

# 9 PM Current Affairs Monthly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



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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: Geography

#### Topic: Distribution of key natural resources across the world

#### On the Critical Minerals Sector – Charging growth

**News:** The article discusses the critical minerals sector. It highlights recent developments concerning India's critical minerals sector. It also points to the challenges of this sector.

#### What are critical minerals?

Critical minerals are those minerals that are at risk of supply shortage, and which may have a large impact on the economy and national security. They have complex global supply chains with a high concentration in the extracting and processing countries, resulting in high supply risks.

These include minerals such as lithium, graphite, potash, silicon, titanium and rare earths (REE).

#### What are the recent developments in India's critical minerals sector?

##### Policy Initiatives:

1. India issued its first critical minerals policy listing 30 minerals important for India's net-zero transition.
2. 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) is allowed in the mining and exploration sector under the automatic route.

**Exploration and Mining Auction:** Government recently initiated the auctioning of 20 blocks of critical minerals, including J&K's lithium reserves. Also, 125 projects are underway to explore critical minerals.

**Geopolitical Initiatives:** Recently, India became the first developing country to be inducted into the US-led Mineral Security Partnership (MSP).

More about MSP [here](#).

#### What are the concerns with the sector?

1. **Scarce supply of minerals.**
2. **China's sole dominance:** China is a central player in the global critical mineral supply chains, particularly in processing and refining. It accounts for ~ 60% of worldwide production and 85% of processing capacity.
3. **Geopolitical Risks:** Their spread is geographically concentrated, making it vulnerable to geopolitical risks. Geopolitical tensions, conflicts, trade disputes, or sudden policy changes in those regions can impact their supply. For instance, approximately 70% of the world's reserves of cobalt are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
4. **Dominance of a few major companies:** This leads to oligopolistic (domination by a few large firms) markets.
5. **Not Traded on Exchanges:** Unlike oil, most critical materials are not widely traded on exchanges, and this limits opportunities to hedge against price volatility. Exchanges provide a way to hedge against price fluctuations by locking in prices through futures contracts or by buying/selling on the spot market.
6. **Insufficient data:** Insufficient data on the consumption, production, and trade of minerals causes uncertainty, price volatility and delays in investments.



**7. Rising Import Bill:** Between FY22 and FY23, there has been a 34% rise in imports of critical minerals, totaling nearly Rs. 91,000 crore.

**What should India do?**

**Push for Expansion of MSP:** Along with India, more countries in the Global South can be part of the alliance, especially critical mineral-rich African countries.

The MSP can become an international platform that reports on the status and future of critical mineral markets.

**Encourage FDI in Domestic Mining:** Rising foreign direct investment (FDI) will not just support businesses like battery and EV manufacturing; it will also bring the expertise of international mining firms to aid in exploring critical minerals for the country's benefit.

**Topic: Changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps)**

### **Risks of glacier melting - An icy warning**

**News:** The article discusses the findings of the World Meteorological Organization's report titled "The Global Climate 2011-2020: A Decade of Accelerating Climate Change." It primarily highlights the state of glacier health.

**What are the key highlights of the WMO report "The Global Climate 2011-2020"?**

1. The significant thinning of the world's glaciers, averaging about a meter per year from 2011 to 2020.
2. The volume of glaciers is forecast to decline anywhere from 55% to 75% by the end of the century.
3. Greenland and Antarctica lost 38% more ice from 2011 to 2020 compared to the 2001-2010 period.
4. During the summer melt season, Arctic Sea ice decreased, reaching a mean minimum extent 30% lower than the 1981-2010 average.
5. The rapid glacier melting will lead to their disappearance. For instance, glaciers on the Rwenzori Mountains and Mount Kenya in Africa are projected to vanish by 2030, and those on Kilimanjaro by 2040.

For more information on **Key highlights of WMO report**, [read here](#).

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

**What are the risks of glaciers melting?**

a) **Glacier lake outburst floods (GLOFs)** are a major risk, as seen in the Uttarakhand floods in 2013, which were caused by glacial melt.

b) The **destruction of infrastructure** due to flooding from melting glaciers, like the collapse of the Chungthang dam in Sikkim.

c) The **rapid decline in glacier volume** may lead to a **decrease in freshwater supply in the future**, impacting regions by 2050.

d) Additionally, the **disappearance of glaciers** in the Hindu Kush Himalayas was reported to be 65% faster in the 2010s than in the previous decade, emphasizing the **accelerating pace of glacier melt**.

**What should be done?**

a) **Enhance the monitoring of glacier health**, as the rapid thinning of glaciers globally indicates a critical need for detailed observation.

b) **Develop and implement early warning systems** specifically for glacier lake outburst floods (GLOFs), to

prevent disasters.

c) Conduct **comprehensive risk assessments** in regions affected by glacier melting to understand and mitigate risks better.

d) Prioritize the **development of resilient infrastructure in vulnerable areas**, keeping in mind the potential for increased flooding and other glacier-related hazards.

e) **Raise the threat level of glacier-related risks to that of other significant natural disasters** such as cyclones and earthquakes. This action will guarantee the implementation of sufficient response and preparedness measures.

## Subject: History

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

#### On the Sahitya Akademi – Awards for words

**News:** Sahitya Akademi has announced the annual Sahitya Akademi Awards 2023 in 24 Indian languages. This year's award includes poems, novels, short stories, essays, and literary studies.

#### What are the Sahitya Akademi Awards?

[Read Here.](#)

#### What is the significance of the Sahitya Akademi Awards?

1. **Linguistic Diversity:** The awards recognize linguistic diversity in a country like India with numerous dialects and marginalized communities.
2. **Empowers Writers:** It provides encouragement, boosts sales, and provide educational recognition for writers.
3. **Translation Opportunities:** It facilitates translation of awarded works into other regional languages including English, expanding their reach and impact.

#### What are the concerns associated with the Sahitya Akademi Awards?

1. **Limited Recognition:** The Sahitya Akademi struggles with limited recognition compared to global counterparts like the Booker Prize or the Pulitzer.
2. **Low Public Awareness:** The Akademi organizes various literary activities, lectures, and workshops. However, there is a lack in its promotion, hindering public awareness of its programs.
3. **Outdated Website and Social Media:** The Akademi's digital presence is inadequate, with an unmaintained website and minimal social media activity.
4. **Limited Book Availability:** Despite affordable publications, Akademi books are often difficult to find, hindering their reach and impact.

#### What should be the way ahead?

There is a need for Sahitya Akademi to enhance its promotional efforts, improve accessibility, and leverage its resources to fulfill its mission of celebrating and promoting India's diverse literary landscape.

### UNESCO tag for garba dance: A dance for all

**News:** The article discusses the inclusion of Garba in the list of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. It also highlights its distinct features.

Read in detail about **Garba** [here](#).

Read about **UNESCO Intangible Heritage Sites** [here](#).

Recently, Garba joined other Indian dances, such as the **Kalbelia folk dance of Rajasthan**, **Chhau from eastern India**, **Sankirtana from Manipur** and **Mudiyettu from Kerala**, on the UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. With this, it has become a representative of the richness of India's performing art traditions.

It is an important part of every Gujarati celebration, from wedding to birth, and, most notably, the annual 9-day festival of Navratri. The worship of goddess Amba (a form of Durga) is a key part of this tradition.

#### What are Intangible Cultural Heritages?

These are the traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed through generations as a way of life. These include oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

#### What are the distinct features of Garba?

1. **Symbolises the Cycle of Life:** It is performed around a centrally lit clay lantern, which symbolizes both the metaphorical universal womb from which humanity emerged and the earth's fertility. The ring formed by dancers and their revolutions around the lantern represent the cycle of time from birth to death and rebirth.
2. **Participation of all ages and genders:** It thrives due to its deep ties to community, where people of all ages, genders, skill levels, and faiths come together to dance.
3. **Adaptability to Changing Times:** Every new generation adapts dancing to its preferences. Garba has embraced both old songs and techniques alongside modern ones, shaping the dance to suit every generation.

Reports, in recent years, of performances being open to only Hindus, and assault for attending events, must be taken seriously. It is important to retain the inclusive character of Garba if this intangible heritage is to continue to thrive.

### 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](#)

### 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.

### 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

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.



## Topic: Role of women and women's organization

### On Women's Suffrage – Women's vote achieved

**News:** The article discusses history of the women's suffrage movement and the need to move beyond just granting the right to vote to women.

Recently, 5 religious sisters were allowed to vote at the Papal advisory body in the Roman Catholic Church, which has been male-dominated for centuries. With this historic move, **Vatican City became the last country in the world** to give its women the right to vote.

#### What has been the history of the women's suffrage movement?

The initial women's suffrage movement emerged during the **19th and early 20th centuries**, predominantly led by protest voices in the **Anglosphere (English-speaking world)**.

**129 countries** granted women the right to vote **between 1893 and 1960**. Some nations tried to place riders on it by using race, age, education level or marital status as a disqualifier, but these were largely discarded.

1) **Role of Social Activism:** At first, it was other forms of social activism that gave rise to the vote demand.

For instance:

a. **New Zealand** in 1893 became the first nation to let women vote in national elections. It was a **fight against alcohol** that moved women to seek a role in policymaking.

b. In **USA**, which did it in 1920, suffrage activism can be traced back to protests led by women **against slavery**.

2) **Role of World Wars:** The suffrage movement gained pace after World War I, at least in the West. The two World Wars hurried the enfranchisement of women.

#### What more needs to be done in the field of women's political empowerment?

This right has not yet shaken patriarchal social structures that dominate power politics. Hence, the focus must now shift to **achieving proper representation in rule-making and governance**, which goes beyond the basic right to vote.

Despite progress in women's participation in politics, their impact in shaping political decisions and policies worldwide is yet to enhance and transform the state of affairs globally.

## Topic: Urbanization and associated issues

### What does COP-28 mean for cities?

**News:** 28th Conference of Parties (COP-28) highlighted the significance of cities in addressing climate change.

#### How is significance of urban areas increasing?

The growing urban population is expected to reach **68% by 2050**.

Urban areas consume about 75% of primary energy and account for roughly 70% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Therefore, desired results of the Paris commitments are not possible without addressing urban issues.

#### What was the major event for urban area development at COP-28?



COP-28 featured a special ministerial meeting on urbanization and climate change. The meeting was attended by various stakeholders including ministers, local leaders, and financial institutions. The conference highlighted the advocacy for formally recognizing cities' roles in global climate negotiations and providing them with direct financial and technical assistance was a key point of discussion.

**What are the challenges faced by cities in the Global South?**

1. **Vulnerability of Global South Cities:** Cities in the Global South face greater challenges due to weaker governance, informal employment, and higher vulnerability to climate disasters.
2. **Need for Empowerment and Support:** These cities require more support in terms of finance, governance, and recognition in climate action plans.
3. **Examples of Proactive Cities:** Some cities, like Chennai, are leading in climate action, aiming to achieve zero emissions by 2050. It exemplifies the importance of local initiatives.

**Way forward:**

1. **City governments need to be involved** in National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions.
2. A **climate atlas of cities**, for mapping them and identifying the most vulnerable hotspots, should be created.

## GS Paper 2

### Subject: Indian Polity

#### Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

#### Mass Suspension of MPs - Breach and stain

**News:** The article discusses recent problems in India's Parliament, including security breaches and the suspension of 141 Opposition MPs.

**What are the rules on suspension of MPs?**

[Read here.](#)

**What are the reasons behind the recent mass suspension of MPs?**

1. **Demanding a discussion:** Opposition MPs were disrupting Parliament for demand of discussion on the security breach in Parliament.
2. **Nature of Disruptions:** Disruptions in Parliament have evolved over time into a political strategy, rather than spontaneous acts. These disruptions often involve shouting and entering the well of the House. These were seen as deliberate acts to stall proceedings, as noted by the Speaker of the 14th Lok Sabha, Somnath Chatterjee.
3. **Government's Authority in Parliamentary Proceedings:** The Indian Constitution, drawing from the British parliamentary system, designed the Parliament primarily for the government to transact its

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business. The rules of parliamentary procedure give the government significant control over convening and conducting parliamentary proceedings.

### What are the consequences of this mass suspension of MPs?

1. **Reduced Representation:** The suspension leaves five crore people that MPs represent, without a voice in Parliament.
2. **Undermining Democratic Principles:** The suspension is criticized for its disproportionality, suggesting a disregard for the essential democratic process of debate and opposition.
3. **Negative Precedent for Legislatures:** This action could set a concerning example for other legislative bodies, potentially encouraging similar measures against opposition parties elsewhere.
4. **Historical Precedent:** This mass suspension is unprecedented in scale, exceeding the past record of suspending 63 MPs during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure.

### What are Interventions by the Court?

Judicial actions are typically rare due to the principle of separation of powers:

1. **Article 122 of the Constitution:** It prevents courts from questioning parliamentary proceedings, safeguarding legislative independence.
2. **Judicial Intervention Exceptions:** Courts can step in for procedural violations or constitutional rights infringements.
3. **Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Case (2021):** An example where the Supreme Court intervened. The Assembly suspended 12 BJP MLAs for a year, but the Court deemed this excessive and limited the suspension to the session's duration. This instance **highlights the court's role in ensuring procedural correctness and protecting constitutional principles in legislative actions.**

### What should be done?

1. **Ensure Open Investigation and Debate:** Conduct transparent investigations into security breaches and encourage open discussions in Parliament, as demanded by the Opposition regarding the December 13 incident.
2. **Reform Parliamentary Procedures:** Update the procedural rules, which are based on the pre-independence British model, to reflect the collaborative essence of a modern democratic legislature.
3. **Address Parliamentary Disruptions:** To address deliberate disruption, Parliament could implement structured debates and improved conflict resolution methods.
4. **Incorporate Opposition's Voice:** Parliament could enhance inclusivity and balance in the legislative process by allowing the Opposition a significant role in agenda-setting. This could mirror the UK House of Commons' approach, where specific days are designated for the Opposition to raise issues.

## Misuse of Anti-Defection Law - The hollowing out of the anti-defection law

**News:** The article discusses how India's anti-defection law, designed to prevent lawmakers from frequently changing parties, is being misused. Politicians are exploiting loopholes to switch parties without consequences, leading to unstable governments and undermining the law's original purpose.

### What is the Anti-Defection Law?

[Read here.](#)

### What are the issues with Anti-Defection Law?

1. **Splits and Mergers:** The Anti-Defection Law allows legislators to avoid disqualification by forming new factions with a two-thirds majority, leading to **frequent party switches**. For example, In Uttar Pradesh and Haryana (1990-2008), legislators exploited this law by defecting, forming new groups, and then merging with other parties, demonstrating how the law can be manipulated to facilitate opportunistic politics.
2. **Formation of Government without Party Switch or Merger:** In Maharashtra, factions within the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party managed to form a government without officially switching parties or merging. They claimed to be the original party and allied with the BJP, highlighting a significant loophole.

For more information [read here](#)

### What are the consequences of this misuse?

1. **Government Instability:** The misuse of the Anti-Defection Law has led to frequent government collapses in states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Karnataka, and Arunachal Pradesh, disrupting political stability.
2. **Erosion of Democratic Values:** By exploiting the law, politicians undermine the spirit of democracy. The law's intention to maintain political integrity is negated, as seen in the strategic alignments in Maharashtra with the Shiv Sena and NCP factions.
3. **Encouraging Opportunistic Politics:** The trend in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana (1990-2008) of legislators defecting and then merging with other parties illustrates how the law **encourages opportunistic politics rather than principled decision-making**.

### What should be done?

**Strengthening Law's Intent:** Reinforcing the law to ensure it aligns with its initial intent of upholding political integrity and stability is essential. This requires identifying and sealing the loopholes that enable opportunistic politics, as observed in previous cases in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Maharashtra.

For more Information on the above, [read here](#).

## Denial of legislative debate furthers democratic backsliding in India

**News:** Recently, there was a security breach in the Parliament by some individuals who highlighted unemployment concerns in India.

### What are some of the essential characteristics of a democracy?

1. **Deliberation:** The essential characteristic of a well-functioning democracy is deliberation which involves elected legislators debating issues, utilizing committees, and thoroughly discussing bills before consideration.
2. **Popular Sovereignty:** The people are the ultimate source of authority in a democracy. This means that the government is accountable to the people and must act in their best interests.
3. **Free and Fair Elections:** Democracies hold regular elections that are free and fair. This means that all citizens have the right to vote and to stand for office.

4. **Separation of Powers:** In a democracy, the government is typically divided into three branches: **the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary**. This separation of powers helps to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful.

