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Features :

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

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GS Paper 1

Subject: Indian Society

Topic: Salient features of Indian Society

NCRB Report 2022 - The crime story

News: The article discusses the National Crime Records Bureau's annual report for 2022. The report highlights an increase in crimes in India, especially against vulnerable groups, and emphasizes the growing issue of cybercrimes, underscoring the need for improved crime reporting and prevention strategies.

About National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is a government agency in India, headquartered in New Delhi. It was established in 1986 and operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
The NCRB's main job is to collect and analyze crime data based on the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws.
They publish a report each year, containing statistics on various types of crimes, including financial, commercial, and crimes against women. This data is gathered by State Crime Records Bureaux (SCRBx) from District Crime Records Bureaux (DCRBx) and sent to the NCRB at the end of each calendar year.
For information on key findings of NCRB report 2022 read here

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What does the NCRB report for 2022 indicate?

1.The report shows a **significant increase in crimes** in India, particularly against women, children, senior citizens, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. Notably, there were 468 suicides daily in 2022, and cybercrimes rose by nearly 25%.
2.The NCRB clarifies that the **data represents registered crimes, not the actual total number of crimes**, suggesting **potential under-reporting**. This under-reporting is particularly concerning in cases where the perpetrators are acquaintances of the victims.
3.The report is crucial for understanding crime patterns and for formulating policies to protect vulnerable groups.
4.The NCRB also notes that the increase in crime numbers in certain areas, like Delhi, could be attributed to greater awareness, increased presence of law enforcement agencies, or citizen-centric initiatives.

What should be done?

1. **Enhance Reporting Accuracy:** The NCRB should improve its data collection methodologies to more accurately reflect the actual number of crimes, considering that the current data only includes registered crimes.
2. **Prioritize Vulnerable Groups:** The report highlights the necessity to make homes, educational institutions, and public spaces safer, particularly for women, children, and marginalized communities.
3. **Combat Cybercrime Rise:** In response to the 25% increase in cybercrimes, law enforcement agencies must adapt and enhance their capabilities to tackle these digital threats.
4. **Utilize Data for Policy Making:** The NCRB data, despite its limitations, should be used as a valuable aid for developing policies and strategies to address the highlighted issues.

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On re-criminalizing adultery

News: The article discusses the Parliamentary Committee's suggestion to make adultery a criminal offense again in India, but in a gender-neutral way. This comes after the Supreme Court decriminalized adultery in 2018. The Committee wants to protect marriage, but critics say it's outdated and the state shouldn't interfere in private matters.

What is adultery?

Adultery refers to a consensual sexual relationship between a married person and someone who is not their spouse. It is typically viewed as a violation of marital fidelity and can result in legal, social, and religious repercussions. In various societies and cultures, adultery is deemed a crime or a sin. In others, it may not be explicitly banned, but it is still regarded as morally objectionable.

What is current legal status of adultery in India?

Adultery was a criminal offense under Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) until September 2018. It was then decriminalized by the Supreme Court in a landmark judgment in the case of **Joseph Shine v. Union of India.**
Supreme Court Ruling (2018): The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Dipak Misra, removed adultery as a criminal offense in 2018. The ruling stated that adultery is a matter of personal privacy and should not be a criminal matter. The Court emphasized that criminalizing adultery infringes on personal freedoms and treats women as property. It should remain a civil issue (ground for divorce), not a criminal one.

For more information read here

What are the arguments in favour of the criminalization of adultery?

1. **Protecting the Sanctity of Marriage:** Criminalising adultery in a gender-neutral manner is crucial for safeguarding the sanctity of marriage, which is considered sacred in Indian society and needs protection. This view is supported by the recent Parliamentary Committee, the Law Commission in its 42nd and 156th reports, and the Malimath Committee in 2003.
2. **Guardian of moral principles:** Criminal law everywhere in the world serves as a guardian of the moral principles of society, protecting a society's historical roots while leading it towards a progressive social order. If we start subjecting laws to our personal rationale, it will lead to chaos, as a counter-narrative would always exist.

What are the arguments against the criminalization of adultery?

1. **Invasion of Privacy:** The 2018 Supreme Court ruling emphasized that criminalizing adultery intrudes on personal privacy, treating it as a matter between individuals, not the state.
2. **Treating Women as Property:** The Supreme Court noted that the adultery law (before 2018 SC ruling) treated women as their husbands' property, challenging the notion of gender equality.
3. **Marriage as a Personal Compact:** One of the Congress MP argued that adultery should be a matter for civil law, not criminal law, as marriage is a personal agreement.
4. **Changing Social Norms:** Justice Indu Malhotra of the Supreme Court highlighted the need to recognize individual autonomy in the private sphere, reflecting evolving social attitudes towards marriage and personal choices.

For more information read here

Way forward

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Parliament has the authority to counteract judicial decisions, as seen in the **Madras Bar Association versus Union of India (2021) case,** provided it modifies the legal foundation of the judgment. Therefore, Parliament could enact a gender-neutral adultery law, addressing the Supreme Court's issues regarding privacy and gender discrimination. This law should balance personal freedom with the societal importance of marriage. Consultation among legal professionals, the public, and legislators is key to creating a law that aligns with modern values and upholds individual liberties.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

Effect of delimitation on Fiscal federalism - The Finance Commission has a highly critical task

News: The article effectively highlights the challenges that the 16th Finance Commission (FC) will encounter, especially in terms of fiscal federalism, due to the upcoming delimitation exercise. These challenges are reminiscent of those faced by the 15th FC following the introduction of GST. It emphasizes the complexities in tax distribution and the likely changes in Lok Sabha seats post the 2026 census, which may significantly impact political representation.

About 16th Finance Commission:

The Union Cabinet has approved the Terms of Reference for the Sixteenth Finance Commission, for five years (starting from 1st April 2026).
For more details on 16th FC term of reference read here.
For more details on challenges faced by FC read here.

What are the challenges in front of 16th FC due to delimitation exercise?

1. **Shift in Political Representation:** Post-2026 census delimitation is expected to reallocate Lok Sabha seats. It may likely increase the representation of northern states due to higher population growth.
2. **Tax Revenue Distribution Complications:** This political shift could affect the FC's approach to distributing tax revenues, possibly favoring states with greater representation. For example, States like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, despite their significant economic contributions, may struggle to advocate for their fiscal interests due to potentially reduced representation.
3. **Maintaining Federal Harmony:** The Commission must navigate these changes carefully to maintain harmony in India's federal structure, ensuring that the fiscal needs of all states are met while managing the shifting political landscape.

For more information read here

What should be done?

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1. **Fair Lok Sabha Representation:** To ensure fair representation of all states in the Lok Sabha post-2026 census delimitation, it is crucial to consider both population and economic contributions. This approach will help address the concerns of southern and western states, which have achieved better population control and economic growth. They fear losing their political influence in the Lok Sabha due to the current population-based seat allocation system.
2. **Strengthen Federal Structure:** Develop mechanisms to manage the economic disparities between states more effectively, reducing the burden on higher-performing states while encouraging efficient resource utilization.

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

On the Issues with EVMs – EVMs are reliable

News: This article discusses the concerns raised over the electoral process in India, especially with regard to Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). It also suggests steps which can be implemented to restore public trust in the election process.

Before the vote count in the recently held Madhya Pradesh Assembly elections, accusations of wrongdoing were raised. A video showing officials sorting ballot papers from the Balaghat election strongroom has emerged. Public debates, suspicion and court cases show that public trust in electronic voting is not as high as it should have been, and the ECI needs to address this.

What are VVPATs?

Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT) is an independent system attached to an EVM that allows the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended. When a vote is cast, a slip is printed on the VVPAT printer containing the serial number, name and symbol of the candidate voted.
This remains visible to the voter through a transparent window for seven seconds. Thereafter, this printed slip automatically gets cut and falls into a sealed drop box. If there is a need, these printouts can later be counted.

More on VVPATs can be read here.

What are the concerns raised over the working of EVMs?

1. **Complexity of EVMs:** Establishing the correctness of a complicated system like EVM is very difficult. If the correctness of an EVM cannot be proved, it is impossible to predict whether an EVM can be hacked or not.
2. **No Inherent Guarantee that the vote is cast, recorded and counted correctly:** In some cases, votes are recorded electronically in the absence of VVPAT. In this case, there is no way to guarantee that the vote is cast as intended, recorded in the EVM correctly and counted properly as recorded.
3. **Inadequacy of Testing:** It is also well known that testing is never adequate to establish the correctness of an EVM. Tests can detect only a small fraction of possible software or hardware errors.
4. **Issues with VVPAT:** VVPATs should be truly voter-verified, electronic and VVPAT tallies should be cross-checked against each other, and there needs to be a definite rule in case of a tie-break if the cross-check fails. The ECI's current VVPAT system is not truly voter-verified (it does not provide the necessary agency to a voter), and there is no principled method for dispute resolution.
5. **Lack of verifiability by a common man:** A common man cannot verify the accuracy of EVMs, without special knowledge or certification from experts (as accepted by a German Constitutional Court in 2009)

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6. **Arbitrary Procedures:** The current stipulation of auditing 5 EVMs per assembly constituency is without any statistical basis.

What should be done?

1. **Changes in the VVPAT Protocol:** The correct VVPAT protocol would be to allow a voter to approve the VVPAT slip **before the vote is finally cast**, and to provide an option to cancel the vote if a discrepancy is noticed.
2. **Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA):** These are standard and well-established methods for cross-checking the electronic tally with VVPAT counts. RLA limits the risk that the reported outcome in an election contest is incorrect.
3. **Mechanization instead of Manual Processes:** If required, independent systems of mechanised sorting and counting of VVPATs may also be set up.

ECI should ensure public trust in elections by making the election process publicly verifiable.

Subject: Governance

Topic: Government policies and interventions

On Regulating 'Dark Patterns'

News: The article discusses the growing concern of digital platforms employing 'dark patterns'.

The **Central Consumer Protection Agency (CCPA)** has issued guidelines for the prevention and regulation of **'dark patterns'** on the web. These guidelines will apply to **all digital platforms offering goods and services** in India.

