This would **undermine the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression**.

2. Observations by the Delhi High Court: It had ruled that "terror activity cannot be so broadly defined as to include ordinary penal offences".

3. Observations by the Supreme Court: In the One Media case where an undisclosed national security consideration was cited to deny renewal of license to a Kerala news channel, the Supreme Court had highlighted the trend of the state **misusing national security as a tool to deny citizens remedies** that are provided under the law.

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas

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.

On Maritime Security Challenges – The challenge of maritime security in the Global South

News: This article discusses the emerging challenges in the maritime domain and the issues associated with dealing with them.

What are the new threats emerging in the maritime domain?

1. **Asymmetrical war tactics:** This includes the following:
 - a. Use of Land-based missiles.
 - b. Use of Combat drones.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

c. Use of grey-zone warfare (Grey-zone warfare is a set of activities that take place between peace and war).

2. **Unconventional security threats:** This includes:

- a. Illegal fishing (and the use of unsustainable fishing methods such as bottom trawling).
- b. Natural disasters and the impact of climate change.
- c. Marine pollution.
- d. Human and drug trafficking.

What are the challenges in dealing with these issues?

1. **Requires much more than just military action:** States must instead be prepared to commit capital, resources, and specialist personnel over prolonged periods to meet security needs.
2. **Lack of precedent:** There is no functioning template or a previous example to fight non-traditional threats at sea.
3. **Lack of representation of the vulnerable states:** Rising sea levels, marine pollution, climate change, and natural disasters have had a disproportionate impact on less developed states. Voices from these littoral states in Asia, Africa, and the Southern Pacific are ignored by the developed countries.
4. **Linkages of these issues across multiple jurisdictions:** The cross-jurisdictional linkages (spread across various sovereign countries) between these diverse areas make them challenging to manage.
5. **Disparity in maritime capabilities:** Littoral states in Asia and Africa have unequal law-enforcement capabilities required to jointly combat maritime threats.
6. **Lack of cooperation:** Many of these countries have varying security priorities and are not always willing to leverage partner capabilities to combat threats such as piracy, armed robbery, and maritime terrorism. Priority is given to political and strategic autonomy over cooperation.
7. **Lack of consensus:** Implementing a collaborative strategy is challenging since it requires maritime agencies to improve interoperability, share intelligence, and agree on a regional rules-based order. There is a lack of consensus in the Global South regarding this.
8. **Lack of sound policies:** Policies such as lenient regulations; lax implementation of the law; and subsidies that incentivise smaller fishermen to shift to motorised trawling contribute to the rise of unconventional threats.

What is India's approach in this regard?

1. **India's Maritime Vision 2030:** It sets out a 10-year blueprint for the maritime sector, envisaging the development of ports, shipping, and inland waterways as a way of generating growth and livelihoods.
2. **India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative:** It rests on seven pillars including maritime ecology, marine resources, capacity building, disaster risk reduction, and maritime connectivity. It acknowledges that countries need collective solutions to their common problems, especially since they remain economically interdependent.

What should be done?

States must adapt a developmental approach to maritime security. To this extent, States must adopt an integrated form of maritime security operations and overhaul regulatory frameworks to align domestic regulation with international law.

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 8. Source: ALESSA.

available in return for a certain investment and gave the new recipients a protective shield for their secretive investments in that country.

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

Topic: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security.

ICMR data breach

News: This article discusses the recent ICMR Data Breach and suggests steps individuals can take to safeguard themselves from cybersecurity threats.

A detailed article on the **ICMR Data Breach** can be [read here](#).

A detailed article on **Cybersecurity in India** can be [read here](#).

Recently, an American cyber security company said that personally identifiable information of 815 million Indian citizens, including Aadhaar numbers and passport details, were being sold on the dark web. The threat actors selling the data claimed it was sourced from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

What are the different types of cyber data breaches?

1. **Hacking:** Unauthorized access to computer systems, networks, or databases by exploiting vulnerabilities.
2. **Malware attack:** Malicious software infects systems to steal data, damage files, or gain unauthorized access.
3. **Ransomware attack:** Malware encrypts a victim's data, demanding a ransom for giving access.
4. **Phishing:** Attackers use deceptive emails or messages to trick individuals into revealing sensitive information or clicking on malicious links.
5. **Physical Theft or Loss:** Breach occurs when physical devices like laptops or storage media are lost or stolen.
6. **Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS):** Overwhelming a network or website with traffic to disrupt services and potentially expose vulnerabilities.

What is the recent incident of health data cybersecurity breach?