### What have been the recent concerns associated with India's democracy?

1. **Deficiency in Parliamentary Sessions:** Recent parliamentary sessions have witnessed attempts to pressure the Opposition, pass Bills without sufficient discussion, restrict amendments, and underutilize committees.
2. **Downgrading of India's Democratic Status:** The lack of proper parliamentary sessions has led to the characterization of India's democracy as an "**electoral autocracy**" by V-Dem Institute.
3. Similarly, the misuse of the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act** to target dissenters, equating dissent with terrorism, has further led to India being labeled as "**partially free**".
4. **Concerns with Judicial independence:** Increasing political pressure on the judiciary has raised concerns about its capacity to act as a check on executive power.
5. **Erosion of Media Freedom:** Government pressure on media outlets and journalists has limited their ability to report critically and independently.
6. **Politicization of Institutions:** Appointment of individuals based on political loyalty rather than merit has weakened the neutrality of various democratic institutions.

For further reading on the democracy: [Click Here](#)

### What should be the way ahead?

It is crucial for the government to address these issues, along with ensuring the effective functioning of parliamentary sessions, upholding the separation of powers, and ensuring the proper functioning of each pillar of democracy.

## 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?

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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?

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 Trail (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?



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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)
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.

## Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

### 7-Judge ruling on Arbitration – India has a superior chance now to emerge as an arbitration hub

**News:** The article discusses a recent decision by India's Supreme Court. It allows arbitration agreements, even if they have stamp duty issues, to be enforced. This ruling is expected to make India a more attractive place for arbitration, speeding up and simplifying dispute resolution.

#### What is Arbitration?

Arbitration is a form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in which a neutral third party resolves a dispute outside of court. The parties to the dispute agree to submit their case to an arbitrator, who will make a binding decision on the matter. Arbitration in India is governed by the **Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996**. For more information on ADR [read here](#)

#### What are the important judgments related to arbitration?



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### **5-Judge SC Bench in N Global Mercantile (P) Ltd vs IndonUnique Flame Ltd:**

**Ruling:** Arbitration agreements without proper stamp duty were unenforceable.

**Impact:** Created complications, as courts couldn't appoint arbitrators until the correct stamp duty was paid.

### **The Supreme Court's (SC) Recent 7-Judge Ruling:**

**Overtaken Prior Decision-** Allowed unstamped or insufficiently stamped agreements to be enforceable.

**Parties can appoint technical experts** as arbitrators in complex matters, aiding in cross-border transactions.

**Role of Courts as per The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996:** a) *Minimized Court Supervision-* The Act emphasizes reducing the courts' supervisory role in arbitration, b) *Selective Court Involvement* - Courts aren't excluded but their involvement is limited to specific situations, like enforcing arbitration decisions or preventing fraud and policy violations.

### **What are the implications of recent Supreme Court rulings on arbitration?**

1. **Increased Enforceability:** The recent SC ruling ensures that arbitration agreements are enforceable, even if they are unstamped or insufficiently stamped. This change prevents delays, thereby expediting the arbitration process.
2. **Reduced Judicial Intervention:** Courts will no longer assess stamp duty before arbitration, adhering to the principles of minimal court involvement.
3. **Enhanced Arbitration Appeal:** This ruling makes India more attractive for arbitration, potentially reducing the preference for international arbitration centers like Singapore or Dubai.
4. **Maintained Revenue Interests:** Stamp duty and penalties are still applicable, ensuring revenue department concerns are addressed, but without disrupting the arbitration process.
5. **Long-term Legal Stability:** A rare 7-judge bench decision provides lasting predictability in arbitration proceedings.

### **Way forward:**

To enhance India's position as a global arbitration hub, continued support for minimal judicial intervention and respect for arbitral autonomy is crucial. Ensuring efficient arbitration processes that appeal to both domestic and international parties will be vital. Regular updates to legal frameworks to uphold these principles will further strengthen India's role in global arbitration.

### **Terminology used:**

**GIFT city:** GIFT City, short for Gujarat International Finance Tec-City, is a business district in Gujarat, India. It's designed as a financial and technology hub with advanced infrastructure. GIFT City aims to attract businesses and financial services, competing with leading global financial centers. It offers a favorable environment for finance and tech firms.

For more information [read here](#).

## Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary

### On Listing of Cases in the Supreme Court

**News:** The article discusses the issues with the listing of cases in the Supreme Court.

Recently, concerns were raised by two senior lawyers on the “irregularities” in the listing of cases in the Supreme Court.

#### What is the role of the CJI in the allocation of cases?

The Chief Justice of India, as master of roster, has administrative control over the allocation of cases. The **Handbook on Practice and Procedure of the Court and Office Procedure** says that the Supreme Court Registry functions on the instructions and orders of the Chief Justice of India as regards allocation of work to a Bench and assignment of cases from one Bench to another Bench (on account of non-availability).

#### What were the concerns raised by the senior lawyers?

**Firstly**, the movement of cases which were already listed and in which notices were issued by one Bench, to another Bench.

It was claimed that some cases had been suddenly taken away from Benches hearing them and listed before other Benches.

**Secondly**, whether a case, instead of remaining with the presiding judge of the Bench before which the matter was listed, can be transferred to the puisne judge (a judge part of the Bench, but lower in seniority than the Presiding judge) when he/she (the puisne judge) starts heading a new Bench.

This was being done even when the senior judge was still available, which is against rules, procedure and established conventions.

#### Terminology Used:

**Puisne Judge:** A puisne judge is a judge who is ranked lower in seniority than the Chief Justice of that court.

## Topic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

### Qualitative Dilution of voting power – One person, one vote, one value

**News:** The article discusses how political equality in democracies is affected by the way electoral constituencies are drawn. It explains how this can lead to unequal voting power and highlights the need for fair delimitation to ensure equal representation for all citizens.

#### What is political equality in democracy?

Political equality means everyone has an equal chance to participate in politics and their votes have the same value. However sometime this political equality is diluted by diluting votes.

#### Ways to dilutes votes are:

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**1) Quantitative Dilution:** This occurs when constituencies have significantly different populations, resulting in unequal vote values. For instance, due to varied population growth from 1971 to 2011, the vote value varies greatly between states. In Uttar Pradesh, an MP typically represents about 2.53 million people, while in Tamil Nadu, an MP represents around 1.84 million people, illustrating a clear case of quantitative dilution.

**2) Qualitative Dilution:** Gerrymandering, or the strategic redrawing of electoral boundaries, can diminish the effectiveness of votes. This process often reduces the ability of certain groups, especially minorities, to elect their preferred candidates, leading to an imbalance in representation. For instance, Muslim representation in Parliament is only 4.42%, despite Muslims comprising 14.2% of the population.

**Three ways of qualitative dilution are:**

**a) Cracking:** Splitting minority-dominated areas into separate constituencies to dilute their influence.

**b) Stacking:** Merging minority populations into constituencies where they are outnumbered by the majority, lessening their voting impact.

**c) Packing:** Concentrating minorities into a few constituencies, weakening their representation across other areas.

Dilution of votes can lead to unequal state representation, diminished minority political influence, and imbalanced constituencies.

**What are the constitutional safeguards to maintain political equality?**

- 1. Population Ratio Alignment:** Articles 81 and 170 of the Constitution ensure that the population ratio for Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly constituencies is as uniform as possible, aiding equal representation.
- 2. Parliament's Role in Delimitation:** Article 327 grants Parliament the authority to make laws regarding the delimitation of constituencies. This helps in legally shaping fair and equitable electoral boundaries.
- 3. Independent Delimitation Commissions:** The government forms these commissions, led by retired Supreme Court judges, to redraw constituency boundaries without bias, thus preventing qualitative dilution. To date, four delimitation commissions (1952, 1962, 1972, 2002) have worked on this.
- 4. Seat Reservation:** Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution reserve seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, ensuring representation for these groups.

For information on **Delimitation Commission**, [read here](#).

**Way forward:**

To ensure fair representation, delimitation must be timely, considering both population changes and the interests of southern states. The next Delimitation Commission should address both quantitative and qualitative vote dilution for more adequate minority representation.

### **Basic Structure Doctrine-Protecting Basic Structure from judicial arbitrariness**

**News:** This article discusses the Basic Structure Doctrine of India's Constitution, introduced 50 years ago. It talks about its origins, debates around it, and the need for limits on government powers. The doctrine's future and ways to avoid judicial bias are also explored.

**What is the Basic Structure Doctrine?**

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The Basic Structure Doctrine, **established by India's Supreme Court in 1973**, states that Parliament cannot alter key elements of the Constitution.

**Inspired by German jurist Dietrich Conrad's ideas**, it limits government power, ensuring fundamental features of the Constitution are protected. For example, it played a crucial role during the Emergency of 1975, preventing the Prime Minister from drastically changing the Constitution. This doctrine maintains a balance between different government branches.

For more information on the **Basic Structure Doctrine**, [read here](#).

### What are the arguments supporting the doctrine?

1. **Limitation of Powers:** It imposes necessary restrictions on all government bodies, including the judiciary. The doctrine ensures that Parliament cannot unilaterally alter the Constitution's core aspects.
2. **Safeguarding Fundamental Features:** The doctrine protects the Constitution's most fundamental features from amendment, thus preserving the democratic framework and fundamental rights.
3. **Upholding Constitutional Supremacy:** It emphasizes the Constitution's supremacy over all government organs. The judiciary, tasked with interpreting the Constitution, uses this doctrine to maintain a balance of power and prevent any one branch from becoming too dominant.

### What are the arguments against the doctrine?

1. **Excessive Power to the Supreme Court:** Critics argue that the doctrine gives the Supreme Court too much authority to decide what constitutes the 'Basic Structure', potentially undermining other institutions. **For instance**, Former Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley criticized the Supreme Court's NJAC judgment. He pointed out that it prioritized judicial independence in basic structure, while overlooking five key constitutional elements: parliamentary democracy, elected government, council of ministers, Prime Minister, and leader of the opposition.
2. **Risk of Judicial Arbitrariness:** There's a concern that the open-ended nature of the doctrine might lead to subjective interpretations, reducing its legitimacy as a constitutional safeguard.

### What should be done?

1. **Enhancing Judicial Legitimacy through Public Trust:** Justice Nambiar's thesis ("The Judicial Role in Constitutional Protection: Examining the Legitimacy of Basic Structure Review in India") emphasizes the need for the judiciary to earn public trust. It can be done through the efficacy of its judgments and through demonstrating the legitimacy of its decisions, especially in the context of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
2. **Addressing Concerns of Constitutional Validity:** While the doctrine has been consistently upheld, there are ongoing doubts about its constitutional validity and application scope. Addressing these concerns is crucial to maintain a healthy balance between the judiciary's power and the roles of other institutions.
3. **Inclusive Debates and Discussions:** Encourage broader debates and discussions about the interpretations and applications of judicial doctrines, including the Basic Structure Doctrine. This promotes a comprehensive understanding and allows for more inclusive perspectives in shaping its future.

For more information on 50 years of Basic Structure Doctrine, [read here](#).

## Subject: Governance

### Topic: Government policies and interventions

#### Punishment for Doctors in Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill, 2023

**News:** The new amendment (Criminal Law Amendment Bills) proposes to change the punishment for medical negligence resulting in death. It has moved away from criminal negligence akin to murder.

#### What were the factors that influenced this amendment?

**The Jacob Mathew vs State of Punjab case** held that criminal charges should apply only in cases of gross negligence of a significantly high degree. Criminal liability can be applied only if physician's act can be demonstrated to be negligent or reckless, causing death.

**The Indian Medical Association argued** that the criminal liability for medical negligence is controversial. It advocated for the understanding that medical accidents may occur without criminal intent. They proposed that deaths during medical treatment be presumed accidents unless proven as gross negligence by expert evaluation.

#### What changes have been made for doctors in the Criminal Law Amendment Bills?

1. **Punishment for the doctors for criminal negligence:** Currently, medical negligence resulting in deaths is punishable under Section 304A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) with imprisonment of up to two years, a fine, or both. Previously, in the Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita (BNS) 2023, Clause 106, the punishment was up to five years. However, the amended BNS has reverted to the original IPC terms.
2. **Penalty for mob lynching:** The new Criminal Law Bills **propose life imprisonment or the death penalty for mob lynching**, providing protection to doctors, whose safety has become a growing concern in recent times.
3. **Definition of Registered Medical Practitioner:** It includes anyone with a medical qualification recognized under the National Medical Commission Act, 2019, and registered in either the National or State Medical Register.

#### What are the concerns regarding this amendment?

1. **No full exemption:** The amendment did not grant a complete exemption to doctors for medical negligence. It effectively **maintaining the existing legal framework like that of Section 304(A) of the Indian Penal Code.**
2. **Fear of legal repercussions:** Doctors may continue to face violence and legal challenges that could deter them from providing optimal care. The need for a balance between accountability and protection is evident.

#### On the Telecommunications Bill 2023 Controversy

**News:** The article critiques the Telecommunications Bill, 2023 in India for perpetuating colonial laws and increasing government control under the guise of cultural nationalism. It also highlights the bill's failure to address the digital divide or introduce meaningful innovation.



### What are the key provisions of the Telecommunications Bill 2023?

[Read here.](#)

### Why is the Telecommunications Bill 2023 Controversial?

1. **Cultural Nativism:** The renaming of the **Universal Services Obligation Fund** to "**Digital Bharat Nidhi**" exemplifies the Bill's emphasis on national identity. However, this change **does little to address the actual digital divide**, as telecom user growth has stagnated and smartphone sales have declined for two consecutive years, according to reports by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India and the International Data Corporation.
2. **Authoritarian Tendencies:** The Bill's vague definitions, such as rebranding "licensing" as "authorisation," potentially extend government control over OTT platforms like WhatsApp and email services like Gmail. This could undermine encryption-based messaging security, leading to increased surveillance and interception without clear legal safeguards.
3. **Favoring Corporations:** Provisions allowing non-auction allocation of satellite spectrum and regulatory sandboxes are likely to benefit large corporations. This is exemplified by the potential market entry advantages for select firms, raising concerns about the fairness of these policies.
4. **Lack of Transparency and Debate:** The Bill's rapid passage through Parliament, despite objections from opposition members, highlights a lack of thorough debate and scrutiny. This is evident from the suspension of opposition members and the dismissal of requests to send the Bill to a Standing Committee for detailed examination.

### What are the implications of this controversy?

1. **Cultural Nativity & Political Credit:** The use of "Bharat" and crediting the ruling government's vision reflects a strategy of cultural nativism and a branding tactic for political gain.
2. **Constitutional Concerns:** Critics argue that the Telecom Bill represents a shift from constitutional governance to rule by select doctrines, potentially undermining democratic principles.

### Way forward:

The future steps should focus on closely examining the Telecom Bill to ensure it benefits all Indians. This requires open discussions, involvement of experts, and consideration of the bill's impact on digital rights and privacy. By doing so, we can create a telecom policy that truly bridges the digital divide and upholds democratic values.

## Analysing the Post Office Bill, 2023

**News:** The Post Office Bill, 2023 replaces the colonial-era Indian Post Office Act, 1898, aiming to update the legal framework for postal services in India.

### What are the key provisions of the Post Office Bill, 2023?

[Read here.](#)

### What are the major concerns related to the Post Office Bill, 2023?



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1. **Privacy Violation:** Critics argue the Bill infringes on the fundamental right to privacy, as it permits the interception of postal articles without robust safeguards. This will increase the risk of unauthorized state surveillance and abuse.
2. **Vague Terms:** The term 'emergency' is not clearly defined, leading to potential misuse of interception powers.
3. **Broad Powers:** The Bill allows officials to detain and open mail, raising concerns about unchecked government authority and potential for misuse.

### What are the Supreme Court rulings related to these concerns?

1. **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs. Union of India (1996):** The Supreme Court acknowledged telephone tapping as an infringement on privacy. It mandated safeguards against arbitrary state surveillance, ensuring any interception aligns with the right to privacy under Articles 19(1)(a) and Article 21.
2. **Justice KS Puttaswamy vs. Union of India (2017):** The Court declared the right to privacy as a fundamental right. It set forth six conditions for any state measure impacting privacy: legality, legitimate goal, suitability, necessity, proportionality, and procedural safeguards. This ruling highlighted that privacy and procedural safeguards cannot be overlooked, even for national security concerns. It underscored judicial oversight's critical role in upholding rights amidst state security measures.

### What should be the way forward?

To address concerns, the government needs to establish clear, transparent rules for mail interception, ensuring these are fair and include procedural safeguards. Additionally, defining vague terms and setting up a strong grievance redressal mechanism are crucial. This approach would balance national security needs with citizens' right to privacy, responding to the criticisms raised by legal experts and parliamentarians.