Read about the **Central Consumer Protection Agency (CCPA)** [here](#).

What are 'Dark Patterns'?

Dark patterns refer to a variety of deceptive practices used to manipulate or strongly influence online consumers into making consumer decisions that might not align with their best interests.
They are designed to manipulate user behaviour by exploiting psychological vulnerabilities. These are widely recognised as unfair trade practices.
Examples: A false timer showing offer expiry, showing limited stocks, being part of mailing subscription lists that are hard to opt out of, collecting user data by evading informed consent, etc.

What are the growing concerns regarding Dark Patterns?

1. **Increased Manipulation due to Technological Advances:** The proliferation of dark patterns may only increase with further advances in machine learning and automation.
2. **Financial Harm:** Their use in the financial services industry can cause significant harm to savers and investors (for example, being lured into taking short-term high-interest credit).
3. **Disproportionately harms vulnerable socio-economic groups:** Certain socio-economic groups and individuals with low digital literacy are more susceptible to dark patterns.

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What should be the aims of regulation of dark patterns?

1 Protecting consumers from manipulation.
2 Preventing discrimination, so that dark patterns do not increase current inequalities.
3 It is also important to ensure that regulations do not end up significantly increasing the compliance burden for firms in India's digital economy, which has a huge potential (According to the government's projection, the digital economy is expected to reach 20% of India's GDP by 2026 from the current 11%).

Topic: Role of civil services in a democracy

On the issues with India's public institutions – Improving the capability of the Indian state

News: The article discusses the issues with India's public institutions and suggests reforms that may be undertaken to resolve them.

In the G-20 group, India has the smallest number of civil servants per capita. Similarly, the per capita number of doctors, teachers, town planners, police, judges, firefighters, inspectors for food and drugs, and regulators is also very low.

Why is a bigger state needed in India?

Supporters of **inclusive development** rightly advocate for an expanded state role, endorsing higher government expenditure on healthcare, education, social security, and a similar increase in bureaucracy. Due to insufficient state capacity, central and state governments often **outsource services** that would be more effectively administered by the public sector, like primary healthcare.

What are the issues with a big state?

However, there are concerns that a bigger state may lead to enormous **bureaucratic inertia and red-tapism** in the form of **licences, permits, clearances, and permissions**.
Also, the performance of the big state in India has been disappointing across domains such as learning outcomes, child and maternal mortality, agricultural and industrial productivity, etc., prompting people to favour a reduced role for state.
The author contends that in the debate on the extent of the role of the state (whether big or not), focus should be on addressing underlying problems such as incentives created by public institutions which result in undesirable consequences as well as skill gap among officials.

What are the issues with the Indian state and what are the reforms which can be undertaken to solve these issues?

Issues	Reforms Required
Concentration of policymaking and implementation powers both within departments.	Separating policymaking and implementation responsibilities is required. This speeds up the process and promotes innovation, tailoring programs more effectively to local situations. For example, The synergy between National Highways Authority of India (implementing agency) and the Ministry (policy

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	decisions) has significantly decreased project delays and cost overruns.
Lack of decision-making power with the frontline personnel. This leads to a **culture of mistrust** and **lack of accountability**.	**Delegating** financial and administrative powers to the frontline functionaries, with clearly defined processes, is required.
Lack of technocratic skills among policymakers to govern an increasingly complex economy.	a. **Lateral entry** at the middle and senior levels can help fill the civil services' size and technocratic gap. b. Qualified officers in **non-IAS services** should also get opportunities in high-level positions if they have the expertise. c. Civil servants should undergo **subject-specific training** under **Mission Karmayogi.**
Narrow scope of audits by the CAG (without taking into account the context in which a bureaucratic decision was made). It encourages the bureaucracy to **focus on compliance with rules** rather than objectives. This has made bureaucrats **risk-averse** to exercising discretion in policy matters, especially in case of big contracts, leading to delays.	The oversight agencies (CBI, CVC, CAG) must be sensitised to appreciate the context of policy decisions. They should factor in the costs associated with the actual decisions as well as their alternatives.
Post-retirement Appointments. This makes civil servants susceptible to political manipulation and influences their in-service decisions.	Increasing the retirement age to 65 years and making an absolute upper limit for all appointments.
High salary in public sector compared to private sector wages makes it attractive for all people, irrespective of them having a spirit of public service or not. This may lead to corrupt practices.	The solution lies in moderate pay raises by the future Pay Commission to make public sector less appealing to money minded people and attract intrinsically motivated individuals to contribute to the social good

Subject: Social Justice

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

Inclusion of people with disability- India, disability inclusion and the power of 'by'

News: The article discusses the challenges faced by people with disabilities. It highlights their struggles in society and work, especially in rural areas. It stresses the importance of including them in all areas of development for social justice and economic growth.

Who are the people with disabilities (PWD)?

As per the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (UN CRPD) "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".

For more information read here

What is the current status of PWD in India?

In India, there were around 26.8 million persons with disabilities, constituting 2.21% of India's total population (2011 Census).
There were 14.9 million men (2.41% of men) and 11.9 million women (2.01% of women) with disabilities.
69% (18 million) of persons with disabilities reside in rural areas.
Disabilities are highest in the age group 10-19 years (46.2 lakh people).

What are the challenges in the inclusion of PWD?

1. **Global Prevalence:** 1.3 billion people globally have disabilities, with 80% in developing countries and 70% in rural areas.
2. **Economic Exclusion:** They often face poverty, lack access to education and limited job opportunities. Inclusion could boost global GDP by 3-7% (asper ILO study).
3. **Social Perception:** They are frequently seen as charity cases, not as capable individuals.
4. **Inadequate Government Schemes:** Some developmental schemes exclude the disabled, as seen in India where awareness and last-mile connectivity are lacking, especially in rural areas.

What steps have been taken by the government for the inclusion of persons with disabilities?

1. **UN Convention Advocacy:** Advocating for changing attitudes and perceptions as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
2. **Government Schemes in India:** Implementation of schemes and the unique ID for persons with disabilities (UDID) under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016).
3. **SPARK Project:** The International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with Maharashtra's Women's Development Corporation, initiated the Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation (SPARK) project. It trains Disability Inclusion Facilitators to integrate women with disabilities into self-help groups, thereby promoting their social and economic development.

For more information on Provision made for PWD in India read here

What should be done to support people with disabilities?

1. **Inclusion in Economic Development:** Recognize and include persons with disabilities in economic activities, as their inclusion could boost global GDP by 3-7%.
2. **Promote 'By' vs 'For' Approach:** Shift focus to actions performed by persons with disabilities, rather than just for them, ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes.

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3. **Private Sector Engagement:** Encourage the private sector to hire and retain workers with disabilities, breaking down employment barriers and stereotypes.
4. **Replicate Successful Projects:** Expand initiatives like the SPARK project, which trains Disability Inclusion Facilitators and integrates women with disabilities into self-help groups for social and economic development.

On Crimes Against Women – A persistent social crisis

News: The article discusses the latest findings in the NCRB Report regarding crimes against women. It also highlights their implications.

What are the latest findings in the NCRB Report regarding crimes against women?

1. **Increase year-on-year:** The NCRB report records a **4% rise** in crimes against women in 2022 over the previous year. The cases reported translate to about 51 FIRs every hour.
2. **Crimes against women at home:** The problems begin at the Indian home, with cruelty by a husband or his relatives being the leading cause in 31.4% cases.
It points to the urgent need to **tighten anti-dowry laws.** It also reflects a **chauvinistic societal view** of women as commodities.
3. **Assault and rape:** These account for almost **26%** of crimes against women.
4. **Higher Crime Rates in Industrialised States:** Highest crime rates against women are in states that are relatively industrialised, such as Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Delhi records the highest rate of crime against women, far higher than the national average.
The crime statistics are probably a significant underestimate, reflecting only crimes that are reported.

Why are women reluctant to come forward to report crimes against themselves?

1. **Social harassment:** Women often fear social stigma, victim-blaming, or being judged for coming forward about a crime.
2. **Personal danger:** Reporting a crime might put women at risk of retaliation from the perpetrator or from others associated with the perpetrator.
3. **Indifference of the police and justice system:** If victims perceive or have experienced previous instances of authorities not taking their complaints seriously, being dismissive, or not providing adequate support or protection, they might hesitate to report future incidents.

What are the implications of prevailing attitudes and crimes against women?

1. **Dissuades women from entering the workforce:** Crimes against women is a factor influencing India's chronically low female workforce participation rates.
2. **Chauvinistic attitude of men in the family** (as reflected in the crimes against women at home): This means that men-folk are unlikely to encourage women in their families to seek financial or social independence in jobs or careers.
3. **Societal attitudes leading to more crimes against women:** The societal preferences against the girl child have skewed the gender ratio so drastically in parts of the country that kidnapping and abduction - mostly to seek wives - comes at third place in the ranking of crimes against women.

Thus, the NCRB data shows India remains unsafe for women, which requires urgent intervention.

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Topic: Issues relating to Health

Developments in TB treatment- Improved drug regimens for TB to cut treatment time

News: The article talks about The Union World Conference on Lung Health 2023, where new, shorter drug regimens for drug-resistant tuberculosis were introduced. It highlights challenges in current TB treatments, advancements in research, and the importance of improved diagnostics and a comprehensive approach to combat TB.

What is the current status of TB in India?

According to WHO Global TB report 2023:

1) In 2022, India had the most tuberculosis (TB) cases globally, with 2.8 million, making up 27% of the world's total.
2) The death rate from TB in India was 12%.
3) India also saw 1.1 lakh cases of multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) in 2022.
Note: Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) is TB that does not respond to at least isoniazid and rifampicin, the 2 most powerful anti-TB drugs.

What challenges exist in current TB treatments?