1. Last month a server breach in ICMR led to the leaking of personal information of about **81 crore Indians**, who had taken COVID vaccines. This data was put on auction on the **dark web**.
2. This is the third time that healthcare system servers were breached. The government had informed the Parliament that there was a leak of CoWIN data in June. Prior to that, there was a **ransomware attack at AIIMS, Delhi**.

More on **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** can be [read here](#).

What was the government's response?

India's IT Minister for State shared that Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is investigating reports of the data leak. He said the government ecosystem will take time to transition to a **bullet proof set-up**, one which manages data and keeps it in a safe and responsible manner. **UIDAI** says that all Aadhaar holders' data is safe and secure in the Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR) of UIDAI and that they have never been breached in all its years of existence. It further added that UIDAI uses advanced security technologies to keep data safe and keeps upgrading them to meet emerging security threats and challenges.

What do these incidents indicate?

1. **Vulnerabilities in Digital Architecture:** The repeated breaches of healthcare data reflect the challenge faced by digital architecture.

2. **Sensitive nature of Health Data:** Health data contains personal information, medical history, and sometimes even genetic information. It is considered highly sensitive. Hence, it has been a key target for ransomware and extortion.
3. **State-Sponsored Espionage:** Countries may target health data to gain insights into the spread of diseases or identify vulnerabilities in healthcare infrastructure for strategic purposes.
4. **Financial Gain:** Stolen health data can be used for medical identity theft or **insurance fraud**.
5. **Issues with Data Protection Laws:** Data protection law provides sweeping exemptions to the government which influences the approach to cybersecurity. Government agencies might focus on priorities which could be tilted towards data collection and surveillance, rather than data protection and privacy.

How does India's digital health infrastructure work?

As part of the National Digital Health Mission, India's digital health infrastructure consists of 4 key features:

1. **Health ID:** The national health ID will be a repository of all health-related information of every Indian. The health ID is voluntary and applicable across states, hospitals, diagnostic laboratories and pharmacies.
2. **Personal health records**
3. **Digi Doctor:** The Digi Doctor option will allow doctors from across the country to enroll and their details will be available here. These doctors will also be assigned digital signatures which can be used for writing prescriptions.
4. **Health facility registry**
5. At a later stage, it will also include **e-pharmacy and telemedicine services**.

India's digital health infrastructure works on the principle of **federated architecture**, which means that information flows between all stakeholders in the healthcare universe but **doesn't get centrally stored**.

However, it could mean that the risks of a data breach can be magnified. A **World Bank study of ABDM** said **health insurers** can access patient data simply because they are in the ecosystem and use the information to hike premiums.

A detailed article on **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)** can be [read here](#).

What needs to be done?

Stricter oversight: Governments need stricter oversight on security.

Accountability towards people: They need to be more accountable to people whose data has been leaked.

What can users do to safeguard their personal information?

1. Users should approach **emails for unknown sources with caution** as stolen information may be used to target users in **phishing campaigns**.
2. It is advised to **change existing user IDs and passwords** to ensure that stolen data cannot be used for launching cyberattacks.
3. Users should also implement **two-factor authentication** for all their accounts and **inform the authorities concerned** in case they notice any suspicious activity in their online accounts.

On the issues of government's fact-checking unit - Retrograde step

News: The article discusses concerns about Tamil Nadu's government creating a fact-checking group to identify false information about its activities. Critics argue this could threaten free speech and lack independent oversight.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of November 2023

In April 2023, IT Rules 2021 were amended, allowing the central government to establish a Fact-Check Unit (FCU) to identify and remove "fake or false or misleading" content online.

In the wake of the Centre's decision, Karnataka government and subsequently the Tamil Nadu government decide to constitute their own fact-checking units to tackle misinformation related to state matters.

What is the concern regarding the Fact-Checking Initiative?

1. **Conflict of Interest:** It raises concerns about bias since the government might not be neutral.
2. **Potential for Censorship:** Critics are worried that this unit could limit freedom of speech by controlling information.
3. **Infringes on Rights:** Changes to the IT Rules have been legally challenged for possibly infringing on constitutional rights. The Bombay High Court has questioned whether such a government-run unit could operate without compromising the constitutional guarantee of free speech.

For more information on **concerns surrounding the FCU**, [read here](#).

What should be done?