## 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.

#### 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: E-governance - applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential

#### Digitization of land Records

**News:** The article discusses India's project to digitize land records for better infrastructure planning and reduced corruption. It highlights the importance of clear land ownership, the impact on real estate, and the need to modernize land registration from physical to digital formats.

#### What are the benefits of digital land records?

1. **Ownership and Fewer Disputes:** Digital records establish clear land ownership, reducing legal issues and disputes over land.
2. **Efficient Real Estate Market:** With clear records, property deals become more transparent, reducing corruption and improving efficiency.
3. **Increased Tax Revenue:** Proper land records could lead to higher property tax collections for state governments.
4. **Facilitates Infrastructure Development:** Easy access to land data aids in faster planning and execution of infrastructure projects under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.
5. **Support for the Poor:** Digital records enable the poor to prove land ownership, safeguarding them against exploitation.

#### What are the challenges related to digital land records?

1. **Partial Success and Ongoing Effort:** While land records from 13 major states and four Union territories have been digitized, integration is still pending for states like Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and the UT of Lakshadweep.
2. **Outdated Registration Laws:** The process is still bound by the 1908 Registration Act, which depends on physical documents, making modernization challenging.
3. **Transition and Technology Challenges:** Moving to a digital system involves overcoming both bureaucratic and technological hurdles, such as implementing unique land parcel ID numbers and adapting to new digital processes.

#### What government initiatives are in place for the improvement of digital land records?

**PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan:** This initiative aims to coordinate infrastructure development using digital land records from states and Union territories.

For more information [read here](#).

**Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme:** A government project focusing on updating and digitizing land records across the country. Once this has been done, every plot/parcel of land can get the **14-digit alpha-numeric ULPIN (Unique Land Parcel Identification Number) or Bhu-Aadhaar**.

For more information [read here](#).

**What should be done?**

1. **Implement Unique IDs:** Assign a 14-digit unique land parcel ID to every land parcel for better tracking and transparency.
2. **Adopt Efficient Digital Systems:** Shift from physical to digital registration, leveraging technologies like Aadhaar for improved efficiency.

**Topic: Role of civil services in a democracy**

**Widespread use of consulting firms in government departments - Work of consultancy firms**

**News:** The article discusses the widespread use of consulting firms by government ministries in India. These firms help with policy making and program execution. However, there are concerns about government dependence on these consultants and potential negative impacts on public policy and government skills.

**Why do governments hire consulting firms?**

1. **Expertise in Diverse Fields:** Governments hire consultants for their specialized knowledge in various sectors like agriculture, transport, and digital services.
2. **Complex Challenges:** The increasing complexity of projects, such as the Jal Jeevan Mission and the cleaning of the Ganga River, requires skills beyond the government's traditional scope.
3. **Technological Advancement:** Rapid digital transformation in public services, like the Direct Benefit Transfer programme, demands technical expertise that consultants provide.
4. **Limited Internal Skills:** Traditional methods of recruiting government officials often lead to a narrow range of internal capabilities, making consultants optimal for specific challenges.

**What is the role of consulting firms in Indian government projects?**

1. **Policy Formulation and Major Project Support:** Consulting firms, including McKinsey, BCG, and the Big 4 (EY, PwC, KPMG, Deloitte), are heavily involved in shaping government policies and executing key projects. Their involvement is evident in key projects like the Swachh Bharat and Jal Jeevan Missions, as well as in efforts to clean the Ganga River.
2. **Economic Growth Strategies:** They assist in significant economic endeavors, such as supporting Uttar Pradesh's aim to grow its economy to \$1 trillion, showcasing their strategic role in regional development.
3. **Strategic Vision Development:** Consultants are tasked with creating foundational documents like the Vision 2047, indicating their deep involvement in long-term national planning and priority setting.

**What are the concerns about the government's dependence on consulting firms?**

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1. **Weakening of Government Capabilities:** Over-reliance on consultants for both routine and complex tasks risks eroding essential government skills, leading to a concerning level of dependency. This situation can result in "mission creep," where consultants gain excessive influence over policy and decision-making processes.
2. **Manipulation of Policy:** Concerns exist that consulting firms might use their influence to tweak policy directions for their own benefit, as seen in some international corruption scandals.
3. **'Consultocracy' and Reduced Public Servant Role:** The term "consultocracy" highlights how deep consultant integration can diminish the traditional functions and capabilities of public servants, altering the fundamental dynamics of governance.

### What should be done?

1. **Regulate Consultant Engagement:** Implement transparent and fair regulations for hiring consultants. This is crucial, considering the Indian government spent about Rs 5,000 million on these firms in the past five years.
2. **Build Government Capabilities:** Strengthen internal skills to reduce reliance on consultants, addressing concerns like the overdependence noted in routine tasks like file note preparation.
3. **Ensure Accountability:** Regularly review and assess consulting engagements for effectiveness, mirroring the finance ministry's recent initiative in auditing consultancy fees and engagements.
4. **Promote Knowledge Transfer:** Establish clear protocols for consultants to transfer skills to government staff, mitigating the risk of 'consultocracy' and enhancing government self-sufficiency.

## 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

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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
<p><b>Concentration of policymaking and implementation powers both</b> within departments.</p>	<p>Separating policymaking and implementation responsibilities is required. This speeds up the process and promotes innovation, tailoring programs more effectively to local situations.</p> <p><b>For example,</b></p> <p>The synergy between National Highways Authority of India (implementing agency) and the Ministry (policy decisions) has significantly decreased project delays and cost overruns.</p>
<p>Lack of decision-making power with the frontline personnel.</p> <p>This leads to a <b>culture of mistrust and lack of accountability.</b></p>	<p><b>Delegating</b> financial and administrative powers to the frontline functionaries, with clearly defined processes, is required.</p>
<p><b>Lack of technocratic skills</b> among policymakers to govern an increasingly complex economy.</p>	<p>a. <b>Lateral entry</b> at the middle and senior levels can help fill the civil services' size and technocratic gap.</p> <p>b. Qualified officers in <b>non-IAS services</b> should also get opportunities in high-level positions if they have the expertise.</p> <p>c. Civil servants should undergo <b>subject-specific training</b> under <b>Mission Karmayogi.</b></p>
<p><b>Narrow scope of audits by the CAG</b> (without taking into account the context in which a bureaucratic decision was made).</p> <p>It encourages the bureaucracy to <b>focus on compliance with rules</b> rather than objectives. This has made bureaucrats <b>risk-averse</b> to exercising discretion in policy matters, especially in case of big contracts, leading to delays.</p>	<p>The oversight agencies (CBI, CVC, CAG) must be sensitised to appreciate the context of policy decisions.</p> <p>They should factor in the costs associated with the actual decisions as well as their alternatives.</p>
<p><b>Post-retirement Appointments.</b></p>	<p>Increasing the retirement age to 65 years and making an absolute upper limit for all appointments.</p>



This makes civil servants susceptible to political manipulation and influences their in-service decisions.	
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

#### On the Forest Rights Act (FRA) - An uphill struggle to grow the Forest Rights Act

**News:** The **Forest Rights Act (FRA)** was enacted in 2006 to resolve conflicts over forest encroachments, addressing historical injustices against forest-dwelling communities, and establish democratic forest governance.

However, even after 17 years, the Act's promise of justice and democratization remains largely unfulfilled.

#### What have been historical injustices done to the forest dwellers?

##### During the Colonial Period:

The **Indian Forest Act, 1878** gave the British ownership of all Indian forests. The **Imperial Forest Department maximized revenue** for the British and treated forests as state property. This resulted in banning shifting cultivation, biased land surveys, forced labor for forest communities and restricting their access to forest resources.

##### Post-Independence:

1. **Inclusion of Princely states and Zamindari estates:** This led the forest areas being declared state property.
2. **Land leases:** Forest lands were leased for "**Grow More Food**" and other initiatives to meet the needs of a growing population, leaving communities in vulnerable situations.
3. **Construction of Dams:** Communities were displaced and were forced to encroach on other forest areas.
4. **The Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and Forest (Conservation) Act 1980:** Both the Acts followed the colonial nature of state ownership. The creation of sanctuaries and national parks led to the forced resettlement of communities.
5. **Developmental Projects:** Forest lands were diverted for the developmental project without the consent of local communities.



### How did the Forest Rights Act address these historical injustices?

1. **Encroachments:** It recognized **Individual Forest Rights (IFRs)** for habitation and cultivation. Forest villages are converted to revenue villages with full rights recognition.
2. **Access and Control:** It granted access and control by giving the rights to utilize forests, own and sell minor forest produce, and manage forests within their boundaries. These rights extended to sanctuaries and national parks.
3. **Balanced Wildlife Conservation and Community Rights:** It created a democratic process creating a balance between conservation goals and community needs.
4. **Supreme Court Judgment:** The SC in the **Niyamgiri case**, empowered forest communities by stating that they enjoy veto power over any proposals to divert that forest for other purposes.

However, despite attempts by the [Forest Conservation Rules 2022](#) and [FCA Amendment 2023](#) to bypass this right, states can still establish consent mechanisms.

### What have been the challenges over the implementation of the Forest Rights Act?

1. **Politicization:** Many states focused solely on individual rights, framing the FRA as an "encroachment regularization" scheme, encouraging illegal cultivation in some areas. They often view forest dwellers as recipients of state benefits, rather than recognizing their rights over forest.
2. **Bureaucratic Obstacles:** The recognition of Individual Forest Rights (IFRs) was affected by Forest Department resistance and technology misuse. There was a hindrance in recognizing **Community Forest Rights (CFRs)** as it would lead to loss of bureaucratic power and control over forests.
3. **Claiming Processes:** Claimants faced difficulties in filing claims, encountering rejections due to faulty processes and arbitrary decisions. The digital processes, like the VanMitra software in Madhya Pradesh, continued the injustice in areas with poor connectivity and literacy.

Read More: [The Conflict Between Forest Rights and Forest Conservation - Explained](#)

### How has the implementation of the Forest Rights Act been carried out in some of the states?

Maharashtra, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh have made progress in recognizing Community Forest Rights (CFRs). **Maharashtra has actively implemented by de-nationalizing minor forest produce** in Scheduled Areas, empowering villages to manage their own forests.

### 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.
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.

## Bihar reservation act – Can Bihar increase its reservation pool?

**News:** The article discusses how the Bihar government approved laws increasing reservations in jobs and education to 75%. This exceeds the Supreme Court's 50% (60% after EWS) limit set for such reservations. The laws may face legal challenges, and there's anticipation that the Supreme Court might reconsider this 50% limit.

### Background:

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The Bihar State Legislature recently passed two significant bills unanimously, which have also received the state governor's approval. These bills propose the same increase in reservations for educational institutions and government jobs and are based on a caste survey conducted by the state government.

### The key provisions of these bills are as follows:

The reservation quota for the Extremely Backward Class (EBC) will increase from 18% to 25%. For the Backward Class (BC), it will rise from 12% to 18%. The Scheduled Caste (SC) quota will go up from 16% to 20%, and the Scheduled Tribe (ST) quota will be doubled from 1% to 2%. Additionally, the existing 3% reservation for BC women has been eliminated.

### What is the judicial view on Reservations in India?

1. **50% Cap on Reservations:** The Supreme Court set a 50% limit on reservations in jobs and education, treating it as an exception under the constitutional framework.
2. **Exceptions to the Rule:** In exceptional cases, such as for communities from remote areas, this cap can be exceeded.
3. **10% EWS Reservation:** The Court approved an additional 10% reservation for economically weaker sections (EWS), effectively raising the cap to 60%.

For more information on the **Judicial view on Reservations in India** read: [article1](#), [article2](#).

### What Challenges Does the Bihar Government Face with Its Reservation Act?

1. **Breaching the Ceiling:** The Bihar government must prove that the communities benefiting from the excess reservation are from remote areas or socially marginalized, as per the Supreme Court's criteria.
2. **Defending the Motive:** Bihar's Chief Minister rationale, based on caste census results, challenges the Court's view that reservations should aim for "adequate" representation, not proportionate to population.
3. **Precedent of Legal Challenges:** Similar attempts by other states, like Maharashtra and Rajasthan, to exceed reservation limits have been struck down by the courts.

**Note:** Several states have gone beyond the 50% reservation limit, not including EWS: Chhattisgarh at 72%, Tamil Nadu at 69% (protected by a 1994 Act), and northeastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland at 80%. Lakshadweep reserves 100% for Scheduled Tribes.

### Way forward:

The Bihar government's reservation act, surpassing the 50% limit, will likely face legal scrutiny. The Supreme Court may be urged to reevaluate this cap, considering Bihar and other states' precedents. A balance between constitutional guidelines and regional socio-economic realities needs to be found.

## Topic: Issues relating to Health

### India's alarming 'Fixed Dose Combination (FDC)' problem

**News:** The article discusses the growing concerns regarding Fixed Dose Combinations (FDCs).

A recent study shows that a large volume of unapproved and even banned fixed dose combination (FDC) of antibiotics are sold in India. According to the findings, in 2020, ~60% FDCs of antibiotics being sold were unapproved and ~10% were banned.

#### What are FDCs and why are they useful?

FDCs are combinations of one or more known drugs. For example, 3 medications are combined into one tablet or one syrup.

FDCs reduce the number of pills to be taken and hence can improve patient compliance (i.e. the patient taking all the medicines at the correct time). This eventually leads to enhanced treatment outcomes.

#### What are the issues with FDCs?

1. **Reduces Efficacy of Drugs:** When formulated together, the active or inactive ingredients may interact to affect the functioning of drugs. It may reduce the therapeutic efficacy of drugs or form toxic elements (**metabolites**).
2. **Tool to Escape Legal Liabilities:** Since FDCs are not covered under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) (which enables the government to fix the prices of individual drugs), manufacturing FDCs is a way to escape the ambit of the DPCO.
3. **Unproductive Combinations Produced:** A large variety of produced FDCs lack any medical rationale. For example, anti-inflammatory drugs combined with vitamins, vitamins combined with analgesics, etc.
4. **Lack of Quality Standards:** There are no standards set by regulatory bodies for testing the quality of these drugs. As a result, it is difficult to hold manufacturers accountable for producing poor-quality FDCs.
5. **Higher Costs of Drugs:** A new FDC may be claimed as a unique new product catering to a specific need. This allows them to charge a higher price until their competitors introduce similar products and the prices go down.
6. **Failure of States to Implement Strict Licensing Norms:** State drug controllers continue to ignore legal provisions and issue manufacturing licences for FDCs not approved by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).
7. **Prohibitory Orders Stuck in Complex Litigation:** The prohibition on the manufacture of specific FDCs by the Ministry of Health has been caught in complex litigation and inconsistent decisions by Courts.
8. **Contributes to AMR:** Unregulated FDCs contribute to the Anti-Microbial Resistance problem in India.

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

It is crucial that all FDCs go through a scientifically designed approval process to make them safe for consumption. A strong regulatory framework is the need of the hour.



## 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.
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.

### Rehabilitation of the Disabled – A call for disability inclusion that must be heeded

**News:** The article discusses neuropsychiatric disorders. It also highlights the steps needed to revamp rehabilitation services for Persons with Disabilities, especially with regards to people with neuropsychiatric disorders.

According to the author, 2 important areas for Persons with Disabilities should be in the focus– 1) **activities of daily life** and 2) **quality of life**, especially with regards to people with **neuropsychiatric disorders (both psychiatric and neurological issues)**.

**Note:** **Neurology** is the branch of medicine dealing with the diagnosis and treatment of conditions involving the nervous system (brain, spinal cord and peripheral nerves). **Psychiatry** is a medical specialty devoted to mental conditions. These include matters related to mood, behavior, cognition, etc.

#### What are neuropsychiatric disorders?

- a. These include disorders such as autism, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and intellectual disability in childhood.
- b. Mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, eating disorder, addictions, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder.
- c. Traumatic brain injury, spinal injury, epilepsy, stroke.
- d. Neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's dementia and Parkinson's disease that appear in old age.

#### What is the current status of disabilities and rehabilitation services?

Nearly **1 billion people are suffering from disabilities** worldwide, with 80% of these in developing countries. According to a report by the WHO, **2.41 billion individuals had neuropsychiatric conditions** that would benefit from rehabilitation. However, it has **not been prioritized** in countries and is **under-resourced**.

#### What should be done to improve rehabilitation services for people with neuropsychiatric conditions?

A large number of people are affected by neuropsychiatric conditions around the globe, leading to a large requirement of rehabilitation facilities. The following can be done to improve them:

1. **Widening the Coverage:** Rehabilitation services must be designed to address the wide spectrum of neurological and mental health problems as opposed to being narrow in concept and led only by specialists.
2. **Generating Awareness:** There is a need to build awareness in the public that disablement does not need to be endured and can be treated or even reversed.