1. **Diagnostic Gaps**: According to the WHO, the over-reliance on direct sputum smear microscopy, with only about 50% sensitivity, results in many undetected TB cases. These cases are never brought into the treatment care.
2. **Ineffective Regimens**: As of 2018, the success rate of conventional treatments is only about 59%.
3. **Extended Treatment Duration:** Current TB treatments, especially for drug-resistant forms, can last up to 24 months. This makes compliance with treatment schedule difficult, ultimately leading to drug resistant TB.
4. **Severe Side Effects**: Patients often experience significant adverse effects from the long-term medication.
5. **Drug Resistance Issues:** Non-compliance and inability to tolerate the drugs contribute to the development of drug-resistant TB strains.
6. **Limited Funding for R&D:** Stop TB Partnership's estimates the funding need for TB R&D to be US$5 billion per annum. Current commitments fall significantly short of this, making it difficult to find alternative treatments.

What are the new developments in TB treatment?

1. **Introduction of New Regimens**: At the Union World Conference on Lung Health 2023, four innovative drug regimens were presented for treating drug-resistant TB.
2. **Effective Treatment Outcomes:** These regimens showed similar efficacy to conventional treatments, with favourable outcomes for 85-90% patients.

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3. **Shorter Treatment Times:** The new treatments reduce the duration by two-thirds compared to traditional methods.
4. **Access and affordability:** The new findings could address issues around access to and affordability of quality TB care.

How has research and development impacted TB drug development?

1. **Impact of Funding:** The United Nations targeted $2 billion annually for TB R&D. In 2021, the funding for R&D reached a billion dollars worldwide, for the first time.
2. **Global Collaboration:** The progress in TB drug development results from a decade of global efforts, involving organizations like WHO, Stop TB Partnership, and the Treatment Action Group.
3. **Long-term Commitment:** Continuous efforts and commitment over years have been crucial in achieving these advances, demonstrating the vital role of sustained research and development in TB care.

What is the way forward in TB treatment?

1. **Innovative Testing and Diagnostics:** The way forward includes the adoption of rapid, portable tests and AI-assisted diagnostics for enhancing early detection and treatment effectiveness.
2. **Global Scale-up of Short Regimens**: Particularly in countries like India, scaling up the 6-month shorter regimens for drug-resistant TB is essential.
3. **Comprehensive Strategy:** The goal of **'Ending TB by 2030'** requires a multi-pronged approach focusing on better case detection, improved treatment, and continued global collaboration and funding efforts.

Topic: Poverty and Hunger

Issues with the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)

News: This article discusses the flaws in the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) used by the United Nations and India. It argues that the MPI's method of measuring poverty is misleading and not detailed enough. The article also highlights the impact of COVID-19 and political factors on poverty levels.

What is Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)?

Historically, poverty estimation was done by largely focusing on income as the sole indicator.
However, there was criticism that poverty is multi-dimensional, going beyond monetary poverty. Income- and consumption-based poverty measures fail to capture the impact of deprivations in other non-economic factors on standard of living.
To capture this multidimensional poverty, Niti Aayog, along with UNDP, has come out with the National Multidimensional Poverty Index. Modeled on the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, the index captures overlapping deprivations in health, education and living standards.
For more information on MPI read here.
For information on key findings of the national MPI 2023 read here.

What are the issues with MPI?

1. **Simplified Approach to Poverty Measurement:** The MPI uses uniform weights for its three components - health, education, and standard of living - which simplifies the complex issue of poverty. For example, Amartya Sen presents a broader perspective on well-being, emphasizing on both capabilities (potential actions in a fair environment) and functioning (actual achievements).

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2. **Questionable Data Sources:** The MPI's reliance on National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5 is highlighted as inadequate. For instance, NFHS 5's data on open defecation contradicted official claims of its elimination, leading to its blockage and questioning its reliability. Yet, this same data was used by NITI Aayog and the UNDP for MPI calculations.

3. **State-Level Variations Ignored:** The MPI's general claims of poverty reduction in India are contradicted by specific state-level data. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, poverty actually rose, showcasing a discrepancy in the MPI's assessment. This rise in poverty at the state level indicates that the MPI's national figures may be overlooking significant regional variations in poverty.

4. **Discrepancy with Pandemic Impact:** Despite the economic turmoil caused by COVID-19, the MPI suggests a reduction in poverty from 24.85% to 14.96% between 2015-16 and 2019-21. However, this seems contradictory, considering the significant job losses and healthcare challenges the pandemic brought.

5. **Inconsistency of MPI against Important Covariates:** As per the author, covariates like per capita state income, urban population share, share of criminals among State MPs, and health and education expenditure significantly influence poverty levels. Their analysis of the trends in these covariates and its impact on poverty suggest the findings of MPI on poverty reduction are highly exaggerated.

Way forward:

To improve poverty measurement, the MPI should integrate detailed surveys like the 75th Round of the NSS with NFHS data and consider broader economic indicators. It should also account for political influences on resource allocation and adopt a nuanced approach to weighting, reflecting the complex nature of poverty.

Subject: International Relations

Topic: India and its neighborhood - relations

On India-Maldives relations – Maldives: From a beach resort to a worry spot

News: The article discusses the changing dynamics of India-Maldives bilateral relations. It also highlights China's rising influence in India's neighbourhood.

A detailed article on **India-Maldives Relations** can be read here.

How is China increasing its influence in India's neighbourhood?

China, in the form of aid for infrastructure (Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)) has pursued debt-trap diplomacy, including in India's neighbourhood. For instance:

1. **Afghanistan:** Chinese-Aghan ties have grown lately.
2. **Bhutan:** China is in border-settlement talks with Bhutan.
3. **Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka had to hand control of its Hambantota Port over to a state-owned Chinese firm on a 99-year lease due to non-payment of BRI dues.
4. **Pakistan:** The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aims to link China with Pakistan's Gwadar Port for trade movement.
5. **Maldives:** Under an earlier regime, Maldives had joined the BRI and signed a free-trade pact with China. However, an agreement on a Chinese post to monitor sea-lanes was not reached after governments changed.

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What are the changing dynamics of India-Maldives relations?

1. After taking charge as the President of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu asked India to withdraw its military personnel from the country.
2. Maldives President's official tour of Turkey broke the tradition of the new leader's first visit being to India. This signals a desire to break away from India's sphere of influence.

What are the issues arising due to these changing dynamics?

1. **Increasing Chinese Influence:** The worry is that Maldives could get became a part of China's **'string of pearls'** surrounding India with bases.
Access to the Arabian Sea could conceivably permit China to project hard power in the region.

Figure 1. Source: forte.jor.br

2. **Turkey's Increasing Role:** Turkey hasn't been friendly towards India. At the same, it has also grown closer to China.

What should India do?

India reportedly agreed to set up a "core group" on ties that would also look into the matter of troop withdrawal. In the future, India will have to present significant benefits to Maldives to maintain its alignment with India's interests. Similarly, practical packages like this should also be developed for other South Asian countries.

India's neighbourhood dilemmas

News: The article discusses India's difficulties in managing relationships with neighbouring countries in South Asia. It highlights challenges from anti-India regimes and China's growing influence. The need for India to improve its diplomatic strategies and increase diplomatic personnel is also emphasized.

What dilemmas does India face in the neighbourhood?

1. **Rise of Anti-India Regimes:** India confronts the rise of anti-India regimes, like the one in the Maldives, which is urging Indians to leave.
2. **Structural Challenges from China's Influence:** The increasing engagement of South Asian countries with China's Belt and Road Initiative and other projects. China's strategic involvement in countries like Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, overshadow India's influence.
3. **China's Border Settlement Strategy:** China's efforts to resolve border disputes with neighboring countries, except India, as demonstrated in Bhutan, creates strategic concerns for India in the region.

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What are the reasons behind India's neighbourhood dilemmas?

Regional Geopolitical Architecture:
a) Diminishing US Presence-The United States' decreasing involvement in South Asia has created a vacuum, now being filled by China, to India's disadvantage
b) Rise of China- China's significant growth acts as a 'geopolitical buffer' for smaller states, challenging India's influence in the region
c) Use of the 'China Card'- Neighbouring countries are increasingly using their relationship with China as a strategic tool in their foreign policy
d) Lack of Interconnectedness and Poverty- The region's underdevelopment and poverty make the economically more capable China an attractive partner
e) India's Normative Approach- India's traditional, normative policy towards the region has been less effective compared to China's non-normative, pragmatic approach.
India's Policy Stance: India's foreign policy shows a deep-seated status quo bias, primarily engaging with those in power, which can alienate other important groups or emerging power centers in these countries.
Misconceptions in Indian Diplomacy:
a) Overestimation of Regional Influence- India believed that excluding Pakistan, South Asia would align with its geopolitical views, which hasn't been the case
b) Overestimation of Cultural Connections- The assumption that India's cultural and historical ties would ensure better relations with neighbors has not been as effective against China's more resource-driven approach.

What should be done?

a) India needs to recognize the fundamental shift in South Asia's balance of power, where China is now a key player
b) Proactively seek involvement of friendly external countries to counter the region becoming Sino-centric
c) Engage with a variety of political and social actors in each neighbouring country, not just those in power
d) Significantly boost the number of diplomats to handle India's foreign policy effectively, given its large population and expanding role in global affairs.

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

US charge against India in Pannun case - A lot at stake

News: The U.S. charged an Indian citizen with planning to kill an Indian origin separatist in America. The plan involved an Indian official and was known to U.S. agents. This could hurt India's global image and its ties with the U.S. India is now investigating the situation.

Background:

The US Department of Justice disclosed a conspiracy to murder a New York attorney and activist of Indian descent. Reportedly, an Indian government officer was involved in plotting this conspiracy on U.S. soil. Additionally, the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada was also linked to this conspiracy. This case highlights potential international legal complexities and serious criminal allegations.

What are the implications of this accusation against India?

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1. **Diplomatic Tensions:** The charge against the Indian citizen by the U.S. may create potential diplomatic tensions between India and the U.S.
2. **International Repercussions:** The allegations, if true, could affect India's reputation as a principled and consistent power in international affairs. It could also impact India's relations with other countries, especially those in the **"Five Eyes" intelligence alliance**.

Note: The Five Eyes alliance, consisting of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US, collaborates in intelligence sharing. This partnership is rooted in the UK-USA Agreement, a multilateral treaty focusing on cooperative signals intelligence.

What should be done?