1. **Specify Scope and Powers:** The government should detail the scope and powers of their fact-checking unit, as suggested by the Editors Guild of India.
2. **Independent Monitoring:** Misinformation and fake news should be managed by independent organizations, not by the government, to avoid conflicts of interest.
3. **Judicial Oversight:** A system of judicial oversight should be established to prevent the misuse of the fact-checking powers by the government.
4. **Prior Notice and Appeal:** There should be a process that allows for prior notice before labeling information as false, and a right to appeal against such decisions.
5. **Involve Stakeholders:** Fact-checking initiatives should be set up with the involvement of journalists and other stakeholders to ensure a more impartial approach.

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?

The 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?

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

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.

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.

On the rising risks of urban flooding – The expansion of settlements into flood-prone areas

News: This article discusses the recent findings of a World Bank Report highlighting the rising flooding risks due to expansion of settlements in flood-prone areas. It highlights the associated challenges and suggests steps to tackle them.

India’s urban areas have been flooding more and more often, destroying lives and livelihoods.

What is the current situation of floods in India?

India is highly vulnerable to floods. Out of the total geographical area of 329 million hectares (mha), more than 40 mha (~12%) is flood prone.

INDIA

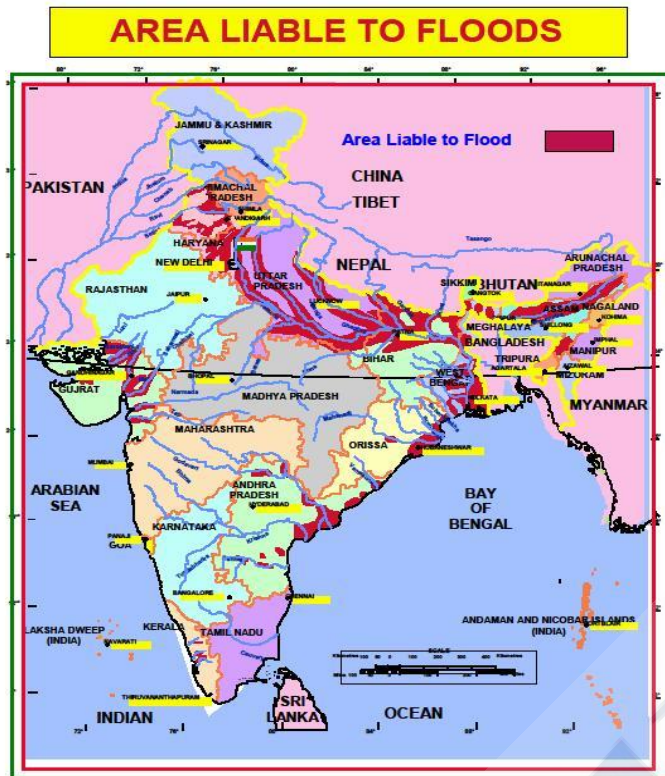


Figure 9. Source: ALESSA.

Flood-prone areas in India. Source: NDMA

What does a recent study by the World Bank say about flood risks?

1. According to the study, **flood risk in many cities is rising** because they are **expanding into flood-prone areas**. Since 1985, human settlements in flood-prone areas have more than doubled.
2. The study also found that **middle-income countries like India have more urban settlements in flood-prone zones** than low- and high-income countries.
3. This highlights the **risk of unsustainable urbanization** in India.

What is the situation of urban flood risk in India?

1. India is the **3rd highest contributor to global settlements exposed to flood hazards**.
2. India is also **3rd in countries with new settlements expanding into flood-prone areas**.

This means India is at significant risk of flood-related problems.

Who is the most vulnerable to this risk?

The risks are disproportionately **higher for those living in informal structures**.

Informal housing in cities is on land that is vacant and less desirable, so that they are not immediately driven off. So, they often lie in **“low-lying, flood-prone areas”**.

What are the reasons for the growth in human settlements in flood-prone areas?

1. **Lack of environmental regulations:** Environmental regulations are often applied only to big infrastructure projects and not to medium- and small-scale localities.
2. **Violation of regulations:** People violate existing government regulations. For instance, a rise in eco-tourism resorts on forest land and the construction of large structures on rivers' floodplains.
3. **Market forces:** Market forces, such as cost of land, tend to increase expansion into flood-prone areas.

What should be done?

1. **Recognition of the problem:** Recognising that we are actually expanding into flood-prone areas is the first step towards sustainable urban planning.
2. **Preventing disproportionate harm to the poor:** There is a need to differentiate between low-income residents and unauthorised structures erected for the elite.
3. **Scientific mapping:** Every city needs to do a proper scientific mapping of the flood prone areas.
4. **Resilient infrastructure:** Urban governments need to make housing in such areas more flood-resilient and protect low-income housing.

For example, riverside settlements that use stilt houses used by the Mishing and the Miyah communities along the Brahmaputra.