3. **Regarding it as an Essential Service:** There is also a need to encourage medical professionals, medical service providers as well as public health professionals to start considering rehabilitation as an essential service.

4. **Developing Human Resources:** Rehabilitation requires a range of professionals: physical and occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, psychological therapists and professional caregivers. Improving their training and empowering their professional /career growth is important in order for these services to develop and evolve.

5. **Developing Holistic Rehab Services:** Rehabilitation services need to be multidisciplinary, multicomponent and holistic.

6. **Utilising New Scientific Care Methods:** There is a need to consider unique methods of care that have emerged through scientific advances.

For instance, **Non-Invasive Brain Stimulation (NIBS)** procedures have been useful in the care and rehabilitation of neurological and mental health conditions.

7. **Collaboration among Public and Private Sector:** It is crucial for governments, the public and private sectors to collaborate and find innovative solutions for persons with disabilities.

### On Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) - Making health our top priority in 2024

**News:** The article discusses the alarming trend of NCDs in India. It also highlights the steps that can be taken by individuals to lead a healthier life and prevent NCDs.

The alarming trend of non-elderly dying from heart-related issues is marking a paradigm shift in India's disease burden. While communicable diseases persist as a significant threat, **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases have emerged as the predominant public health concern.

#### What is the status of NCDs in India?

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report titled 'Invisible Numbers', a staggering **66% of deaths in India in 2019** were attributed to NCDs.

India has **101 million diabetics** and **136 million with prediabetes**. Cardiovascular diseases top the mortality charts, and **cancer incidence is projected to rise by 57.5% by 2040**.

NCDs also pose a substantial economic burden. According to WEF, India could incur a staggering cost of **\$4.58 trillion between 2012 and 2030** due to NCDs and mental health conditions.

#### What are the causes?

- 1) The silent epidemic of NCDs is fuelled by **common behavioural risk factors** — unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, the use of tobacco and alcohol — which are all on the rise in India.
- 2) This epidemic is further spurred by factors including a **genetic predisposition** towards conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.
- 3) A **sedentary lifestyle** which brings with it issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

#### What steps have been taken by the govt?

Government has launched initiatives such as:

- a. **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke.**

b. **75/25 initiative** (screening and providing standard of care for 75 million individuals with hypertension and diabetes by 2025).

#### What should be done by individuals to prevent NCDs?

1. **First**, integrating more natural movement into our daily lives. For instance, walking where possible instead of taking a vehicle. This can increase cardiovascular fitness, strengthen our bones, reduce excess body fat, and boost muscle power and endurance.
2. **Second**, choosing 'slow food' over fast food. This includes food that is prepared with the ingredients that are right for us.
3. **Third**, getting comprehensive health check-ups done regularly.
4. **Fourth**, making health a dinner table and water cooler conversation. For e.g. asking colleagues and loved ones what they did for their health.

The power to transform the nation lies in the daily choices of its citizens, reflecting a profound understanding that the well-being of individuals directly impacts the well-being of society.

### Topic: Issues relating to Human Resources

#### On Youth Unemployment – Are graduates facing unemployment?

**News:** The article discusses the persistent issue of high unemployment rates among young, educated people in India, despite overall falling unemployment rates. It highlights that while fewer people are unemployed now, the problem remains severe for educated youth, reflecting a long-standing issue in the Indian economy.

#### What is the current unemployment situation?

1. **Overall unemployment rate:** According to periodic labour force survey, the overall unemployment rate in India has decreased from 6.1% in 2017-18 to 3.2% in 2022-23.
2. **Educated youth unemployment:** Young graduates, specifically those aged 18-29, face a high unemployment rate of 27% as of 2022-23. This indicates a persistent challenge for this demographic despite overall improvements.
3. **Graduate unemployment trends:** For all individuals with graduate degrees, unemployment has seen fluctuations but shows a decreasing trend; it peaked at 17% in 2017-18 and reduced to 13% in 2022-23.
4. **Growing graduate workforce:** The share of graduates in the labor force has increased, now making up around 15% by 2022-23.

#### Why is youth unemployment a concern?

1. **Underutilized Human Capital:** Such high unemployment rates among young, educated individuals suggest a significant underutilization of skilled human capital, which is detrimental to economic growth and productivity.
2. **Growing Share of Graduates:** The increasing share of graduates in the labor force, from 5% in 1993-94 to around 15% in 2022-23, highlights the expanding pool of educated yet unemployed youth, exacerbating the unemployment issue despite overall improvements.
3. **Structural Issue:** The problem has been longstanding since the 1990s, with unemployment among graduates peaking at 17% in 2017-18, showcasing it as a structural issue rather than a temporary fluctuation.



## Way forward

Efforts to align education with market demands and enhance relevant skill development are crucial to address the 27% unemployment among young graduates. Creating more job opportunities in sectors that absorb educated youth will also mitigate high unemployment rates. Strengthening the education-employment linkage is key to utilizing the growing educated workforce effectively.

## 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).
- 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



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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.

## Topic: Issues relating to Education

### Measuring digital literacy – Why India must measure digital literacy

**News:** This article highlights the importance of digital technology in education and the need for youth to have digital skills for the future economy.

#### What is the current condition of youth education in India?

1. **Increased Elementary Education Enrollment:** The percentage of children aged 6-14 not in school dropped to 1.6% in 2022, showcasing significant progress in elementary education.
2. **Slower Secondary School Transition:** Despite the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan's launch in 2009, the transition to secondary education has been gradual, with a decline in out-of-school children aged 15-16 from 16.1% in 2010 to 7.5% in 2022.
3. **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic led to extended school closures, affecting education, especially at the primary level.

#### Why should India measure digital literacy?

1. **Supporting Educational Goals:** With the increase in smartphone usage from 36% in 2018 to 74.8% in 2022, measuring digital literacy helps ensure that digital tools effectively support education.
2. **Economic Development:** As the World Development Report suggests, understanding digital literacy is crucial for realizing the potential of the digital dividend in economic growth.
3. **Pandemic Recovery:** The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the necessity of digital literacy for uninterrupted learning, making its measurement vital for educational resilience.
4. **Future Workforce Preparedness:** Accurate measurement of digital literacy is key to preparing India's youth for a digital economy, ensuring they can contribute productively.

#### What are initiatives to enhance digital literacy in India?

1) **National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) and Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (DISHA)** (2014-2016): Aimed to train 52.50 lakh candidates in digital literacy.

2) **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** (Since 2017): Targeted to impart digital literacy in rural India, covering 6 crore households.

### Way forward:

To maximize India's demographic and digital dividends, India must focus on enhancing digital literacy and accessibility. As smartphone usage in rural areas rose to 74.8% in 2022, leveraging this for educational resources and skills development is crucial. Continued support for youth aspirations will drive economic participation and growth.

## Subject: International Relations

### Topic: India and its neighborhood – relations

#### On India losing influence in South Asia

**News:** The article discusses India's waning influence in South Asia, attributing it to internal changes, neighboring countries' evolving perspectives, and external pressures from powers like China and the Middle East. It suggests that India must revise its strategies to effectively respond to these new regional dynamics and maintain its regional standing.

#### Why is India losing influence in South Asia?

1. **Historical Legacies:** The India's collective nostalgia for the British Raj's integration of the Subcontinent along with partition and unresolved disputes have led to continuous regional tension.
2. **Perception of Hegemony:** Neighbors perceive India's regional strategies as attempts at hegemony, conflicting with their sovereignty and autonomy. For example, India's concepts like "Akhand Bharat" or the liberal version of an integrated Subcontinent, seen as covers for regional hegemony.
3. **Domestic Politics of Neighborhood:** Neighbors like the Maldives demand the withdrawal of Indian military presence, worried about its impact on its sovereignty. Additionally, the unresolved Kashmir issue with Pakistan remains a focal point of contention.
4. **Changing Regional Dynamics:** The rising influence of global powers like China in South Asia and the strategic and economic interests of Middle Eastern countries are diminishing India's role and complicating its traditional influence.

#### What is the future of South Asia?

1. **Evolving Geopolitics:** The influence of external powers like China and the Middle East will grow, reshaping regional dynamics.
2. **Changing Alliances:** Neighboring countries will continue to assert their sovereignty, potentially leading to new alliances and partnerships beyond India's influence.
3. **Increased Regional Integration:** Despite challenges, there is potential for more economic cooperation and regional integration, albeit at a pace influenced by political will and external factors.
4. **Continued Legacy of Partition:** Historical disputes, especially related to Partition, will persist in shaping the political and social landscape.

#### Way forward:

India needs to reassess its regional strategy, focusing on inclusivity, cooperation, and resolving disputes like Kashmir to adapt to a changing South Asia. Recognizing and constructively engaging with neighboring countries and external influences is vital for navigating the region's complexities. By embracing these changes, India can better position itself in the evolving geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

## 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.

### 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 become 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.

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

#### On International Maritime Trade and Choke Points – Global trade disruption

**News:** The article discusses the reasons behind the recent obstructions in the Suez and Panama canal trade traffic and its implications.

Two continental shipping passages, the Suez and Panama canals, are suffering from obstructions to trade traffic. This has raised concerns about supply-chain woes and risks to the global economy. Additionally, it highlights that climate change and geopolitical tensions have the potential to negatively impact global trade and shipping.

#### Suez Canal:



Source: Nippon.com



### What are the reasons for obstruction to trade in the Suez Canal?

**Houthi rebels from Yemen** have increased their attacks on ships in response to the war in Gaza. Even an Indian-flagged ship carrying crude oil was attacked.

Turmoil in the **Red Sea** can practically render the Suez Canal unusable, a route that facilitates **12% of global trade** and around **20% of India's trade flows**.

### What is the impact?

- 1) This has led to major shipping companies rerouting vessels away from the Suez Canal, navigating around the **Cap of Good Hope (circling the African continent)**, a much longer but safer route.
- 2) Vessels still operating on the route are facing extremely high war-risk insurance premiums.
- 3) Both of these consequences have led to an increase in freight and shipping costs, rendering both imports and exports more expensive.
- 4) **On India:** Continued tensions surrounding the Gulf of Aden can impact India's trade flows. However, India is safe in the case of its oil imports as it sources its oil mainly from West Asia, and this is shipped via the **Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz**.

### Panama Canal:



Source: WorldAtlas

### What are the reasons for obstruction to trade in the Panama Canal?

The Panama Canal, which connects the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean, has been impacted by **drought conditions** coupled with the [El Nino effect](#).

As it **lies above the sea level**, it is completely reliant on freshwater from nearby lakes and cannot run on ocean water.

**What is the impact?**

- 1) The channel is currently operating only at **55%** of its normal capacity.
- 2) Blockage in the Panama Canal has also exacerbated supply-chain disruptions.

**What should be done?**

It is important to **recognise the criticality** of these "**choke points**" upon which global trade and navigation depend and take appropriate measures:

1. Smooth trade flows in the future may require **international cooperation** for effectively managing the major straits and canals during periods of natural emergency and political crisis.
2. **Intermodal freight transport** is a possible alternative. For instance, using air transport.

**Indian Navy in a threatening Red Sea**

**News:** The article discusses the importance of shipping trade and why the Indian Ocean is more vulnerable to interventions by state and non-state actors. It also mentions the challenges in front of the Indian Navy in dealing with the Houthi threat in the Red Sea.

The recent attacks by Yemen-based Houthi rebels have begun posing a serious threat to merchant ships in the Red Sea.

**Why is shipping trade important?**

1) Shipping is the **cheapest and most efficient method** of transporting goods over long distances, forming the bedrock of the global economy.

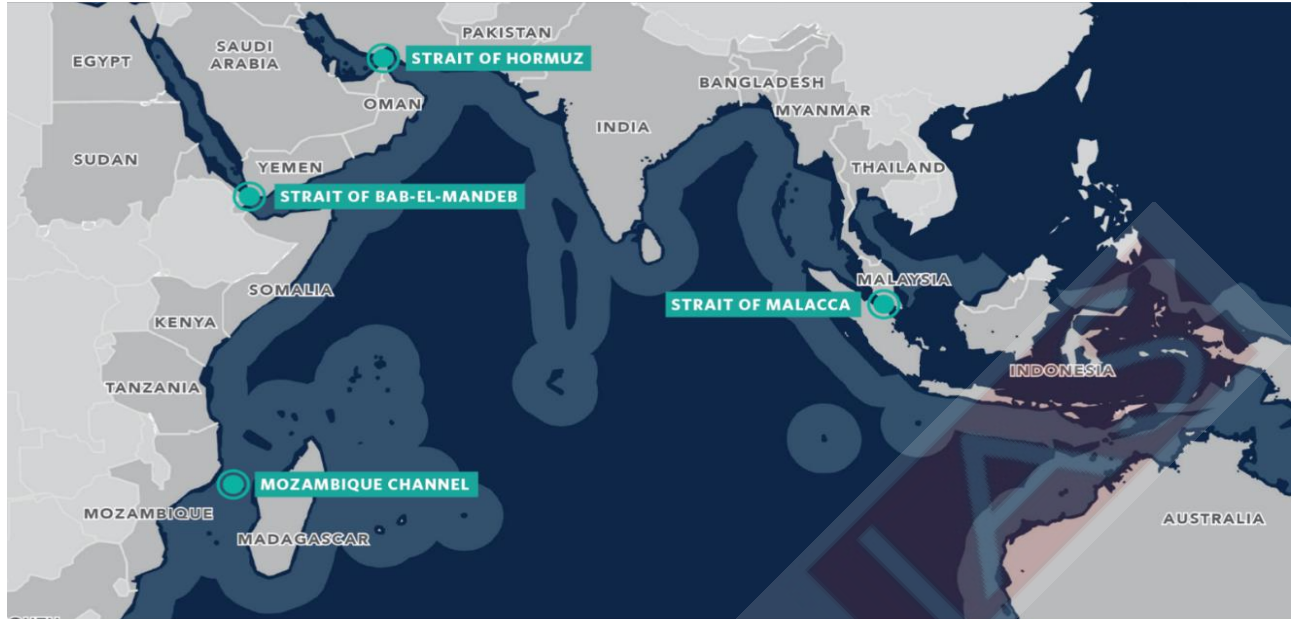
For instance, the waters of the Indian Ocean carry **80% of the world's oil**.

2) **Trade warfare or waging war on seaborne commerce** has historically been a favoured strategy to coerce an enemy by striking at the very roots of its security and prosperity.

**Why is shipping trade in the Indian Ocean more vulnerable?**

The Indian Ocean has a number of **narrow passages** called "**choke points**". These constrict shipping traffic into a narrow sea lane, making them vulnerable to interventions by states, pirates and terrorists. These include Malacca Strait, Hormuz Strait and Bab al Mandab Strait.

It is at **Bab al Mandab Strait** where the Iran-backed Houthi rebels have launched missile and drone attacks on US Navy units and merchant shipping.



Indian Ocean Choke-Points. Source: Carnegie Endowment.

### What could be the reasons for the Houthi attack?

The underlying reasons for these attacks could be manifold:

- 1. Clash of Regional and Global Powers:** The conflict between the Yemen Republic and the Houthis is seen as a Saudi Arabia-Iran proxy war, which has assumed wider multilateral dimensions. Countries like USA, Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Sudan, Bahrain and organisations like Al Qaeda and Hezbollah either participate or support one or the other side.
- 2. Ideological Objectives:** The Houthis have claimed that their aim for attacking shipping is to pressurise Israel to end its bombardment of Gaza, targeting only those ships which are in any way “linked” to Israel.

### What has been the world’s response?

The US, due to its deep ties to Israel, launched “**Operation Prosperity Guardian**” with the aim of safeguarding Red Sea shipping.

However, it is being seen as provocative against Iran, and hasn’t received wider support by 3 important NATO countries — France, Italy and Spain.

**India:** India’s deployment of 4-5 warships as a show of “naval presence” reflects its status as a maritime power.

### What will be challenges in front of the Indian Navy?

According to the author, the Indian Navy will be constrained by two factors:

- 1. Jurisdictional Issues:** The state in which a ship is registered has the primary responsibility for maintaining security and law enforcement on ships in international waters. A warship of any other state wanting to board a merchant vessel in peacetime will need the consent of the flag state.
- 2. Drone Warfare:** Navies are struggling to devise counter-measures to the evolving dangers of drone attacks.

The smaller, low-flying drones are hard to spot by radars and target. Soft-kill measures (jamming the drone’s radio signals) or hard-kill/kinetic systems (missiles or rapid-firing guns) can be utilised.