1. **Thorough Investigation**: India must conduct a detailed and transparent investigation into the allegations. Apart from this, government should clarify its stance on the alleged involvement of Indian officials and its approach to Sikh separatists.
2. **Diplomatic Dialogue:** India needs to ensure transparent and direct communication with the U.S. and other relevant countries, particularly with U.S. law enforcement, which revealed this conspiracy.
3. **Managing Extradition Requests:** Addressing the extradition issue with the U.S. is important. This requires balancing legal and diplomatic considerations to maintain good bilateral relations.

On Kra Isthmus Project- Kra, New Delhi's New KRA

News: The article discusses Thailand's plan to build a land bridge in the Kra Isthmus. This bridge could change global trade routes and affect regional powers, especially China and India. It highlights China's strategic interests and India's need to respond strategically.

What is the Kra Isthmus Project?
Thailand plans to build a 90-km land bridge (road and rail link) in the Kra Isthmus. It will connect the Andaman Sea and Gulf of Thailand. The project aims to move 20 million TEU (unit of cargo capacity) of containers and cut transport time by 4-6 days.
The bridge could change global shipping routes, reducing reliance on the congested Malacca Strait. This shift might affect major ports in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

Figure 2.Source: The Maritime Executive

Why is China interested in the Kra Isthmus Project?

1. **Overcoming the Malacca Dilemma:** This dilemma involves the fear that a blockade of the Malacca Strait by foreign powers, especially the United States, could cripple the Chinese economy.
2. **Expanding Military and**

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Commercial Reach: The project complements China's broader ambitions in the region, including their military facility in Cambodia. It also aligns with their interests in developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) near these ports, allowing for easier export to Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.

3. **Enhancing Influence in the Bay of Bengal:** China's increased involvement in the Kra Isthmus region could also lead to a stronger military presence in the Bay of Bengal. This is evident from the potential dual-use capabilities of ports like Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Kyauk Phu in Myanmar.

How does the Kra Isthmus Project impact India?

1. **Geostrategic Concerns:** India is wary of the Kra Isthmus Project due to its proximity to the strategic Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This raises concerns about China's growing influence in the Bay of Bengal, a region of significant importance to India.
2. **Economic Impacts:** India's development plans, like the container trans-shipment port and SEZ at Galathea Bay in Nicobar, might be impacted by Thailand's similar project in Ranong, which is only 500 nautical miles away.

What should be done by India?

1. **Coordinate with Thailand:** Given the proximity of India's and Thailand's port projects, closer interaction with the Thai government is essential. India should ensure these projects are complementary, benefiting both countries.
2. **Monitor Chinese Activities:** India needs to closely watch China's involvement in regional ports like Hambantota and Kyauk Phu. This vigilance will help protect India's commercial interests and prevent a Chinese monopoly in the Bay of Bengal.
3. **Strengthen Regional Ties:** India should deepen its engagement with ASEAN countries Myanmar and Bangladesh, focusing on those affected by the Kra Isthmus Project. This helps in understanding and influencing regional dynamics.
4. **Promote Balanced Investment:** Encouraging ASEAN's control over the Kra Isthmus Project and involving other international investors could help maintain a multipolar balance in the region. This approach supports India's position as a principal maritime power in the Bay of Bengal.

On India's stand on the Israel-Palestine issue – New Delhi's flip-flop on Israel-Palestine is costly for India

News: This article discusses the issues with India's stand on the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict and suggests a suitable foreign policy path for the same.
A detailed article on the **Israel-Palestine Conflict** can be [read here](#).

A brief timeline of the conflict:

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Source: Associated Press.

What are the issues with India's current stand?

A detailed article on **India's policy on the Israel-Palestine issue** can be read here.

According to the author, following are the issues:
1. **Negative Perception in the Global South:** There is an increased perception that India is drifting from its historical neutrality on the Palestinian issue. It is against the India's aspiration to become a leader of global south.
2. **Inconsistent and Paradoxical Stand:** India initially showed support for Israel after Hamas attacks but later reaffirmed commitment to a two-state solution. It abstained from a UN resolution for a ceasefire in Gaza but later voted for a resolution condemning Israel's settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These positions are conflicting and inconsistent.
3. **Detrimental to India's interests in West Asia:** India's geopolitical interests in West Asia (such as increasing trade and physical interconnectivity (as part of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC))) are heavily dependent on its sound relations with the Gulf Arab states.
Further dilution of India's historic and principled stand would be detrimental to it's long-term aspirations and strategic interests in this region.

What should India do?

According to the author, India should follow these steps:

1. **Re-establish its principled approach:** India should highlight the merits of nonviolent struggle for the Palestinians, as well as the use of strategic patience and democratic co-option by Israel.
2. **Consistency foreign policy:** To emerge as a counsel and leader of the Global South, India's foreign policy will need to be consistent.
3. **Increase in Humanitarian Aid to Palestine:** India should bolster its small humanitarian aid ($35 million over the past two decades) for the Palestinian people. India should also continue to send medical and disaster relief aid to Gaza.
4. **Push for Dialogue:** India could push Israel and the Palestinian Authority to resume direct negotiations for establishing a sovereign state of Palestine, which lives in peace with the state of Israel.
5. **Pursue Israel for an amicable solution:** Israel might be pushed to remove settlements in the West Bank and reduce the use of excessive force.

This will ensure that the vision of a well-integrated India-Arab-Israel can still materialise in West Asia.

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GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

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

On Innovation in India – Rework the risk-reward matrix for innovation gains

News: The article discusses the advantages India has with respect to growing its footprint in the field of innovation. It also highlights the current status of innovation in India, and the steps needed to improve it further.

What is the advantage India has in terms of innovation?

1. World-class tech talent (India's skilled IT Workforce).
2. Rapidly maturing startup entrepreneurial ecosystems (Over 1,12,718 DPIIT-recognized startups making India the 3rd largest startup ecosystem in the world).
3. Access to smart capital and big finance (Rising FDI and the healthy state of banks).
4. Strong academic institutions (IITs, IIMs, IIITs).
5. Supportive policy environment (such as the Startup India Scheme and the Funds of Funds for Startups).

Despite these positive factors, India hasn't made its mark globally in terms of innovation.

What is the status of innovation in India?

A key indicator of India's low but growing innovation capabilities is patent filing.

1. **Patent Filing:** Among 55 nations, India is ranked **42nd on the International IP Index 2023** developed by the **Global Innovation Policy Center, US Chamber of Commerce**. In patent filings, directly related to investment in research, India scores much lower than top spenders such as Israel, South Korea, Sweden, Japan.

2. **Lack of Quality Institutions:** Out of the 10,000 institutions teaching technology, over 95% have not submitted any intellectual property for protection.

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3. **Lack of long-term innovation:** Even in institutions such as IITs, there has been criticism about the lack of a longer-term innovation strategy.

Apart from this, the **World Intellectual Property Organization** ranks India **40th in the Global Innovation Index 2023**.
By this assessment, despite producing more innovation output relative to its level of innovation investment, India ranks low on infrastructure, business sophistication and institutions.

What are the areas India needs to focus on to drive innovation?

1. **First**, build truly world-class centres of excellence such as those in the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and a few IITs. These have strong linkages between industry, government and academia.
Second, create an enabling environment for India's Generation Z (people born between 1996 and 2010) to succeed.
India is witnessing the emergence of its current Gen Z as the first generation that is educated, competitive and not risk averse when it comes to innovations.
2. **Third**, going beyond 'jugaad' and frugal innovation to focus on world-class innovation in mission mode. This can be ensured through a commitment by both private industry and the government to longer-term investments, aided by tax incentives.

India must build on its strong grounding in technology, IT services and now also digital public infrastructure (DPI) to become a global powerhouse of innovation.

Improving GST Regime-Creating certainty

News: This article discusses the growth in India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue. The article points to the recent high collections in the GST. It suggests the government should improve GST by addressing issues like tax disputes and including excluded items.

What is the current status of the Goods and Services Tax (GST)?

1. GST revenue has seen a significant rise. The collections was nearly ₹3.4 lakh crore in October and November.
2. Average monthly GST collection for 2023-24 is approximately ₹1.66 lakh crore.
3. Economists predict central GST receipts may exceed budget estimates.

What steps are being taken for the improvement of GST?

1. **Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT), approved** by the GST Council, is being set up to reduce GST case backlogs.
2. Plans are underway **to include items like petroleum and electricity** in the GST framework.
3. GST Council has notified the reconstitution of **group of ministers (GoM) on rate rationalisation.**

What should be done for GST improvement?

1. **Address Taxpayer Appeals:** Rapid operationalization of appellate tribunals to resolve the rising number of pending taxpayers appeals against GST levies. These cases have reached nearly 15,000 in number.
2. **Simplify Tax Structure:** Work towards restructuring the complex multiple rate system of GST.
3. **Ensure Stability and Predictability:** Develop a clear and stable tax regime that provides certainty to investors and taxpayers, enhancing India's economic environment.

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4. **Maintain Focus Post-Elections:** Despite potential delays due to upcoming elections, the GST Council should keep deliberating on these improvements to fast-track implementation after the Lok Sabha election.

Terminology Used:

Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT): It is a key body for resolving GST disputes. It shall be presided over by its President and shall consist of one Technical Member (Centre) and one Technical Member (State). It handles second-level appeals in GST laws, bringing uniformity in decision-making across the country. Its establishment under the CGST Act, it aims for fair and consistent resolution of tax disputes.

On India's Forex Reserves – Decoding the fall and rise of India's forex reserves

News: The article discusses the recent rise of India's foreign exchange reserves. It highlights the various components of forex reserves as well as the mechanisms of RBI's interventions involving them.

India's Forex Situation:

On 14 July, India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves stood at $609 billion. On 20 October, it hit a recent low of $583.5 billion before rising again slightly to $597.9 billion on 24 November.

On 20 October, forex reserves hit a recent low of $583.5 billion before rising again slightly to $597.9 billion on 24 November.
Total foreign exchange reserves (in $ billion)
597.9
578.4
31 Mar 2023   24 Nov 2023
Source: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

What are India's forex reserves?

Primarily, foreign exchange reserves consist of foreign currency assets and gold.