India must use its good relations with Iran, as well as with Israel, to urge moderation and restraint in order to restore peace in the Indian Ocean.

### On the Qatar Death Row Issue – A quiet reprieve

**News:** The article discusses the recent commuting of the capital punishment handed down in October to 8 former Indian naval personnel by Qatar. It also highlights the possible future course of action that the government can follow to ensure the best possible results for the naval personnel.

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

Recently, the Qatari Court of Appeals reduced the capital punishment handed down in October to 8 former Indian naval personnel, commuting it to a jail term.

However, since the conviction was upheld, the government and the men's families must now reassess their legal strategy and evidence of their innocence before filing a review petition with Qatar's Court of Cassation.

**Read more about this issue** [here](#).

#### What are the options if all avenues of judicial appeal are exhausted?

The government will have three options:

1. **First**, to press for a review of the conviction with Qatar's ruling Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.
2. **Second**, if that fails, the men could appeal for clemency and ask for a pardon, that Qatar's rulers have given in the past.
3. **Third**, the men could serve out their terms in India (according to a **2015 bilateral Agreement on Transfer of Sentenced Persons**). However, this option would require them to accept the conviction.

#### What was the role played by diplomacy in getting the death sentence commuted?

1. India's Prime Minister reached out publicly to the Qatari leadership when he met Qatar's Emir on the sidelines of COP28 recently.
2. India chose not to react to the case with public rhetoric (such as negative media reporting against Qatar). This could have been counterproductive.
3. India also did not allow the case to be influenced by the growing tensions in the region due to the Gaza conflict.

#### What should be done?

1. **Reviewing Intelligence Operations:** If the case is in any way connected to India's intelligence services, then an appropriate review should be undertaken (of operations that could risk Indian lives overseas).
2. **Diplomatic and Political Efforts:** The government must be seen to be pursuing diplomatic and political efforts at the highest level, to convey that the men are a priority for India.



## Challenges in the Red Sea – The stormy Red Sea

**News:** This article discusses the security challenges in the Red Sea region, including the involvement of the **Hamas (Palestinian-based)** and **Houthi militia (Yemen-based)** and its impact on global trade and Asian economies. It also highlights the growing role of non-state militant actors in shaping geopolitical dynamics.

### Background:

In October, Hamas attacked Israel, shaking regional stability. The Iran-aligned Houthi militia responded by joining the conflict, supporting Gaza. They are targeting all the ships travelling through Red Sea, which has association with Israel. **This involvement threatened the Red Sea's critical waterways**, linked to the Suez Canal, vital for 15% of global trade.

### What are the challenges in the Red Sea?

#### 1. Strengthening of militant:

**a) Houthi Aggression-** The Houthis, aligned with Iran, have intensified their attacks in the Red Sea, targeting commercial vessels, particularly those with Israeli affiliations.

**b) Enhanced Missile Capability-** The Houthis have significantly upgraded their military arsenal, now possessing a variety of missiles, including long-range ones, and other advanced weaponry like torpedoes.

**c) The growing political and military influence of non-state actors** like the Houthis highlights the growing impact of such groups on regional stability and security.

#### 2. Escalating Military Presence:

**a) U.S. Involvement:** The U.S. has deployed military assets, including longer-range drones and missiles, in response to the Houthi threat.

**b) Call for International Cooperation:** The U.S. urges the formation of a multinational task force to protect the Bab al-Mandab Strait, underscoring the strategic importance of securing this critical waterway.

### What are the implications of these challenges?

- 1. Global Trade Disruptions:** The Red Sea's instability affects crucial trade routes, impacting global economies, especially since nearly 15% of global trade passes through.
- 2. Rising Tensions:** The involvement of multiple nations, including the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Iran, leads to heightened regional tensions.
- 3. Energy Security Concerns:** With the Red Sea being a key route for oil and gas shipments, disruptions pose significant risks to energy security, particularly for Asian economies reliant on these imports.

### What should be done to address them?

- 1. Multinational Military Collaboration:** Inspired by the U.S. initiative, a multinational task force is needed to secure the Red Sea, particularly around strategic points like the Bab al-Mandab Strait.
- 2. Balanced Diplomatic Approaches:** Considering Riyadh's call for restraint and ongoing talks with the Houthis, diplomatic efforts, like those observed in the Saudi-Iran détente brokered by China, are essential.
- 3. Enhanced Naval Protection:** Following the example of **India's Operation Sankalp**, which began in 2019 to escort India-flagged ships, other nations should bolster their naval presence to safeguard commercial shipping.
- 4. Acknowledging Non-State Actors' Roles:** Recognizing the increasing military capabilities of groups like the Houthis, strategies must adapt to consider the influence of non-state actors in the region's stability.



For more information on **India's Operation Sankalp**, [read here](#)

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

### **On MEA's Russia Visit – Express View on Jaishankar in Moscow**

**News:** The article discusses Dr. S Jaishankar's recent trip to Moscow. It highlights the significance of the visit and the changing dynamics of India-Russia bilateral relations.

The camaraderie between India and Russia was evident during Dr. S Jaishankar's recent trip to Moscow. Dr. Jaishankar rightly highlighted that amidst fluctuations in ties with other key nations, the **Indo-Russian bond has remained remarkably steady** and haven't encountered significant disagreements. India and Russia have often found **convergence in their geopolitical goals**, particularly in maintaining a stable balance of power in Asia.

#### **What is the status of India-Russia bilateral relations?**

- 1) **Trade & Energy Relations:** Bilateral economic engagement has risen rapidly in the last two years. Bilateral trade has grown from about \$12 billion to **\$50 billion last year**, thanks to the massive oil imports from Russia.
- 2) **India's stand on Russian Aggression against Ukraine:** India came under widespread criticism in the West for not condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and for expanding its energy and economic cooperation with Moscow.

#### **What is the significance of the visit?**

- 1) **Aims to uphold a strong level of political involvement with the Russian leadership:** This is important given the inability to hold the annual summits between PM Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin over the past two years due to the conflict in Ukraine.
- 2) **Does not mark a break in the thriving strategic partnership between India and the US:** It is wrong to interpret the visit as a major Indian decision to embrace Russia amid presumed setbacks to India's relationship with the US (regarding the **Gurpatwant Singh Pannun episode and the rejection of Republic Day Invitation by US President**).

#### **What are the new announcements during the recent visit?**

1. **First**, talks for the Eurasian Economic Union-India free trade agreement have been resumed.
2. **Second**, agreement over furthering collaboration in future Kudankulam nuclear power projects.
3. **Third**, imports of Russian hydrocarbons will continue to rise despite the West's Russian sanctions.
4. **Fourth**, as Russia will host the expanded BRICS summit next year, India will be beneficiary of coordination with Russia like at the UN and SCO.

#### **What are the changes in the bilateral relations between India and Russia?**

The context of bilateral relations with Russia has fundamentally changed due to the following factors:

- 1) **Economic Gap Reversed:** India is no longer a junior partner to Russia. India's GDP in 1991 was half that of Russia's; today it is bigger than Russia's by a large margin — \$3.6 trillion to \$2.2 trillion.

- 2) **Dependence on Russian Military Imports Decreasing:** India is diversifying away from its traditional military dependence on Russia — France and the US have emerged as major arms suppliers.
- 3) **Increased Partnerships with the West:** India's commercial and technological relationships are deeply tied to the US, Europe and the UK. A large section of the Indian diaspora resides in the English-speaking world.

India is reconstituting its Russia relationship as an equal. There are concerns over defence supplies from Russia and the method of payment for imports from Russia. Yet both countries value sustaining a sensible bilateral relationship that will help them deal with an increasingly bipolar world.

### On Shift in Global Trade Policy

**News:** The article discusses how recent trade policies, particularly in the US and EU, are moving away from global trade rules and becoming more protectionist. This shift is leading to a more fragmented and contentious global trade environment.

#### What is changing in global trade policy?

1. **Unilateral Measures:** The US and EU are adopting more unilateral trade policies, as evidenced by the **US's Inflation Reduction Act** and the **EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism**. These measures, like the **US's local content rules in electric vehicle manufacturing** and the **EU extending its Emission Trading System**, are contrary to WTO rules and favor certain regions over others.
2. **Rising Protectionist Actions:** Nations are following the US and EU's lead with their own protective measures. For instance, the Netherlands and Japan's restrictions in the semiconductor industry are part of a broader trend of increasing trade restrictions aimed at protecting domestic industries.
3. **Contradictory US Policies:** The US has the highest number of trade and industrial policy interventions between 2017-23, contradicting its stated commitment to a rules-based order. This includes actions against China and its own protectionist measures, reflecting a larger trend of contradiction in its trade policies.

For more information on **US's Inflation Reduction Act**, [read here](#).

For more information on **EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism**, [read here](#).

#### What are the implications of these changes?

1. **Undermining WTO Principles:** Unilateral measures like the Inflation Reduction Act and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism challenge WTO's rules-based order, undermining principles of non-discrimination and fair competition.
2. **Weakening of Multilateral Dispute Settlement:** The US's reluctance to engage with the WTO's dispute resolution mechanisms signals a move towards more uncertain and bilateral dispute settlements. This move threatens the predictability and stability provided by the multilateral system.

#### What should be done?

1. **Strengthen WTO Commitment:** Reinforce adherence to World Trade Organization rules and principles to ensure a fair and stable global trading system.
2. **Support Positive Trade Developments:** Recognize and build upon the growth and resilience of global trade, as evidenced by the expansion of the **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)** and the full effectuation of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.

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3. **Encourage Multilateral Cooperation:** Utilize the positive momentum from these regional blocks to foster a more inclusive and rules-based global trade environment.
4. **Enhance Transparency:** Developed countries should lead by example, ensuring that any new trade measures are transparent and in line with international norms.

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

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

### 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?

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 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:



MEGHAN HOLT, DN DESIGN  
Source: Associated Press, Council on Foreign Relations, Anti-Defamation League

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

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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 its 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.

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

### Global reaction to the change in J&K's Status

**News:** The article discusses the global reaction to both India's Parliament revoking Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 and the Supreme Court's decision to uphold this constitutional amendment.

### Background:

In 2019, India's Parliament annulled the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and enacted the Jammu and Kashmir (Reorganisation) Bill. This legislation divided the region into two Union Territories: Jammu and Kashmir, which retained its legislature, and Ladakh, which did not. Recently the Supreme Court upheld the abrogation of Article 370, which had previously granted special status to the former state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Read about [SC Judgement on abrogation of Article 370](#).

### What were the international reactions after India's Parliament revoked J&K's special status under Article 370?

1. **Pakistan:** Strongly opposed India's move.
2. **China:** Criticized the creation of Ladakh as a Union Territory, claiming it affected its sovereignty; expressed concern over regional stability.
3. **Islamic Countries:** Mixed reactions; UAE and Saudi Arabia saw it as India's internal matter, while Turkey and Malaysia criticized the decision.
4. **Western Nations & EU:** Expressed concerns over potential instability and human rights issues; emphasized dialogue between India and Pakistan.
5. **Russia:** Supported India, viewing the changes as within India's constitutional framework and a bilateral issue.

### What is the Supreme Court's verdict on this matter?

[Read here.](#)

### What were the international reactions following the Supreme Court's verdict?

1. **Limited International Reaction:** Apart from Pakistan, China, and the OIC, there were no major global reactions to the Supreme Court's verdict on 370.
2. **Pakistan:** Refused to recognize the Indian Constitution's supremacy over Jammu and Kashmir.
3. **China:** Did not acknowledge Ladakh as a Union Territory, asserting a claim on the western section of the China-India border.
4. **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):** Urged reversal of abrogation of 370.
5. **India's Response:** Dismissed OIC's statements, attributing them to Pakistan's influence and labeling Pakistan as a promoter of cross-border terrorism.

### What diplomatic efforts were made in relation to this change?

1. **UN Security Council Engagement:** After India's outreach to UNSC members, the US, France, and Germany, as part of the UNSC, preferred not to internationalize the issue, supporting a bilateral resolution instead. Poland, holding the UNSC Presidency at the time, also supported this approach.
2. **High-Level Diplomatic Talks:** Government approached France, China, Europe and US to gather support in favor of abrogation. Majority of these countries backed India.
3. **J&K Tours:** The Indian government conducted tours of J&K for the international diplomatic community.

### What should be done?

1. **Organize free and fair elections** in Jammu and Kashmir as directed by the Supreme Court.
2. Ensuring the **protection of human rights** in the region is crucial to maintain international credibility.
3. India should **seek to reduce tensions and explore engagement opportunities** with Pakistan.
4. India must **continue its diplomatic efforts to communicate its stance** and developments in J&K to the international community.

## India's evolving foreign policy, a new pointer to India's changed world view

**News:** The article discusses India's evolving foreign policy, particularly regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. Historically non-aligned and supportive of Palestine, India is now closer to Israel, influenced by security concerns and relations with the US. This change also reflects India's strategic response to China's rise.

**What was India's historical stance on Israel-Palestine conflict?**

[Read here](#)

**What changed in India's policy towards Israel-Palestine conflict?**

1. **Shift Due to Security and Terrorism Concerns:** The rise of Pakistan-supported Islamic militancy against India led to a strategic shift towards Israel for enhanced security and intelligence cooperation.
2. **Upgrading Diplomatic Relations:** In 1992, India upgraded its relations with Israel to ambassadorial level, a significant move from its earlier policy of keeping relations at a consular level.
3. **Recent Pro-Israeli Tendencies:** India's rapid support for Israel during conflicts and abstaining from certain UN resolutions indicate a more pro-Israeli stance compared to the past.
4. **Balanced Approach with Palestine:** Even with closer ties to Israel, India continued supporting Palestine. For instance, India's External Affairs Ministry voiced support for direct negotiations towards a sovereign Palestinian state, showing a balance in its stance.

**What is the concern related to change in India policy towards Israel-Palestine?**

1. **Erosion of Non-Alignment Principle:** The shift towards Israel marks a departure from India's historical stance of non-alignment and balanced foreign policy.
2. **Impact on India's Muslim Population:** India's growing proximity to Israel raises concerns among its substantial Muslim population, who traditionally sympathize with the Palestinian cause.
3. **Isolation from Global South:** India's abstention from the UN vote calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Palestine conflict contrasts with its role as a voice of the Global South.
4. **Gandhian Principles at Stake:** India's reluctance to vote for peace in the UN General Assembly is seen as contrary to its Gandhian legacy of non-violence and peace advocacy.

**How have global dynamics influenced India's foreign policy?**

1. **China's Rise and US Alignment:** The increasing influence and territorial disputes with China have led India to strengthen its ties with the United States, especially after the Galwan clash in June 2020.
2. **Engagement in Middle Eastern Affairs and Economic Strategies:** India's active involvement in Middle Eastern politics, evidenced by its participation in the **I2U2 group** and the **Abraham Accords**, demonstrates a strategic interest in the region. Additionally, **economic initiatives like the IMEC** (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor), announced at the G-20 summit, further highlight India's expanding economic engagement in the Middle East.
3. **Reorientation from Traditional Allies:** With Russia's diminishing influence in global politics and China's assertiveness, India is visibly shifting its foreign policy, moving away from its traditional reliance on Russia.

## Topic: India and its neighborhood - relations

### Maldives not allowing India to survey its waters – Patience and vigilance

**News:** The Maldives government chose not to renew a 2019 agreement that allowed India to conduct hydrographic surveys (Mapping of water bodies to promote secure and effective maritime transportation). This decision seems influenced by local politics. The Maldives is shifting away from India, influenced by China's growing role in the region. India needs to respond carefully.

#### What are the reasons behind Maldives government's steps against India?

1. **Domestic Politics:** The decision aligns with President Muizzu's "India Out" campaign, reflecting a shift in domestic political sentiment.
2. **Influence of China:** The Maldives is increasingly engaging with China, evident from Vice President Latheef attending a China-organized Indian Ocean Forum (which excluded India) and skipping an India-related event (Colombo Security Dialogue).
3. **Regional Power Dynamics:** India's dominant role in the region is being challenged by China's growing influence. The Maldives, like Sri Lanka, is using its strategic location to navigate between these major powers.
4. **Short-term Political Gains:** The Muizzu government's move appears to prioritize immediate political benefits over long-term mutual interests with India.

For more information on **Shift in Maldives' foreign policy**, [read here](#)

#### What is the implication for India?

The non-renewal of the hydrographic survey agreement **reduces India's strategic reach in the Indian Ocean**, impacting its ability to monitor regional waters.

With the Maldives showing a preference for China, as evident in their participation in China-organized forums, **India faces a challenge to its regional dominance**.