1 Gold: Gold reserves are maintained for financial emergencies.
As per the latest data, gold has risen to around 7.7% of foreign exchange reserves of $597.9 billion (from 7% $530 billion a year earlier). This has primarily been on account of the price of gold in dollar terms going up by close to 15% in the last one year.

2 Foreign Currency Assets (FCAs): This constitutes major global currencies like the US dollar, euro, pound sterling, Japanese yen, etc., held in the form of securities such as treasury bills, bonds, and deposits in foreign central banks. It forms the majority of India's forex.
These are used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to actively manage the value of the rupee against the dollar.

Apart from this, forex also consists of:

3 Special Drawing Rights (SDRs): SDRs are allocated to member countries of the IMF, including India, and serve as an additional reserve asset. The SDR is not a currency. It is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members.

4 Reserve Position in IMF: It represents the funds held in the IMF that a country can use based on its membership quota. Part of the quota can be withdrawn from the IMF during critical situations such as Balance of Payment (BOP) crises.

How does forex reserve help RBI in managing the value of the Rupee?

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For India's macroeconomic stability, it is important that the **rupee does not depreciate too much and/or too fast** against the dollar.

For instance, India imports much of the oil that it consumes (more than 80%). In such a scenario, a weaker rupee makes oil imports expensive, (which passes on to either the end-consumers or the primarily government-owned oil marketing companies). This makes it important for the RBI to ensure that the value of the rupee doesn't fall too much and too fast against the dollar.

The RBI secures this stability by selling the dollars from its reserve of foreign currency assets and acquiring rupees in return. This practice ensures availability of dollars in the economy, thereby averting swift devaluation of the rupee against the dollar.

Why did the Forex reserves recently go down?

Recently, the Rupee has come under pressure of depreciating. This is because the returns on US government bonds have been going up. Higher returns led foreign institutional investors (FIIs) to sell Indian stocks and move money to USA (because investors opt for safer investment options). In order to move this money out of India they had to sell rupees and buy dollars. This put pressure on the rupee, forcing the RBI to act.

Why have the Forex reserves now gone up?

The return on the US government bond fell in November. The fall in returns has encouraged FIIs to bring money back into India.

So, with FII dollars coming into the country again, the RBI doesn't need to sell its dollar reserves anymore to prevent the depreciation of rupee. This is why forex reserves have risen to close to $598 billion.

On the state of India's Economy – Patchy expansion

News: The article discusses the recent data released by the NSO regarding the state of the Indian economy in Quarter 2 (2023-24).

What are India's macroeconomic figures for Quarter 2 (2023-24) released by the NSO?

GDP Growth Rate: The latest provisional estimates of GDP for the July-August-September quarter project GDP growth rate at **7.6%.**

Figure 3.Source: TOI.
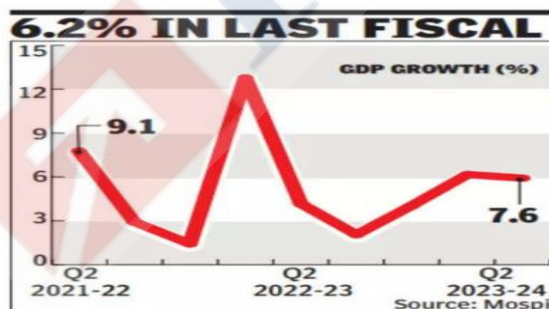
GVA Growth Rate: Gross Value Added (GVA) across 8 broad sectors of economy registered a **7.4%** expansion.

High-Growth Sectors: Double-digit expansion was seen in the **manufacturing, mining and quarrying, construction and utilities sector.**

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Figure 4. Source: TOI.

Slowdown in Agriculture Sector: The agriculture, livestock, and fishing sector experienced contraction for the third consecutive quarter. It also witnessed a significant slowdown in year-on-year growth, dropping to just **1.2%**. This highlights the severe financial uncertainty affecting people reliant on farming and related activities in rural areas. **Slowdown in Services Sector:** The trade, hotels, transport and communication, and the financial and realty services sectors, two crucial components of the service industry, experienced a decline in growth. This suggests that the post-pandemic recovery in services might be losing momentum.

Slowdown in Private final consumption expenditure: Private consumption spending, the single-largest component of demand in the economy, is also encountering challenges. Its growth notably decelerated to **3.1%**, down from 6% in the previous quarter. This is because rural demand remained affected by a below-average monsoon.

Public Spending-fuelled Growth: The recent surge in the economy can mostly be attributed to the boost provided by government spending (both in terms of consumption demand and asset-creating capital investments).

Policymakers must focus on expanding the base of growth in order to maintain the current pace as well as reduce inequality.

Subject: Agriculture

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

On Fertiliser subsidies – Farm dos and don'ts

News: The article discusses the need and challenges with the rising fertiliser subsidies in India.

A detailed article on **Fertiliser Subsidies** can be read here.

Why is the Fertiliser subsidy bill increasing?

Despite the import prices of fertilisers such as **Urea** rising recently, the maximum retail prices for these fertilisers have remained the same. Other fertilisers like Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Muriate of Potash (MOP), which aren't formally price-controlled by the government, have also seen their prices frozen

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by preventing companies from charging more.
This has resulted in higher fertiliser subsidies.

What are Controlled and Decontrolled fertilisers?

Controlled fertiliser: Urea is the only fertilizer with statutorily controlled price & movement. For phosphatic & potassic (P&K) fertilizers, the Department of Fertilizers provides an indicative Maximum Retail Price at which they are to be sold. The Government pays the difference between controlled price and market price to the fertiliser company.
Decontrolled fertilisers: The MRPs of non-urea fertilisers (such as DAP, MOP) are decontrolled and are fixed by the companies in the open market. The Centre, however, pays a fixed per-tonne subsidy on these nutrients to ensure they are priced at "reasonable levels".

What is the importance of fertiliser subsidies?

1. **Boost Agricultural Production:** An adequate supply of fertilisers will increase agricultural production. For instance, DAP is a crucial fertilizer for growing cotton in the western and northern regions of India.
2. **Cushioning Farmers from Price rise:** It shielded farmers from the global price shocks post the Russia-Ukraine war.

What are the issues with Fertiliser subsidies?

1. **High Burden on Exchequer:** The Centre's fertiliser subsidy outgo, which was Rs 81,000 crore in 2019-20, has shot up to Rs 1.5 lakh crore in 2021-22 and Rs 2.5 lakh crore in 2022-23.
2. **Environmental Cost:** The fertiliser subsidy has incentivised use of urea and DAP over other fertilisers. This has resulted in **skewed Nitrogen : Phosphorus : Potassium (NPK) ratio.** For the recent kharif cropping season, this ratio was estimated at close to 11:5:1, as against an ideal ratio of 4:2:1. This has adversely impacted soil health as well as crop productivity.
3. **Health Impacts:** Overuse of fertilizers also pollutes groundwater and streams. Infants who drink water with high levels of nitrate (or eat foods made with nitrate-contaminated water) may develop disorders (such as the Blue-Baby Syndrome).

What should be done?

According to the author, there are two things that the government must do:

Bring urea under the nutrient-based subsidy regime: Decontrol fertilisers and bring in a **per-tonne subsidy** linked to the fertiliser's nutrient content. This way, farmers will start looking beyond urea.
Extend the subsidy on a per-hectare basis: The government should let farmers buy any kind of fertiliser using this money.
It will also force companies to come out with new value-for-money fertiliser products that are crop-, soil- and agro climatic region-specific.

Topic: Issues of buffer stocks and food security

Hidden costs of agriculture in India - The need to transform agri-food systems

News: The article discusses a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, highlighting the "hidden costs" of current farming methods. These methods, focused on a few crops and heavy chemical use. It

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affects the environment and health. In India, it is leading to poverty and health issues. The report suggests that diverse, more natural farming methods can reduce these hidden costs, benefiting farmers, health, and the environment.

What is Hidden cost of agrifood systems?

Hidden costs of agrifood systems encompass various aspects. These include environmental costs, such as greenhouse gas and nitrogen emissions, water usage, and land-use changes. Additionally, there are hidden health-related costs due to decreased productivity from unhealthy dietary patterns and social hidden costs associated with poverty and productivity losses resulting from undernourishment. Major finding of the State of Food and Agriculture report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations are:

1. Present, global agri-food systems have hidden costs exceeding $10 trillion.
2. India's total hidden costs of agrifood systems were approximately $1.1 trillion. Which makes it the third largest in the world after China ($2.5 trillion) and the United States ($1.5 trillion).
3. The current farming practices in India account for nearly 11% of India's GDP in hidden costs, contributing to higher poverty levels.
4. In India, the burden of disease (productivity losses from dietary patterns) had the largest share (60 per cent) among hidden costs, followed by the social cost of poverty among agrifood workers (14 per cent), and then the environmental cost of nitrogen emissions (13 per cent).

What are the reasons for the hidden costs of current farming in India?

Impact of Green Revolution: The Green Revolution in India increased hidden farming costs by promoting monocultures of rice and wheat, which now make up over 70% of agricultural production. This focus led to **loss of seed sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge, reduced crop diversity, and increased farmer debt.** By 2013, farmers' debt-to-asset ratio had risen by 630% from 1992, showing the economic strain of these practices.

India's Agriculture Policy (National Food Security Act 2013 and MSP): The National Food Security Act 2013 legally assures food at subsidized rates to 65% of households, around 800 million people. It **increased priority to rice and wheat**, for example, in 2019-2020, India focused on rice and wheat, procuring over 850 lakh MT, but only 3.49 lakh MT of coarse grains, less than 1% of the total. This led to a 20% **decrease in coarse grain cultivation** from 1966-1967 to 2017-2018, while rice and wheat cultivation increased by 20% and 56%, respectively.

This policy framework inadvertently **encourages water-intensive and chemical-dependent farming** practices. Which has led to a monoculture system, impacting biodiversity and soil health. **Global Market Influence:**

1. **Fluctuations in global markets**, like with soy prices between 2021 and 2016, impact local farmer incomes.
2. **Historical global trade relations**, like the British-enforced exports of cotton, also shaped local production, aligning it more with global demands than local needs.

What should be done?

1. **Shift to Multi-Cropping Systems:** Diversify crops to enhance farmers' well-being and nutritional outcomes. This can be achieved by implementing systems like 'akkadi saalu' in Karnataka, which involve mixing legumes, pulses, and oilseeds.

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2. **Reduce Chemical Usage:** Gradually transition from chemical-intensive practices to natural farming methods. This can reduce input costs and improve soil health.

3. **Rebalance Crop Allocation:** Increase the cultivation and procurement of coarse grains and nutritious crops. This can be accomplished by decreasing the emphasis on rice and wheat to promote dietary diversity.

4. **Policy and Subsidy Reforms:** Redirect subsidies to support sustainable farming and diverse crop cultivation. There is a need to incentivize farmers for their eco-friendly practices.

5. **Collaborative Efforts:** Encourage collaboration among institutions, policymakers, and farming communities. This is essential for developing and implementing sustainable agricultural strategies.

Subject: Science & Technology

Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Regulating deepfakes and generative AI in India

News: The article discusses the misuse of deepfake technology, where AI is used to create realistic fake videos and images, often leading to issues like privacy invasion, misinformation, and harassment. It highlights recent incidents involving deepfakes, their impact, and the need for legal measures to address these challenges.

What is deepfake technology?

Read here

What are the concerns related to deepfake technology?

1. **Political Concerns:** Deepfakes have infiltrated politics. In India it was seen with AI-generated videos of BJP leader Manoj Tiwari and Congress chief Kamal Nath, used for misleading election campaigns. Internationally, deepfakes influenced Argentina's presidential polls. Also, a fake video of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, falsely urged citizens to surrender.

2. **Gender Vulnerability:** As per a 2019 study, 96% of deepfakes are pornographic, with 99% targeting women. These technologies have been exploited to harass and shame women, causing significant psychological trauma.

3. **Other Concerns:** Deepfakes pose threats of misinformation and privacy invasion, highlighted by incidents involving actor Rashmika Mandanna and influencer Zara Patel. The ease of creating deepfakes raises challenges in distinguishing real from fake content, undermining trust in digital media.

What is the judicial view on deepfakes in India?

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The Delhi High Court **expressed uncertainty about issuing directions on deepfake control,** citing the government's better suitability for a balanced approach.

During a PIL hearing, the Court noted the challenges in controlling borderless internet technologies.

The matter was postponed for further hearing, acknowledging ongoing government actions to address deepfake issues.

What legal provisions exist against deepfakes in India?

1. **India does not have specific laws or regulations that ban or regulate the use of deepfake technology.** However, several existing legal provisions are used to address deepfake-related crimes:
2. **Information Technology Act, 2000: a)** Section 66E of IT Act, is applied in cases where deepfakes violate an individual's privacy through the capture, publication, or transmission of images, carrying a penalty of up to three years in jail or a fine of ₹2 lakh, **b**) Section 66D of the IT Act targets the malicious use of communication devices or computer resources for impersonation, **c)** For deepfakes that are obscene or sexually explicit, Sections 67, 67A, and 67B of the IT Act are used.
3. **IT Rules:** It prohibits hosting content that impersonates another person and requires social media platforms to remove 'artificially morphed images' promptly.
4. **Indian Penal Code:** Sections 509, 499, and 153, address cybercrimes associated with deepfakes.
5. **The Copyright Act of 1957:** It is applicable if deepfakes use copyrighted images or videos. Section 51 prohibits unauthorized use of such copyrighted material.
6. **Recent initiative:** The government is going to introduce a draft on AI regulation, which will be open for public consultation.

What are the global best practices against deepfake?

United States: US President **executive order on AI management** includes specific standards for the labeling of AI-generated content, which is crucial for identifying deepfakes. Additionally, individual states like California and Texas criminalize deepfakes influencing elections. Furthermore, at the federal level, **the DEEP FAKES Accountability Bill**, introduced in Congress, seeks to require creators to label deepfakes on online platforms and notify users of any alterations in videos or other content.

China: The **Cyberspace Administration of China** has introduced new regulations that significantly restrict the use of deep synthesis technology. These policies mandate that any content altered using this technology must be explicitly labeled and traceable back to its source.

European Union: The **EU's Code of Practice on Disinformation requires** flagging deepfake content. This initiative is bolstered by the **Digital Services Act,** which aims to increase the monitoring of digital platforms to prevent various forms of misuse.

Additionally, Under the proposed **EU AI Act**, deepfake providers must disclose and label their content.

What should be done?

a) Establish safety standards while assimilating AI benefits, **b**) Develop a regulatory framework tailored to AI technology, **c**) Use regulatory sandboxes for innovation, similar to the financial sector, **d**) Balance legal responses without impeding innovation or free speech, **e**) Strengthen enforcement mechanisms for existing and new laws, **f**) Focus on preventive measures and public awareness about deepfakes.

On the Challenges of the AI Revolution – Navigating AI's dystopian realities

News: The article discusses the challenges that AI regulation faces in its implementation. It also highlights the scope of the future AI revolution and points to the issues that may arise due to it.

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Read in detail about the **Bletchley Declaration** here.

What is the Bletchley Declaration?

29 countries such as the US, the UK, China, Australia, Brazil and India, along with the European Union have agreed to work together to prevent "catastrophic harm, either deliberate or unintentional" which may arise from artificially intelligent computer models and engines. The document emphasizes the necessity of aligning AI systems with human intent and urges a deeper exploration of AI's full capabilities.

What are the issues with the Bletchley Declaration?

1. **Behind the pace of the technological curve** (The technological curve refers to the rate at which technology advances or progresses over time).
This is because technology evolves swiftly, making it challenging for regulators to anticipate and understand the implications of new developments fully.
2. **Not Enforceable:** No binding agreement was adopted by the participating countries, either for nations or AI developers.
3. **Signatories have continued encouraging AI R&D:** No nation will deliberately slow down R&D in AI for fear of being left behind and foregoing economic benefits (**NASSCOM projects AI could add 12-13% to India's GDP within 2 or 3 years**).
Funding for AI has increased (currently there are 120+ AI unicorns globally).

For more on the **Concerns with the Declaration**, read here.

What are India's initiatives in the field of AI?

1 India is part of the **Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)**.
2 **National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence:** The Government has published the document with the objective of developing an ecosystem for the research and adoption of Artificial Intelligence i.e. #AIFOR ALL.
3 **INDIAai**, the Government of India's National AI Portal: It is a repository of AI based initiatives in the country at a single place.
4 **Corporate and academic-corporate initiatives:** These include those by Nvidia, IBM, IIT Madras-Ericsson, etc.
5 Initiatives such as the **Semiconductor Mission** which will augment the AI ecosystem in India by building high-end manufacturing capacity.

What are the future applications of AI as predicted by the author?

1. **Physical Infrastructure:** By 2030, all physical infrastructure and related applications are expected to be run by AI. This includes power grids, telecom networks, highway systems, ports, metros, airports, city traffic lights, satellite networks, municipal water supplies.
2. **Defence Sector:** AI will almost completely takeover defence applications with the induction of autonomous weapons systems, robotic vehicles, munitions design, etc.
3. **Miscellaneous:** AI will also impact healthcare, drug research, law enforcement, retail, financial systems, autonomous cars.

What are some of the challenges posed by the AI Revolution?

1. **Mass State Surveillance:** AI, equipped to conduct facial recognition and analyze extensive data, will empower governments to maintain round-the-clock profiles of citizens. This will make dissenting against governments difficult.

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2. **Autonomous Weapons:** It has the capability to power drones capable of identifying and eliminating targets without requiring human intervention. These machines have the potential to make life-and-death decisions without direct human intervention, leading to ethical dilemma regarding the value of human life.
3. **Cybersecurity Issues:** Through replicating voices and faces, it can produce convincing fake news, deceive individuals, or bypass cybersecurity measures.
4. **Perpetuates Biases:** Algorithms trained on current data might suggest granting STEM scholarships exclusively to males and providing bank loans solely to individuals from upper-caste backgrounds.

Even though the economic benefits associated with AI development are predicted to be significant, its dangers must not be ignored. It is important to develop safeguards at a faster pace to prevent harm while reaping its advantages.

Subject: Environment

Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

India's challenges at the CoP-28 -CoP-28: Let local climate actions outdo our global commitments

News: The article talks about India's challenges at the CoP-28 meeting in Dubai. It focuses on India's struggle to balance coal use, renewable energy growth, and health sector improvements. The article also discusses India's efforts in promoting sustainable behaviors and electric vehicles, and the need for global climate justice.

Background:
At CoP 28, developed countries were criticized for not meeting their climate commitments. Developing countries, especially India, face pressure to lead in climate action. **India was specifically noted for not signing pledges to triple its renewable energy by 2030 and double energy efficiency, as well as for not joining the Declaration on Climate and Health.**

For information on CoP-28 read here

What are the India's challenges at the CoP-28 meeting?

1. **Balancing Coal and Renewable Energy with Renewable Energy:** India's plan to increase coal production to over 1 billion tonnes by 2023-24 contrasts with its commitment to enhance renewable energy (RE) to 450GW by 2030.
2. **Phase-Down of Coal Power:** India faces the challenge of reducing coal power, which currently accounts for 75% of its electricity, in line with renewable energy and energy efficiency (EE) targets.
3. **Meeting Growing Electricity Demand:** The increase in renewable energy mainly addresses the rising electricity demand for an 8% economic growth rate, complicating a complete shift away from coal.

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What policies can India adopt to balance its economic growth with environmental responsibility?

1. **Renewable Energy Expansion:** India is committed to more than tripling its RE capacity by 2030 with a target of 450GW. This will significantly reduce its coal dependence.
2. **Decentralized Renewable Energy:** Harnessing decentralized renewable energy in urban and rural areas can enhance energy security and reliability. This will align it with global trends in renewable energy business models.
3. **Integrated Approach to Climate, Energy, and Health:** India can benefit from addressing these interconnected issues together, even if it's challenging to acknowledge this integration on international platforms.
4. **Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE) Initiative:** India's focus on the LiFE initiative encourages individual and community behavioral changes towards more climate-friendly practices.
5. **Electric Vehicle Incentive Schemes:** The robust growth in electric vehicles, primarily driven by sector-specific incentives, indicates a potential shift towards sustainable transportation options. For more information on LiFE read here

On Phasing Out Coal – Honest reckoning

News: The article discusses India's apprehensions in endorsing the pledge on tripling renewable energy due to its mention of phasing out coal.