#### What should India do?

1. **Maintain Patience and Vigilance:** India needs to be patient, understanding the long-term implications of its actions in response to the Maldives' decision.
2. **Balance Engagement and Non-Interference:** India should engage positively with the Maldives without appearing intrusive, respecting its sovereignty.
3. **Adapt to China's Growing Presence:** Acknowledge and strategically respond to China's increasing influence in the region. There is need to draw specific lines concerning China's activities, especially regarding military presence in the Maldives.
4. **Offer Support for Environmental Challenges:** Given the threat of rising sea levels to the Maldives, India should be ready to provide assistance and cooperation in environmental protection and disaster management.

For more information on **India-Maldives Relations**, [read here](#)



## On India-Oman Bilateral Relations – A time-honoured connect that will help bridge the Gulf

**News:** The article discusses the importance and the key highlights of the India-Oman bilateral relations. The Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is visiting India on a state visit. This will be his first visit to India after taking over.

### What is the importance of Oman for India?

1. **Historic Cooperation:** During and after the Cold War era, Oman was friendlier to India compared to the Arab World (which was supportive of Pakistan).
2. **Geostrategic Aspect:** Omani ports along the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman being the entry point to the Persian Gulf and to the Gulf of Aden make Oman's location of strategic importance to India.



Figure 3. Source: World Atlas.

3. **Economic Relations:** In the past, Indian companies and professionals have undertaken projects in Oman.
4. **Large Indian Diaspora:** Oman has a large **Indian community of 7 lakh people**.
5. **Oman's Neutral Foreign Policy:** It has pursued a foreign policy of neutrality in dealing with regional issues and conflicts. For instance, it has carefully balanced its close relations with the western powers and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and even neighbouring Iran.
6. **Crucial Pillar of India's West Asia policy.**



7. **Shared Values:** The two countries consider themselves as ambassadors of peace and enjoy goodwill in the world.

### What are the highlights of India-Oman bilateral relations?

1. **Strategic Relations:**
  - a. The **India-Oman strategic partnership** was signed in 2008 based on twin pillars of mutual trust and shared interests.
  - b. India's Prime Minister had visited Oman in 2018 where key agreements on trade, defence and security were agreed upon.
2. **Defence and Security:**
  - a. Both countries have cooperated in ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. For instance, an Indian naval ship has remained on duty in the Gulf of Oman for anti-piracy operations.
  - b. Oman's **Duqm Port** provides base facilities, Operational Turn Round and other logistics facilities to Indian naval ships in the region.
3. **Trade and Commerce:**
  - a. Bilateral trade during FY2022-23 reached \$12.4 billion.
  - b. Over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures are present in Oman.
  - c. India was the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022.
4. **Space Cooperation:** An MoU on space sector cooperation was signed in 2018.
5. **Connectivity Projects:** The proposed India-Middle-East-Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) project will see Oman playing an important role in India's connectivity ambitions.

### Way Forward:

**Gateway to West Asia:** India is seeking deeper engagement and collaboration in West Asia, in which Oman can play an important role. This is because Oman is an integral part of important groupings in the region: the GCC, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Arab League.

## Economic Relations between India and Sri Lanka – Bridge this deficit

**News:** The article discusses Sri Lanka's efforts to strengthen economic ties with India. It covers projects like a land bridge, connecting electricity grids, and trade agreements. Progress in these areas has been slow, but recent developments in tourism, energy, and dairy cooperation show improvement. The goal is to enhance mutual economic benefits and move beyond past challenges.

### About India-Sri Lanka economic relations:

1. India is a key export destination for Sri Lanka, ranking third after the US and UK.
2. Indian FDI in Sri Lanka reached USD 1.7 billion (2005-2019), showing strong investment ties.
3. In 2022, Indian tourists topped Sri Lanka's visitor list, emphasizing cultural and economic connections.
4. The countries are developing a multi-product petroleum pipeline, enhancing energy cooperation.
5. During Sri Lanka's unprecedented economic crisis, India provided approximately USD 4 billion in aid.
6. India has also been actively involved in supporting Sri Lanka in restructuring its debt, collaborating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other creditors.

### What efforts have been made to strengthen economic relations between India and Sri Lanka?

## 9 PM Compilation for the Month of December 2023

1. **Land Connectivity Proposal:** Sri Lanka proposed a bridge linking Rameswaram, India, and Talaimanar, Sri Lanka, an idea first suggested 20 years ago.
2. **Energy Cooperation:** there are attempts since the 1970s to link electricity networks, though progress is slow compared to India's successful power exports to Bangladesh.
3. **Recent Collaborative Initiatives:** Resumption of air services between Chennai and Jaffna, new ferry services, and a dairy sector joint venture, all aiming to bolster economic relations.

**Note:** Apart from these, both nations also signed several MoUs, including a collaboration in renewable energy, Network to Network Agreement between NPCI International Payments Limited and Lanka Pay to promote the Unified Payments Interface application in Sri Lanka. Additionally, an energy permit was granted for the Sampur Solar Power Project, which aims to produce 100 MW of power for Sri Lanka.

### What are the challenges in the India-Sri Lanka relationship?

1. **Opposition to Land Connectivity:** Proposed bridge linking Rameswaram, India, and Talaimanar, Sri Lanka, faced opposition from Sinhalese-Buddhist groups, leading to stalling of the project.
2. **Energy Project Delays:** Despite a MoU signed over 13 years ago for an electricity grid connection, there's been no progress, unlike India's successful power exports to Bangladesh.
3. **Delayed Trade Agreements:** The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement, signed in 1998, hasn't progressed significantly, with protracted negotiations on an upgraded economic and technology cooperation agreement.
4. **Lagging Trade Performance:** Despite India being the largest source of imports for Sri Lanka, accounting for 26% of total imports, the trade performance is underwhelming compared to trade with other regional countries.

### What should be done?

1. **Prioritize Energy Grid Connection:** Emulate India's success in exporting 7,000 million units of electricity to Bangladesh to expedite the India-Sri Lanka electricity grid project.
2. **Enhance Trade Agreements:** Renew efforts on the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement, taking lessons from India's \$18.14 billion trade with Bangladesh, compared to the \$5.45 billion with Sri Lanka.
3. **Utilize Tourism Potential:** Build on the fact that 17% of Sri Lanka's tourists are from India to strengthen economic relations further.

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

## GS Paper 3

### Subject: Indian Economy

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

### **An Alternate Development Model – The quest for 'happiness' in the Viksit Bharat odyssey**

**News:** The article discusses the flaws with the development model followed under 'Viksit Bharat'. It highlights an alternate developmental model that should be followed by India.

## 9 PM Compilation for the Month of December 2023

Viksit Bharat aims to make India a developed nation by 2047, the 100th year of its Independence. In achieving this goal, the focus and priorities in the choice of development planning are crucial and complex.

### What are the developmental aspects included under 'Viksit Bharat'?

1. Structural transformation; 2. Organising labour markets; 3. Increasing competitiveness; 4. Improving financial and social inclusion; 5. Governance reforms.

### What are the concerns with this model of development?

1) **Euro-centricism:** In Viksit Bharat, economic development is overemphasised. Post-developmentalists argue that this is a Euro-centric notion of development which reflects the interests of its practitioners.  
2) **Contradictions of Development:** The current model of mere economic development is highly disruptive to our social order, leading to disorders and crime. It creates imbalances and contradictions (such as rising income inequality).

### What aspects can be included to make it a more comprehensive and inclusive developmental model?

1) **'Happiness' as a goal:** Happiness ought to be a central pursuit. Materially rich nations are not essentially happy nations. This development scheme conveniently overlooks mental health and wellness. It is also crucial because India is ranked 126 out of 137 countries in the Happiness Index despite being the 5<sup>th</sup>-largest economy.

2) **Developing Social Connections:** Happiness Report 2023 highlighted the importance of social connections and relationships in contributing to happiness and well-being. According to the report, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and the Netherlands are the happiest countries due to focusing on social connections and support systems.

3) **Inclusion of Other Indices:** There is a need to include social indicators for development as GDP estimates fail to consider life's human and social aspects.

For instance, a weightage to the **Human Development Index**, which consists of life expectancy, educational attainment, and income level, could be considered.

Similarly, the World Bank has developed a **'Green Index'** that measures a nation's wealth by incorporating three components: produced assets, natural resources and human resources.

Indices such as the Global Innovation Index, Rule of Law Index, Poverty Index, Corruption Perceptions Index, Gender Equality Index, and World Press Freedom Index will be significant to give effect to the idea of a happy India.

## On the Overseas Demand for Indian Labour

**News:** The article discusses the recent developments regarding the rising demand of Indian labour and the steps taken by the government in this regard.

After focusing on **migration and mobility pacts**, the government is now increasingly eyeing agreements with developed nations to send skilled workers in the construction, farm, and manufacturing sectors.

Flurry of mobility and migration agreements signed by India in recent years

### AGREEMENTS SIGNED

France	2018
United Kingdom	2021
Germany	2022
Finland	2022
Australia	2023
Austria	2023
Italy	2023

### UNDER DISCUSSIONS

Netherland, Taiwan, South Korea, Greece, Denmark

Source : MEA

### What are the recent developments regarding the rising demand of Indian labour?

Developed countries are facing a major shortage of workers due to **rising labour costs** and **increasing inflation**. India (especially states with a history of international migration such as Haryana, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu) has stepped in to fill that demand from various countries. These include:

1. **Greece** has approached India for sending up to 10,000 seasonal agricultural workers. It is facing an acute shortage of at least 70,00 workers in Greece for domestic production of vegetables, fruit, olive oil and milk.
2. **Italy** has sought workers to staff municipal bodies in its emptying towns.
3. A labour agreement signed with **Israel** in May, to send 42,000 Indian workers may be expanded further. Israel is looking to bring in foreign workers to fill up nearly 90,000 jobs which had been held by Palestinians before the recent Gaza conflict.
4. Recently, India signed a **Migration and Mobility Partnership** with **Italy**. There are 1,57,000 NRIs in Italy, the majority of whom work in the farm and dairy sectors. A similar agreement was signed with **France** in 2018.

### What steps have been taken by the government in this regard?

1. **Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY)**: It is a skill development initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs in partnership with the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. It is aimed at training and certification of Indian workforce keen on overseas employment, in line with international standards.
2. **Skill India International Centres (SIICS)**: Govt had announced setting up of **30 SIICS** in the 2023-24 Budget. They aim to provide destination-based skilling, re-skilling, immigration assistance and post placement support. They provide both domain skills training on international standards and pre-departure orientation training (PDOT) to candidates.
3. **Labour Agreements**: India has signed **17 agreements** with various countries between 2015 and 2023 to facilitate movement of labour.

### How can India gain from sending labour overseas?

1. **Opportunities**: India is a labour-surplus country and has been exporting workers around the world through both formal and informal channels over the years.
2. **Experience**: Although there could be concern that labour migrating abroad could create shortages in India, most of the labour demand for now seems temporary in nature, which means people will come back with international experience.



3. **Incomes:** Since wages in developed countries are much higher, they are also likely to return with savings, which can be used to build real assets in India. Given the vast pool of surplus labour, it is unlikely to create shortages in India.

### Why is sending Indian labour overseas not enough?

It is important to recognise that this will not solve the unemployment or under-employment problem India is facing and should not be seen as an answer to the Indian economy's inability to create enough well-paid jobs. According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, over **57% of the workforce was self-employed**. This is not an indication of entrepreneurship, but people engaged in some economic activity to sustain themselves because not doing anything is not an option.

Over **18%** of the labour force was engaged as **helpers in household enterprises**, while more than **21%** identified themselves as **casual workers**.

Thus, India needs to create gainful employment for its rising workforce.

### What should be done?

Since the government is actively pursuing this route, there are at least two important things that must be kept in mind.

1. **First**, the kind of workforce being discussed here is not particularly highly educated and savvy. It is, therefore, important that people are shortlisted transparently with trusted third-party involvement, if necessary.
2. **Second**, as the number of Indian workers goes up in various countries over time, India should consider increasing its diplomatic presence to ensure difficulties faced by Indians are swiftly addressed.

## On Private Investment – Crowd-in must not start crowding investors out

**News:** The article discusses the optimistic indicators in Indian economy which signal a future increase in private investment in the economy.

In June 2023, India's credit-to-GDP gap has turned positive for the first time in a decade, according to **Bank for International Settlements**. This has led to optimism regarding the economy's trajectory ahead.

### What is Credit-to-GDP Gap?

The **Credit-to-GDP gap** compares the current level of credit (the amount of money lent by financial institutions) to the GDP.

This gap helps identify periods when the pace of credit expansion is unusually high relative to the growth of the economy. A high credit-to-GDP gap may indicate a credit boom, potentially signaling increased risk of financial instability or a future economic downturn. Conversely, a negative or low credit-to-GDP gap might suggest limited credit availability, which could constrain economic growth. While the credit-to-GDP gap is a contentious figure to assess the state of an economy, it is often used along with other data as an early warning indicator of a banking crisis.

### What are some other positive indicators in the economy?

1. **Healthy State of Banks:** Banks are broadly in better shape than a decade ago, with bad loans as a chunk of bank assets having fallen to low single-digit rates. Lending norms have been tightened and the risk of debts going bad appears to pose no systemic threat at this point.



2. **Credit Growth:** The rate of credit growth has reached mid-teen levels.
3. **Increased Capacity Utilization in Manufacturing:** It has crossed 75% (the percentage of potential output levels that is being achieved), which suggests business borrowings are increasing as expansion plans are dusted off for action.
4. **Consumer Spending:** The post-pandemic recovery in consumer demand has been uneven, but markets for many products and services have logged record sales and even the laggards have begun to look up.
5. **Increasing capex by the Government:** India's post-covid economic growth has been boosted by heavy capital expenditure by the Centre.
6. **Crowd-in effect of Government Capex:** A major thrust behind government's capex push was to crowd-in private investment, which is crucial for gross capital formation. To this extent, the author has found that government capex has finally begun to **crowd-in private investment (increased government spending leading to increased private investment)**.

### What requires to be done?

The increase in government capex has resulted in an enlarged **fiscal deficit**. With crowding in of private investment, it's time for a sharp fiscal pullback, sharper than outlined by India's official glide path to 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26. The economy has emerged from its COVID crater and grown faster than expected, but a big fiscal deficit for too long risks crowding out private players.

### Issues related to Credit Ratings – CEA's concerns apart, India needs better data

**News:** India has experienced substantial economic growth in recent years. However, credit rating agencies (CRAs) have not correspondingly raised its sovereign credit rating.

### How have various credit rating agencies (CRAs) rated India's sovereign credit?

- 1) **S&P Global and Fitch:** They both raised India's sovereign credit rating to BBB, marking the lowest investment grade.
- 2) **Moody's:** It initially upgraded India from the lowest investment grade (Baa3) to the next level (Baa2) in November 2017 but later reversed this upgrade to Baa3 in June 2020. India receiving such ratings despite being the fifth largest economy raises concerns regarding the **opaque methodologies used by CRAs**.

### What concerns exist regarding the methodologies employed by CRAs?

1. **Focus on Subjective Factors:** CRAs rely too heavily on subjective qualitative factors like good governance and democracy while neglecting objective measures of a country's ability and willingness to repay debt.
2. **Concerns with Governance Indicators:** Governance indicators used by CRAs explain only 68% of India's rating. This is because a country's macroeconomic fundamentals, like GDP growth, inflation, and debt levels, are ultimately the key determinants of its ability to pay debt.

Hence, even if India improves its economic fundamentals, it might not affect its credit rating significantly due to the **heavy reliance of CRAs on subjective factor like "governance indicators"**.

**Read More:** [India's Sovereign Ratings don't reflect its fundamentals](#)

### What should be the way forward for India?

1. **Fiscal Consolidation:** India needs to reduce the government debt-to-GDP ratio, currently at 82%, to levels seen in 2006 (77.2%) and 2010 (66.4%).
2. **Data Quality:** There are absence of Census or household consumer expenditure survey results post-2011-12. Hence, India needs to improve its data accuracy and transparency by conducting required surveys.

### IMF's annual report on India's Economy

**News:** The article discusses the IMF's annual report on India's economy, highlighting its currency stability and government debt. The IMF changed India's currency regime classification and advised fiscal consolidation to manage debt risks, while India defends its economic policies and stability.

#### What is the IMF's observation on India's currency and government debt?

##### 1. Observation on India's currency:

**IMF Observation:** The IMF observed the Indian rupee's stability against the dollar, noting a narrow fluctuation range between 81.04 and 83.29 per US dollar (a 2.8% band), compared to the Euro-dollar rate band of 7.3%. Consequently, it reclassified India's exchange rate from "floating" to a "stabilized arrangement" for the period between December 2022 and October 2023.

**India's Response:** India, particularly the Reserve Bank of India, asserts the rupee is market-determined with interventions only for excessive volatility, contesting the IMF's short-term view.

##### 2. Observation on Government Debt:

**IMF's Warning:** The IMF warns that if past economic shocks recur, debt could exceed 100% of GDP in the medium term. It also warns that long-term risks are high because considerable investment is required to meet India's climate change mitigation targets.

**India's Position:** India counters, India argues that the sovereign debt risk is low since it's predominantly in domestic currency, b) Despite various economic shocks, India maintains that its general government debt level has been relatively stable, barely increasing from 81% in 2005-06 to around 81% in 2022-23, c) India suggests that the IMF's assessment might be overlooking the broader historical stability and resilience of India's debt management.

For more information on **IMF's annual report on India's Economy**, [read here](#).

#### Why did the Indian currency decline narrowly between December 2022 and October 2023?

##### Internal Factors:

1. **Trade Deficit improved:** India's trade deficit averaged \$20 billion a month during the period, a slight improvement from the previous year's \$22.1 billion.
2. **Current Account Deficit:** The current account deficit was \$27.3 billion, nearly half of the previous year's \$53.5 billion.
3. **Foreign Investment:** Net foreign investment increased to \$30.7 billion, despite a decrease in FDI (by almost \$22 billion), offset by a surge in FPI.
4. **Forex Reserves:** Forex reserves modestly rose from \$563 billion to \$586 billion, indicating improved currency health.

##### External Factors:

## 9 PM Compilation for the Month of December 2023

1. **Global Dollar Strength:** The relentless increase in the US Federal Reserve's policy funds rate strengthened the dollar, impacting other currencies including the Rupee.
2. **Rupee Volatility vs. Dollar:** Rupee's movement was narrower (2.8%) compared to other major currencies like the Euro (7.3%), indicating active central bank management to stabilize it amidst global volatility.

### Findings in the RBI bulletin on Inflation

**News:** The article discusses the December bulletin from the Reserve Bank of India, focusing on how India's inflation is affected by supply and demand. It explains that during COVID-19, supply issues caused inflation, but after the Russia-Ukraine conflict, demand factors became more significant,

**What is inflation?**

[Read here.](#)

**What are different types of inflation?**

[Read here.](#)

**What are the major findings in the RBI December bulletin on Inflation?**

1. **Data Analysis:** Using the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's data, the bulletin categorizes inflation based on price and quantity shifts. If both rise, it's demand-driven; if they move oppositely, it's supply-driven.
2. **Cause of supply driven inflation:** a) **COVID-19 Restrictions-** Lockdowns caused production declines, leading to supply shortages, b) **Excess Rainfall (2019-2020)-** Resulted in supply disruptions, especially for agricultural products, c) **Global Events:** The **onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict** in 2022 exacerbated supply chain issues, impacting global commodity prices.
3. **Cause of demand driven inflation:** a) **Post-Lockdown Recovery-** As COVID-19 restrictions lifted, there was a release of pent-up demand, outpacing supply recovery. b) **Vaccine Distribution-** Accelerated reopening of the economy, boosting consumer demand rapidly, c) **Russia-Ukraine Conflict- Post-conflict,** demand-side factors became more prominent, impacting prices.
4. **Overall Inflation Trends:** From January 2019 to May 2023, supply factors contributed to about 55% of CPI headline inflation. In contrast, demand factors dropped to 27.1% in 2020 from 41.5% in 2019 but rose again post-COVID-19 and during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
5. **Specific Categories:** (from January 2019 to May 2023):  
**Supply Constraints item:** Vegetables, oils, fats, milk, eggs, pulses, sugar.  
**Demand Influences item:** Non-alcoholic beverages, personal care, health related goods.

### Evergreening of Loans in India

**News:** This article discusses the **issue of "evergreening" loans in India**, where banks give new loans to prevent defaults on existing ones. It highlights the Reserve Bank of India's concerns and actions against such practices, emphasizing the risks to the banking system and the need for regulatory vigilance.

**What is Evergreening of Loans?**

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### What are the RBI's findings on the practice of evergreening loans in India?

1. **Banks' Innovative Methods:** Banks were found using creative ways to hide stressed loans, like, a) sale and buyback arrangements between two banks to reset the history of a stressed loan, b) Banks were extending loans to entities related to already stressed borrowers, using this to hide the actual stressed nature of the original loans.
2. **Use of Alternate Investment Funds (AIF):** Banks invested in AIFs, which then bailed out stressed entities, indirectly continuing the cycle of evergreening. **Note:** Alternate Investment Funds (AIF) in India are investment vehicles that pool funds to invest in non-traditional assets like real estate, hedge funds, and derivatives. They are lightly regulated by the Securities and Exchanges Board of India (Sebi) and are typically subscribed to by high-net-worth individuals or entities, aware of the associated risks.
3. **Use of Commercial Paper (CP):** Mutual funds heavily invested in CPs issued by banks, which offered higher returns than government securities. Banks then used CP proceeds for short-term funding, contributing to indirect evergreening.
4. **Rapid Growth of unsecured loan:** Non-Bank Finance Companies (NBFCs) unsecured loan assets grew by 51% up to 2022-23, raising concerns about under-reported stressed loans.

### What are the implications of evergreening loans in India?

1. **Misrepresentation of Loan Quality:** Banks using evergreening tactics distort the actual health of their loan portfolios.
2. **Governance and Audit Failures:** Such practices indicate lapses in the governance and audit mechanisms within banks.
3. **Round-Tripping :** The practice of mutual funds investing in commercial papers and returning funds to banks , this will lead to a) increases the correlation between bank and mutual fund performances, **escalating market concentration risk**, b) If banks face liquidity issues, mutual funds might be unable to redeem commercial papers, possibly **triggering a liquidity crisis**, c) Evergreening through such round-tripping **hides the true credit risk**, as commercial papers might be underpriced compared to the actual borrowing cost.
4. **Regulatory Challenges:** Continual adaptation of evergreening methods poses significant challenges for regulators like RBI to ensure financial stability.

### Way forward:

To tackle evergreening in India, it's vital that regulatory bodies like the RBI and SEBI increase their oversight and seal regulatory gaps. Improving transparency in loan reporting, especially in fast-growing areas like non-bank financial companies, is key. Moreover, reinforcing governance and audit processes in banks and dealing with the complexities of cross-regulatory financial instruments is crucial to uphold the financial system's integrity and stability.

### Terminology used:

**Commercial Paper (CP):** It is an unsecured money market instrument issued in the form of a promissory note (legal instrument). It was introduced in India in 1990 with a view to enabling highly rated corporate borrowers/ to diversify their sources of short-term borrowings and to provide an additional instrument to investors.



## On the Benefits of Cryptocurrency for India

**News:** The status of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies is evolving, as they edge closer to mainstream acceptance in the global financial system. Therefore, there is a need for regulatory clarity in India regarding cryptocurrencies.

Cryptocurrencies are gradually becoming a “mainstream alternative financial asset”.

### What is Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework?

**Released by:** Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

**Objectives:** To enhance transparency in the global financial system, combat tax evasion, and ensure tax compliance related to crypto assets.

It was designed to establish a standardized framework for the reporting and exchange of information related to financial transactions involving cryptocurrencies and other digital assets.

### What are the developments concerning cryptocurrencies?

- 1) El Salvador launched a Bitcoin "volcano" bond.
- 2) An approval of a Bitcoin ETF by BlackRock in the United States is pending.
- 3) Nasdaq has listed several companies focused on crypto mining.

### What are the significances of cryptocurrencies?

1. **Digital gold:** Due to their performance, Investors have stated seeing cryptos as “digital gold” which provides a hedge against inflation.
2. **Remittances:** Cross-currency remittances done via cryptos are substantially cheap compared to conventional bank transfers. Remittances to India are roughly \$100 billion per annum.
3. **Loss for freelancers:** Indian freelancers working in crypto and blockchain start-ups are often offered payments in cryptos.
4. **Loss of new business opportunities:** The Indian citizens interested in Crypto mining, thriving gaming and non-fungible token (NFT) ecosystems, are discouraged due to uncertainty in the Crypto regulations space.

### What is its present status in India?

1. **First,** under the **Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework**, Overseas transactions in cryptocurrencies by Indian citizens will be reported to Indian tax authorities. However, it is not clear, how Indian citizens can use cryptocurrencies.
2. **Second,** Regulations have resulted in imposition of a very high tax on trading in these assets.
3. **Third,** there is no clarity on whether cryptocurrencies can be used for cross-currency remittances, or as alternatives to the rupee in buying goods and services.
4. **Fourth,** therefore, India to establish clear rules and guidelines on the use and taxation of cryptocurrencies to keep pace with global trends and safeguard interests of developers, entrepreneurs, and investors.



## 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.
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.
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)



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?

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.

### India's informal sector

**News:** The article discusses the procedure for calculating the contribution of the informal sector to the GDP. It cites the PLFS Data to argue that the contribution of the informal sector in the economy is not declining.

Some experts have highlighted that since a GDP base revision (updating the reference year used for calculating and comparing the country's economic output) is long overdue, the recently released second-quarter GDP estimates are unreliable. It is argued that as they do not adequately capture the informal sector, the GDP estimates are also consequently over-estimated.

#### Why do experts think it is?

The argument being given for the above is that the country's informal sector, after both demonetization and COVID, has seen a large decline in its ability to contribute to economic value addition. But since GDP calculation estimates the contribution of the informal sector **indirectly** (by measurements drawn from the formal sector), the size and contribution of the sector is overstated.

#### What are the flaws in the argument?

**1. Informal Sector assessment not completely indirect:** The assessment of the informal sector's contribution to the GDP is not entirely indirect.

For instance, agriculture (which is almost 40% of informal sector GVA) is assessed through direct estimates of production. The construction sector, which is the second major component of this sector, is also assessed through the production of key inputs like cement, steel, etc.

**2. Growth in value-added due to trade** is inferred from **data on tax collections**.

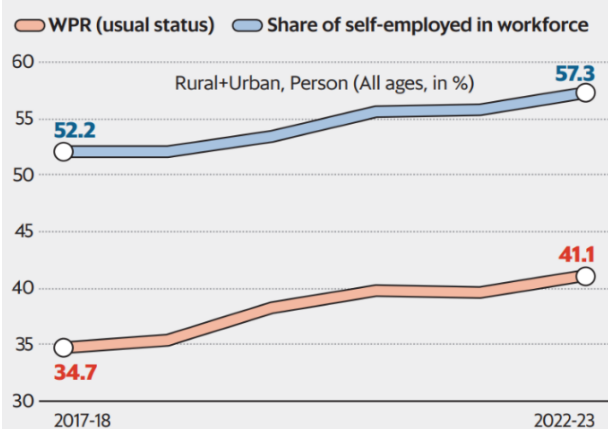
Thus, these significant components of informal sector activity are calculated from data elements that are performing well.

#### What does the PLFS data reveal about the status of the informal sector?

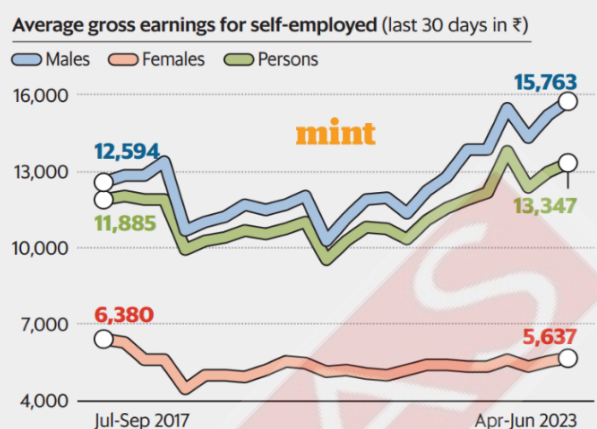


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Millions more have joined the Indian workforce since 2017-18, according to PLFS data, even as the self-employed have not only expanded their share of it, but also seen their earnings grow.



Note: WPR refers to the worker population ratio.



Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey annual reports

Source: LiveMint.

- Rise in Worker Population Ratio (WPR):** Between 2017-18 and 2022-23, the Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for all ages (rural+urban) rose significantly from 34.7% to 41.1%. This rise, combined with the rise in India's population over the same period implies a substantial increase in the number of informal enterprises. Thus, in size terms, the informal sector has not declined.
- Rise in the Share of Self-Employed:** It has also increased from 52.2% to 57.3%.
- Rise in Gross Earnings:** PLFS data also reveals that average gross earnings for self-employed people shows that the growth in earnings post July 2020 is almost 6.5% per year.

Initially we witness a stagnation in earnings as a consequence of GST implementation and COVID-lockdowns. Subsequently, there has been a revival which can be explained by the momentum gained in financial inclusion and credit outreach aimed at the informal sector.

Thus, there does not appear to be a case that the contribution of the informal sector has declined.

### India's Economic Growth – Calibrating a strategy for India's future growth

**News:** The article discusses India's economic growth. It mentions different growth predictions from the RBI, IMF, and World Bank. It talks about challenges like global conflicts, supply chain issues, and the need for India to focus on domestic growth and savings. It also covers employment trends, climate commitments, and fiscal responsibility.

#### What are India's Growth Projections?

The Reserve Bank of India predicts a 7% growth rate for 2023-24.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank estimate it at 6.3% for 2023-24.

Working age population growth in India will decrease from 1.2% in 2023-24 to 0% by 2048-49.

According to United Nations population projections, the peak of India's working age population is projected at 68.9% in 2030, with a low dependency ratio of 31.2%.

#### What are the factors affecting India's Growth?



### Positive Factors Affecting India's Growth:

1. **Robust Early Growth:** In 2023-24, India experienced strong growth rates of 7.8% and 7.6% in the first two quarters.
2. **High Investment Rate with Potential for Increase:** The nominal investment rate was 29.2% of GDP in 2022-23. Adjusting for the deflator of capital goods, the real investment rate stands at about 33%. To reach a 7% growth target, this rate needs to increase to 35% of GDP.
3. **Improving Employment:** according to a preorder labor force survey, the worker population ratio increased to 51.8% in 2022-23 from 44.1% in 2017-18.

**Note: Worker Population Ratio:** The number of employed persons in the population above 15 years of age

### Negative Factors Affecting India's Growth:

1. **Global Tensions and Supply Chain Disruptions:** Conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars have led to sanctions, supply chain disruptions, and settlement issues due to restrictions on systems like SWIFT.
2. **Decline in Household Savings:** The decrease in household savings to 5.1% of GDP in 2022-23, from 7.8% pre-COVID, limits the availability of domestic funds for investment, which is crucial for economic growth.
3. **Fiscal Responsibility Challenges:** Struggling to meet fiscal deficit targets of 6% of GDP affects India's economic stability and investor confidence. This could potentially lead to higher borrowing costs and reduced public investment.
3. **Climate Change Initiatives Impacting Growth:** India has commitments to reduce carbon emissions, like achieving net zero emissions by 2070 and reducing total carbon emissions by one billion tons between 2021 to 2030. It needs a shift to climate-friendly technologies. These changes may slow growth rates initially.

### What should be done?

1. **Adjust Export Strategies:** With exports peaking at 25% of GDP in 2013-14 and dropping to 22.8% in 2022-23, India must evolve from its previous export-led growth strategy to a more diversified approach.
2. **Boost Employment through Skill Development:** With a working-age population peak projected at 68.9% in 2030, prioritizing training and skill development is essential for harnessing this demographic advantage.
3. **Emphasizing Service Sector and Climate-Friendly Technologies:** To offset the potential reduction in growth from climate-promoting technologies, focusing on the service sector. Which is more climate-friendly.
4. **Maintain Fiscal Discipline:** Aiming to reduce combined fiscal deficit and debt to GDP ratios to 6% and 60%, respectively, will help in economic stability.
5. **Prepare for Medium-Term Challenges:** Addressing issues like the decline in household savings and adapting to technological advancements.

**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%.

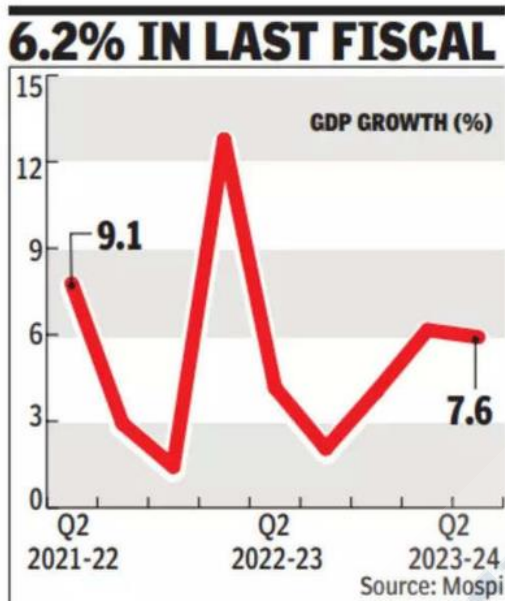


Figure 4 Source: TOI.