Global pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions are insufficient to achieve the target of preventing Earth's temperatures from rising to 1.5 degree C above the pre-industrial levels.

What are the efforts being made in this regard?

Current estimates are that to limit warming to 1.5°C, the world requires 3 times more renewable energy capacity by 2030 (at least 11,000 GW). The recent **Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge** at COP28 acknowledges this.
However, only 118 countries have endorsed the pledge so far. 2 major countries, i.e., India and China, have so far abstained from signing.

What has been India's stance?

India is committed to the goal of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030, as reflected by the following:
1. **India's Nationally determined contributions (NDC)** aims to increase renewable energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, which is three times the existing 170 GW.
2. **New Delhi Declaration of G20** on tripling renewable energy.
At the same time, India's major concerns regarding the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge is related to the reference made in the draft text to "phase down of coal power and ending the investment in new coal-fired power plants".
India has been unwilling to give up specific fuel sources (such as coal, which contributes to nearly **70% of India's greenhouse gas emissions**). This is because coal-fired plants provide a major portion of India's energy consumption **(more than 50%)**.

Why is India against phasing out coal?

1. **Energy Demand:** India heavily relies on coal for its energy needs. The country's growing population and industrialization require a steady power supply.
2. **Economic Impact:** Coal mining and associated industries provide employment for a significant portion of

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the Indian workforce. Phasing out coal could lead to job losses and economic disruptions.

3. **High Transitioning Costs:** Shifting to alternative energy sources requires substantial investments in infrastructure, grid upgrades, and technology, which might be a challenge in terms of cost and implementation.

4. **Lack of Reliability of Renewable Sources:** While renewable energy sources like solar and wind are promising, their intermittency poses challenges in providing consistent power.

5. **Singular focus on phasing out Coal and Not other fossil fuels:** Developed countries (such as the USA) that have made commitments to give up coal often have other large, fossil-fuel resources as back-up.

For instance, USA only draws about 20% of its energy from coal and at least 55% from oil and gas, with plans to increase it.

On the utility of Nuclear Power – Embracing nuclear power

News: The article discusses the importance of nuclear power in achieving renewable energy targets as part of the global commitment to prevent further climate change.

Two pledges concerning renewable energy were announced at the recent UNFCCC COP-28. This includes:

1. Tripling of the global renewable energy capacity by 2030.
2. Tripling nuclear energy by 2050 (pledge by 22 countries).
In addition to this, the **International Atomic Energy Agency** drafted a statement, alongside multiple countries, making it clear that "net zero needs nuclear power".
This highlights the importance of nuclear energy as a tool to achieve renewable energy targets. However, India was unwilling to sign these declarations (due to references to phasing down coal generation).

What are the advantages of Nuclear Power generation compared to other renewable energy sources?

1. **High Output:** Just around 400 nuclear reactors in 30 countries produce 10% of the world's power and represent 25% of global low-carbon generation.
2. **Consistent Power Generation:** Unlike solar or wind power, which are intermittent and dependent on weather conditions, nuclear power provides consistent electricity ensuring a stable energy supply.
3. **High Energy Density:** Nuclear reactions release a tremendous amount of energy from a small amount of fuel, making it highly efficient.
4. **Less Land Requirement:** Nuclear power plants typically occupy less land compared to large-scale renewable projects like solar or wind farms.

What are the disadvantages of Nuclear Power generation?

1. **Radioactive Waste:** Nuclear power generates radioactive waste that remains hazardous for thousands of years. Proper disposal and management of this waste poses significant challenges.
2. **Risk of Accidents:** Nuclear accidents can have grave consequences, as seen in incidents like Chernobyl and Fukushima.
3. **Limited Fuel Availability:** While uranium, the primary fuel for nuclear reactors, is available, its supply is finite. There are concerns about potential scarcity in the long run.
4. **Nuclear Proliferation:** The technology used in nuclear power plants can also be diverted for the production of nuclear weapons, raising proliferation concerns.

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A detailed article on **Nuclear Energy** can be read here.

What should India do?

1. **Revisiting the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act:** It has led to limited private investment in the nuclear sector in India.
2. **Diversification:** India remains overdependent on Russia. Current liability systems must be changed to make it easier to bring in newer reactors from France and other countries.

On Loss and damage(L&D) Fund - Finding funds

News: The article talks about the L&D fund for climate change, decided at COP28 in the UAE. It highlights challenges such as funding shortfalls and operational issues, including World Bank management and the need for transparent, accessible, and sufficient support for impacted nations.

What is the Loss and Damage(L&D) Fund?

The L&D fund, a longstanding demand for climate justice (since COP-19,2013), aims to provide **financial and technological** resources to countries impacted by climate change. This fund is replenished by developed nations and used by others to address the unavoidable effects of climate change.
At the COP28 climate talks in the UAE, member-states agreed to operationalize the L&D fund. This decision follows the COP27 talks in Egypt, where the launched of the fund was agreed upon, largely due to the efforts of the G-77 bloc and China, spearheaded by Pakistan.
COP28 has overseen the commitment of $475mn to the loss and damage fund.
Note: Conference of Parties (COP)- The COP is the decision-making body of the UNFCCC. All States that are party to the Convention are represented at the COP. They review the implementation of any legal instrument that the Convention adopts.

For more information on COP read here.

For more information on L&D Fund read here.

What are the concerns related to the L&D Fund?

1. **High overhead fee:** The World Bank charges a high overhead fee for maintaining any fund with it. The developing countries want a dedicated funding mechanism and an independent secretariat.
2. **Insufficient Funding:** The amounts committed are insufficient, totaling $450 million (for now) against an actual demand of several billion dollars. Apart from this, periodic replenishment of these funds remains unclear.
3. **Previous Commitment Shortfalls:** Developed countries previously missed a 2020 deadline to mobilize a promised $100 billion in climate finance, achieving only $89.6 billion in 2021.
4. **Voluntary Contributions:** All countries are invited to contribute, but it's not mandatory.

For more information on concerns to L&D Fund read here

Way forward:

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While the L&D fund is now operational, its effectiveness remains uncertain. Issues like accessibility, bureaucratic hurdles, and sufficient funding are concerns that need to be addressed to ensure the fund meets its intended goals.

Subject: Internal Security

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas

UNLF Peace Accord

News: The article discusses the recently signed peace accord between Manipuri insurgent group UNLF and Govt of India. It also highlights the various challenges in implementing peace agreements.

Recently, a tripartite peace accord has signed by the Government of India, Government of Manipur and the **United National Liberation Front (UNLF)**. Although the terms of the agreement are awaited, at the moment it is largely on suspension of operations (SoO). A Peace Monitoring Committee has been set up to oversee its enforcement.

What has been India's experience with peace accords?

Peace Achieved: Normalcy has been achieved in states like Mizoram and Tripura.
Removal of AFSPA: For instance, in Assam, except for the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), separatist groups have signed accords and the state removed AFSPA from 4 more districts in October.
Decline in Violence: Security personnel KIA, civilian casualties and number of violent incidents have considerably declined. Since 2014, 6,112 insurgents have surrendered.
Failure: Nagaland and Manipur are the two states where all groups have not come to the table.
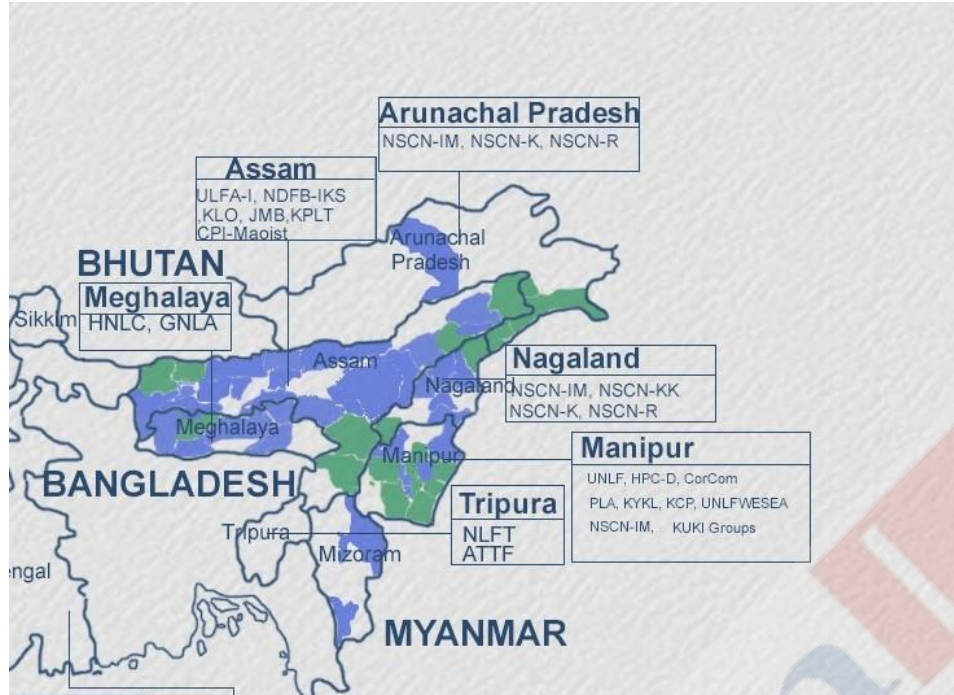
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Figure 5. North-East Insurgent Groups. Source: USI

What is the UNLF?

The UNLF was formed in 1964 and is a **valley-based insurgent group** — distinct from the insurgent groups in the state's Naga-dominated and Kuki-Zomi dominated hills. It was formed with the demand of secession from India under the leadership of Arambam Samarendra Singh. Its armed wing, the Manipur People's Army, was formed in 1990 and over the years, it has carried out multiple attacks targeting Indian security personnel.

What is the significance of this peace agreement?

1. It will end hostility, bring peace and normalcy in the region.
2. It will address the concerns of the community.
3. First valley-based armed group to participate: This will encourage other insurgent groups.

What are the challenges in implementing peace agreements in the North-East?

1. **Multiplicity of Stakeholders:** This is reflected in the divergent interests of different groups. Diverse demands from **various ethnic and/or tribal communities** are difficult to reconcile.
For instance, UNLF has two factions with different stance - the Pambei faction has advocated for dialogue, while the Koireng faction has refrained from engaging in talks.
2. **Disruption by Extremists:** The peace agreements can be halted by disruptions caused by extremist factions or splinter groups resorting to violence.
3. **Historical Distrust:** The lack of faith in the government's commitment to fulfilling promises outlined in peace agreements due to historical distrust undermines their effectiveness.
4. **Geopolitical Factors:** External influences and geopolitical factors also play a role. Lack of cooperation and interference by external actors can destabilize the region.
For instance, some cadres and leaders of the UNLF remain in Myanmar, where they are reported receiving support from the military junta.

What should be done in addition to the peace accord?

1 **Victims of violence should be provided with enhanced compensation.**
2 **Rehabilitation of those displaced** due to insurgency.
3 **Dismantling of Zones carved out by militant groups.**

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4 **Criminal cases must be prosecuted** at the earliest.
5 **Pushing for a political agreement** between the various stakeholders.

Manipur is a volatile border state. Appointing a political negotiator backed by a team of administrators to meet the various stakeholders and come up with a peaceful agreement supported by all stakeholders should be the way forward.

Subject: Disaster Management

Topic: Disaster and disaster management

On Cyclone Michaung – Shared blame

News: The article discusses the reasons other than the natural calamity which led to the recent crisis in Chennai due to Cyclone Michaung.

Detailed articles on developments related to **Cyclones** can be read here.

Late on December 3, heavy rains hit Chennai due to Cyclone Michaung. Most areas recorded more than 120 mm of rain, with a few even recording more than 250 mm (a very huge volume of rain in a single day).

Cyclone Michaung:

1 It was formed over the Bay of Bengal on November 29, 2023. It moved westward and intensified into a severe cyclonic storm.
2 The storm made landfall near Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh, on December 5, with winds of up to 110 kilometers per hour. It caused widespread damage in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
3 The storm caused heavy rains, flooding, and power outages. At least 12 people were killed and around 9,450 people were evacuated.
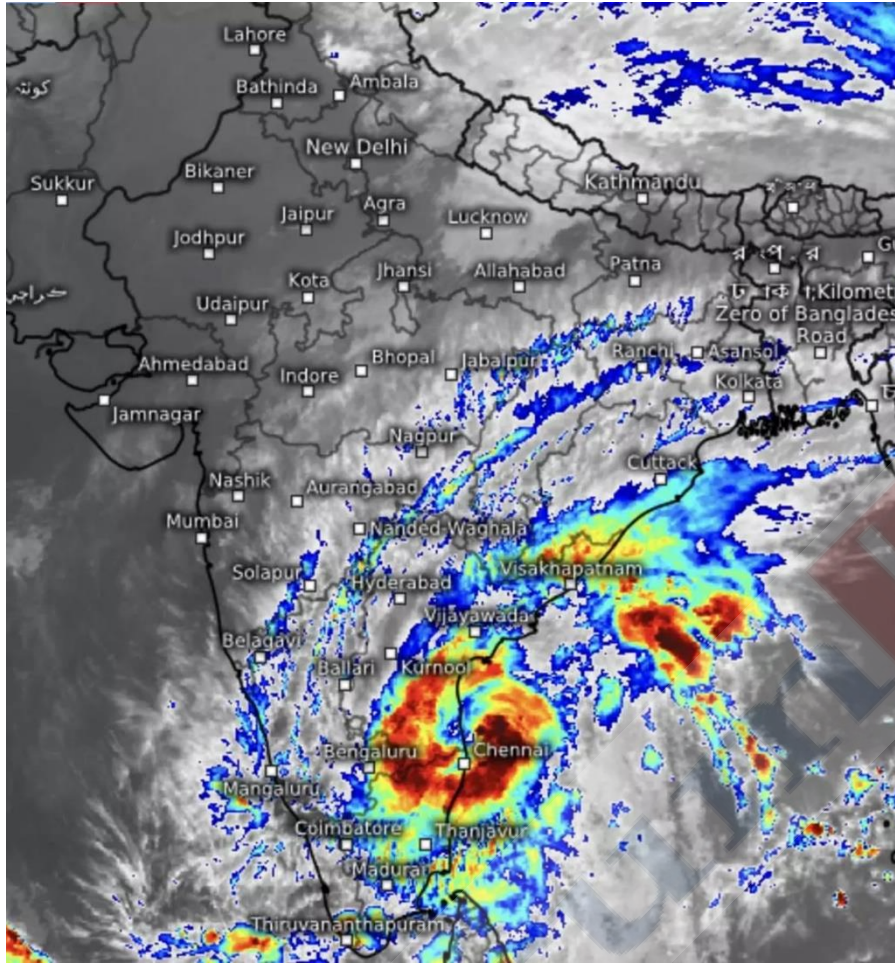4 Named by **Myanmar**, Michaung means 'strength and resilience'.

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Figure 6. Cyclone Michaung. Source: The Hindu BusinessLine

What factors apart from the natural calamity worsened the situation?

1. **Issues with the Power Infrastructure:** Inadequate investment in maintenance and repair meant that the power had to be cut off in the city as a precaution to prevent loose electric cables from electrocuting pedestrians.
2. **Unplanned construction:** This includes defiance of zoning (construction based on consideration of flood situations). This led to water stagnation on almost all roads.
3. **Public indiscipline:** This includes littering, leading to storm water drains choking with plastic trash.
4. **Climate Change:** Climate change is contributing to the intensification and increased frequency of cyclones due to rising sea surface temperatures and altered atmospheric conditions.

What should be done?

In order to deal with such situations, the following can be implemented:

1. **Power Infrastructure Issues:** Increased allocation of funds for maintenance. Apart from this, measures like using waterproof materials, or relocating vulnerable infrastructure away from flood-prone areas can be done.
2. **Unplanned Construction:** Strictly enforcing zoning laws and regulations. Measures like better drainage systems or green infrastructure to absorb water should be the way forward.
3. **Public Indiscipline:** Public Awareness Campaigns and Community Engagement Initiatives should be implemented.

On Dam Safety – Damned by our Dams as Safety Issues swirl

News: The article discusses the dam safety in India. It also highlights the reasons for poor dam safety in India. It also highlights suggestions by experts in this regard.

Recently, Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) caused heavy destruction in Sikkim. South Lhonak Lake, a glacial lake situated in north-western Sikkim burst due to incessant rains. The hydropower dam over the Teesta was

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destroyed and the associated 1,200MW Teesta-III hydropower project submerged. This has raised attention towards dam safety in India.

For more information on the **Sikkim GLOF,** click here.

A detailed article on **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)** can be read here.

What is the status of dam infrastructure in India?

India is the 3rd most dammed country in the world, with 6,138 large dams in total.
India produces around 25,000MW energy from the dams on the Himalayan rivers alone, which is around 65% of the total hydropower potential of these rivers.

What is the status of dam safety in India?

India has a poor record of dam safety.
1. **Dam Failures:** According to National Dam Safety Authority, there have been **42 cases of dam failures.**
For instance, the Machchu dam incident of 1979 in Gujarat, killing 2,000.
2. **Dam-induced floods:** For instance, the Hirakud-induced floods in Mahanadi basin.

What are the reasons for poor dam safety in India?

1. **Large number of Ageing Dams:** According to the Jal Shakti ministry, dams in India are designed for approximately 100 years of useful age. However, 80% of India's large dams are over 25 years old and 234 are over 100 years old.
2. **Lack of Performance Assessment:** There is no mechanism to assess the viable lifespan and performance of dams.
3. **Unscientific operation of dams:** For instance, not taking seismicity into account, unscientific water release strategies, etc.).
4. **Old dams not being Decommissioned:** Due to a variety of reasons (discussed below), dams are not being retired out of service.

Why are dams not being decommissioned?

1. **Lack of Diversity in Policymakers:** India's water policymaking does not involve stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. It is dominated by civil engineers.
2. **Socio-Economic concerns:** Dams create a new economic ecosystem around them, such as colonies. This makes it difficult to shift ecosystems around dams to new sites.
For instance, Mullaperiyar dam (Kerala).
3. **Tedious Process:** It is a time-consuming and laborious process. This is due to the need of conducting socio-economic and ecological impact studies, earmarking rehabilitation areas for the displaced and devising strategy for building an alternative water resource to offer livelihoods to the displaced population.

What can India do about dam safety in the Himalayas?

Various experts have suggested the following measures:

1 **Strict Monitoring of Glacial Lakes:** Himalayan glaciers have been receding and strict monitoring is necessary. This includes maintaining an updated inventory of Glacial Lakes (possibly every 5 years).
2 **Climate Assessment of Hydropower Projects:** Evaluating the potential effects of climate change on the risks and vulnerabilities associated with such projects in the **fragile Himalayan region.**
3 **GLOF Assessment and Mitigation:** GLOF assessment should be done beforehand and mitigation measures should be built into Himalayan hydropower projects.

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4 **Declaring a mountain regulation zone:** Declaring MRZ on the lines of coastal regulation zone (CRZ), where large infrastructure projects would be regulated.

5 **In-built SOPs in Dam Designs:** A critical component of dam safety has to be in-built special operating procedures in dam design that take care of eventualities like flash floods.

What are the steps taken by the government in this regard?

1. **DRIP II and DRIP III scheme:** The **Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) II and IlI schemes** have been devised to enhance dam safety oversight. It aims to fully rehabilitate 736 dams in 19 states by 2031. It includes reduction of seepage, improvement in dam drainage; treatment for cracking in the dam, improvement in the ability to withstand higher floods, etc.

More on the **DRIP Scheme** here.

2. **Dam Safety Act, 2021:** It includes:

a. Framework for proper surveillance, inspection, operation and maintenance of all large dams.

b. Empowered institutional framework for dam safety, both at Centre and State level.

c. Standardizing dam safety practices across the country.

More on it here.

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