**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.**



Figure 5 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.

## Topic: Infrastructure: Energy

### On Renewable Energy Storage

**News:** The article discusses India's plans to increase renewable energy use by investing in energy storage technologies like batteries and pumped storage. It mentions government incentives, future goals for storage capacity, and the importance of new technologies and policies to support this growth.

#### What is the current status of renewable energy storage?

1. **Renewables Growth:** 83% of the world's power capacity added in 2022 was renewable, primarily wind and solar.
2. **Energy Storage Expansion:** Energy storage is **growing at 23% annually**, crucial for managing renewable variability.
3. **India's Position:** India, with a significant renewable capacity, is projected to be the third largest by 2030 but fifth in energy storage installations.
4. **Future Goals:** India targets 500 GW renewable capacity by 2030. By 2047, the Central Electricity Authority estimates a **need for 320 GW of energy storage**, including 90 GW of PSP (pumped storage projects) and 230 GW of BESS (Battery Energy Storage Systems) to meet rising renewable energy use and 2070 net zero targets.
5. **Storage Needs:** A requirement of 60 GW of energy storage by 2030 is projected, with current visibility around 30 GW.

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

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

#### What are the challenges of renewable energy storage?

1. **High Capital Costs:** Initial investments for technologies like BESS are high, with costs anticipated to be ₹2.20-2.40 crore per MWh in 2023-26.
2. **Material Availability:** Lithium, crucial for batteries, poses supply and volatility challenges; alternatives like sodium are being explored.
3. **Infrastructure Needs:** Implementing large-scale storage requires infrastructure upgrades and policy support. Some storage technologies, especially newer ones like green hydrogen, are in early development stages.

#### What are the solutions for renewable energy storage?

1. **Exploring Alternatives:** Consideration of sodium-ion batteries as a potential alternative to lithium-ion, given sodium's abundance.

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2. **Integrated Tenders:** Promoting integrated solutions combining solar, wind, and storage to optimize costs and efficiency, as seen in tariffs ranging from ₹3-7/kWh.

### What initiatives have been taken by the Indian government?

#### A. Ministry of Power:

1. Announced the National Framework for Promoting Energy Storage Systems, detailing procedures and incentives for different sub-sectors of ESS. This includes-Generation, Transmission, Distribution, Standalone ESS Operating Independently as Merchant Units, and Storage for Ancillary and Balancing Services.
2. Approved a ₹3,760 crore viability gap fund for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

#### B. Ministry of Environment:

1. At COP28, emphasized the need for viable storage and abatement technologies before committing to phasing out fossil fuels.

#### C. Ministry of New and Renewable Energy:

1. Set a target of 500 GW renewable energy capacity by 2030.
2. Launched a ₹18,000 crore Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for advanced cell chemistry battery manufacturing to boost domestic and foreign investment.

**D. Lithium Reserves Discovery:** Identified significant lithium reserves in Jammu & Kashmir and Rajasthan to support battery manufacturing.

### Way forward:

India should continue to expand its renewable capacity, invest in diverse storage technologies, and implement supportive policies. Leveraging the ₹18,000 crore PLI scheme and enhancing infrastructure for BESS and PSP are crucial. Addressing regulatory challenges and tapping into newly discovered lithium reserves will also be vital to sustainably meet the 2030 and 2047 energy goals.

## On Nuclear Energy – Climate-friendly power strategy

**News:** The article discusses the utility of Nuclear Energy as a viable alternative to non-renewable as well as renewable energy sources. It highlights the flaws in the arguments put forward against the adoption of nuclear energy in India.

A detailed article on **UNFCCC COP28** can be [read here](#).

With a call to phase down coal power sooner than later, along with the issues of intermittency and low power supply from renewable energy sources like Wind and Solar, there is a need to explore an alternative carbon-free power supply. According to the author, the inclusion of nuclear power development can be an important part of the carbon mitigation strategy.

For information on the **Challenges of reducing emissions**, [read here](#).

### Recent Developments:

In the UNFCCC COP28, a commitment by 21 countries for a 3-fold increase in nuclear power by 2050 was announced under the leadership of USA.

India had already announced its plan to nearly triple its nuclear capacity by 2030.

With power demand in India expected to rise to around 6 trillion units (from the current 1.5 trillion units) by 2050, India should explore the nuclear energy option.

### What are the changes that could fasten the creation of nuclear capacity in India?

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1. **Nuclear accord negotiated by India** (for instance, the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal) has opened opportunities for greater engagement with foreign nuclear technology suppliers.
2. **Partnership between the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC)**, which can bring in the better capacity of NTPC for timely project implementation.
3. **Growing interest in small modular reactors (SMR)**, which are small reactors (30-300 megawatt), pre-made in factories and assembled on site. NTPC has plans of retro-fitting SMRS into decommissioned coal plants. It has set a target of 20 to 30 gigawatts of nuclear capacity by 2040.

### What are the arguments given against the viability of nuclear power?

1. High cost of nuclear energy.
2. Challenge of nuclear power waste disposal.
3. High safety risks of nuclear power plants.

### What are the flaws in these arguments?

1. **Cost issue:** One of the cheapest sources of energy being produced in India today is by the 1964 commissioned Tarapur nuclear power plant (Rs. 0.92/unit). The prices from the recently established Kudankulam unit is also competitive (~3-4 per unit).
2. **Waste issue:** The quantity of waste from nuclear power plants is much smaller in India due to the adoption of the closed fuel cycle where the plutonium from the first-stage reactor waste is used in the second-stage fast breeder reactors, and the waste from this will fuel a third stage based on thorium.  
Read about **India's 3-Stage Nuclear Programme** [here](#).
3. **Safety issue:** In India, the heavy-water reactors that are part of the three-stage strategy are safer. Moreover, the design of the plants includes redundancies which reduce the safety risks. A detailed article on **Nuclear Energy** can be [read here](#) and [here](#).

India ought to prioritize the advancement of nuclear power within its climate change agenda to the same extent as its focus on renewable energy.

## On Ethanol Blending - Food versus Fuel

**News:** The Indian government directed mills not to use sugarcane juice/syrup for ethanol production. This is to increase domestic sugar availability.

### Why has the government directed not to use sugar cane juice for making ethanol?

1. **Reduced Sugar Stocks:** The decision comes in the context of low sugar stocks at the end of the 2022-23 sugar year, which stood at just over 57 lakh tonnes. This is the lowest since 2016-17 and significantly below the record 143.3 lakh tonnes in 2018-19.
2. **Uncertainty Over production:** This year's sugar production is estimated by the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories at 291.50 lakh tonnes. This marks a decrease from 330.9 lakh tonnes in 2022-23 and 359.25 lakh tonnes in 2021-22.
3. **Food Over Fuel Policy:** The government is prioritizing sugar for consumption over its use for producing ethanol, a fuel additive.

### What is the impact of this decision?



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1. **Challenges for Ethanol Producers:** Companies set up for producing ethanol from cane juice/syrup, like Balrampur Chini Mills and Shree Renuka Sugars, could face issues due to this change. For example, it could affect the supply of around 135 crore litres of ethanol, previously expected from sugarcane juice/syrup for 2023-24.
2. **Potential Shift to Other Feedstocks:** There could be a shift toward using alternative feedstocks such as rice, broken/damaged food grains, and maize, which yield higher ethanol quantities (380-480 liters per tonne), potentially impacting industry dynamics.
3. **Stabilize rising Sugar Prices:** This decision is expected to bring about 15 lakh tonnes more sugar into the market. The influx of this additional sugar will not only increase its physical availability but also help stabilize rising sugar prices.

What is ethanol? [Read here.](#)

Terminology used:

**EBP programme:** The Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) in India, launched in 2003 by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, aims to blend ethanol with petrol. This initiative is designed to reduce pollution, conserve foreign exchange, and provide benefits to farmers by enhancing the value in the sugar industry. The implementation of this programme is being carried out through Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).

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

#### On Make in India – There is no substitute for an industrial policy

**News:** The article discusses the Make in India initiative, contrasting it with past self-sufficiency policies. It explores the campaign's focus on manufacturing and global competitiveness, concerns about protectionism, and the need for policies that support job creation.

What is Make in India (MII)?

[Read here.](#)

How is it different from past policy?

1. **Beyond Import Substitution:** MII diverges from the past policy of self-sufficiency and import-substituting industrialization. It's **geared towards making India a global manufacturing hub**, unlike the 1970s approach that led to inefficiencies and market distortions.
2. **Not a Protectionist Policy:** While MII is implementing some protective measures like raising tariffs, it's not intended to be as pervasive or damaging as past policies. For example, a mobile phone made in India typically has 80-85% imported content, indicating the importance of keeping trade somewhat open.
3. **Job Creation and Economic Growth:** The National Manufacturing Policy (NMP, 2011) targeted raising manufacturing's GDP contribution to 25% and creating 100 million additional jobs. MII aims to further these goals with a more outward-looking, competitive approach.
4. **PLI Schemes for Modernization:** The PLI scheme under MII aims to enhance manufacturing efficiency and global competitiveness in specific sectors, contrasting with the broad-brush protectionism of earlier times.

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

### What are the concerns related to MII?

1. **Rising Protectionism:** There's concern that MII could lead to increased tariff duties, reminiscent of past protectionist policies, potentially hindering the competitive edge and increasing costs.
2. **Legacy of Past Policies:** Fears persist that MII might unintentionally bring back elements of the License Raj era, characterized by shortages, black markets, and rampant rent-seeking, despite its fundamentally different approach.
3. **MII cannot be a substitute for an Industrial Policy:** Industrial policy over and above MII is needed to address the issue of jobless growth. Mass job creation remains the need of the hour, given the large working population.

### What should be done?

1. **Balance Protectionism and Open Markets:** While protecting nascent industries, India should avoid excessive tariffs that hinder competitiveness, focusing instead on strategic, sector-specific support.
2. **Enhance Labor-Intensive Manufacturing:** Given the emphasis on job creation, policies should focus more on labor-intensive manufacturing to provide employment, especially for women.
3. **Ensure Data-Driven Policymaking:** Frequent and reliable data collection is crucial for informed policymaking, avoiding the "shooting darts blindfolded" scenario and enabling responsive and effective strategies.

## Terms of Trade (ToT) for Indian agriculture – How ToT have moved for agriculture

**News:** The article explains the changes in the Terms of Trade for Indian agriculture, highlighting the evolving price relationship between farm and non-farm goods. It also discusses the varying impacts on farmers and agricultural workers, leading to economic and social consequences.

### What is meant by Terms of Trade (ToT)?

Terms of Trade (ToT) in simple terms refers to the **ratio of the prices at which a country sells its exports to the prices at which it buys its imports**. In an economic context, TOT refer to the relationship between how much money a country pays for its imports and how much it earns from exports. It is expressed as a ratio of import prices to export prices.

**For agriculture,** ToT compare the price farmers get for their agricultural products (like wheat, rice) against the prices of the goods and services they need to pay (like for machinery, fertilizers).

**For farmers and agricultural laborers,** Terms of Trade measure how much they are earning from their crops and labor, when compared against the costs of essential items like food and tools.

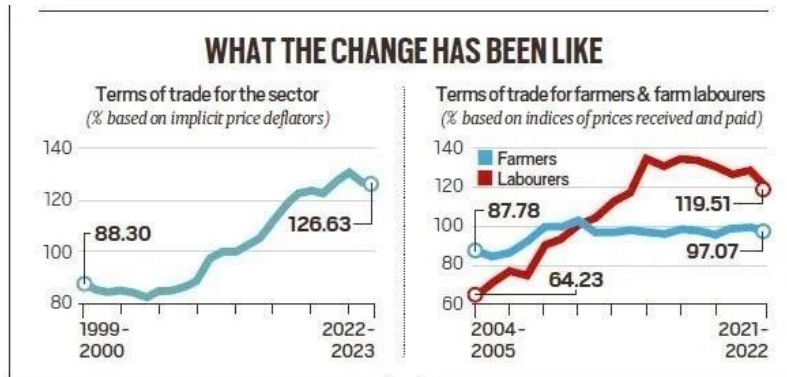
This metric reflects whether they are making more money from their work than they spend on daily needs. Favorable Terms of Trade occur when these earnings surpass their expenses.

### What is the significance of ToT?

1. **Economic Indicator:** ToT shows a country's economic strength. Better ToT means earning more from exports than spending on imports, leading to a stronger economy.
2. **Living Standards:** For individuals, especially in sectors like agriculture, favorable ToT can mean higher income from their produce, which can improve their living standards. Conversely, unfavorable ToT can lead to reduced income and lower standards of living.

- Income Distribution:** In the agricultural context, ToT affects income distribution within the economy. If farmers are getting better prices for their products, it can lead to a more equitable distribution of income, benefiting rural communities.

### How does ToT affect farmers and farm workers?



**Overall Trend:** While there has been an improvement in ToT for the farm sector, the gains have been more pronounced for agricultural laborers than for farmers. The last few years have seen a stagnation or decline for both groups.

### What are the social and economic implications of ToT?

#### 1. Impact on Marginalized

- Communities:** The rise in ToT benefited agricultural laborers, primarily from Dalit, Adivasi, and Most Backward Classes, historically at the socioeconomic bottom.
- Economic Growth and Labor Opportunities:** Growth in the wider economy around 2003-04 opened up non-agricultural jobs, particularly in construction and urban services, impacting labor availability in agriculture.
  - Tightening of labor markets:** Initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and public distribution systems contributed to the tightening of labor markets and improvement in laborers' wages and ToT.
  - Challenges for Farmers:** Farmers have been under **financial pressure due to rising labor and input costs**. Despite government support through subsidies and MSP, their Terms of Trade (ToT) have not shown significant improvement, remaining largely stagnant. This increased demands from agrarian communities like Marathas, Jats, and Patidars for government job reservations and educational benefits.

## Subject: Agriculture

### Topic: Marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints

#### Policy Inconsistency in Agriculture Sector – Avoid sending out mixed signals on farm reforms

**News:** The article discusses the Indian government's inconsistent policies on agriculture, like changing rules for sugarcane ethanol and banning exports. It suggests the need for more market freedom in farming, less government control, and better planning and consultation for farm reforms.

### What are the concerns related to government inconsistency in agriculture policy?

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1. **Create uncertainty:** The government's rapid changes, like the ban and subsequent lifting of the ban on sugarcane for ethanol production, create uncertainty in the agricultural sector.
2. **Impact on Farmers and Industry:** Sugar and distillery businesses faced potential losses due to the sudden ban, given their investments in cane-derived ethanol, aligned with India's biofuel goals.
3. **Market Disruption:** These policy changes interfere with natural market forces of demand and supply, potentially leading to unforeseen economic consequences.
4. **Political Influence on Decisions:** With national elections approaching, policies seem driven more by political considerations, like controlling inflation, rather than sustainable agricultural practices.
5. **Contradiction with Reform Goals:** The government's actions contradict its earlier attempts to liberalize the farm sector, as seen in the 2020 farm laws aimed at reducing state control.

### What should be done?

1. **Stakeholder Consultation:** Engage with farmers and industry players before implementing policies, learning from the backlash against the 2020 farm laws.
2. **Market Freedom Emphasis:** Shift towards market-driven agriculture, allowing farms to respond to real demand and supply, as opposed to heavy state control.
3. **Balanced Approach to Inflation:** While controlling inflation is important, it shouldn't lead to abrupt policy shifts that disrupt the market, as seen with export bans and import duty changes.
4. **Parliamentary Discussion and Transparency:** Encourage open discussions in Parliament on agricultural reforms for informed decision-making and consensus building.

## Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

### On the PM-Kisan Scheme – Not the way forward

**News:** The article discusses the significant features of the PM-Kisan scheme. It suggests the reforms that can be undertaken in the scheme to make it better for Indian farmers.

The Government is undertaking a drive to increase the total number of farmer-beneficiaries under the [Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi \(PM-Kisan\)](#), from the current 8.12 crore to about 8.75 crore.

### What are the significant features of the PM-Kisan scheme?

PM-Kisan's is a **direct income support (DIS) programme**. Its significant features include:

1. **Not dependent on Crops Grown:** This payment is irrespective of which crops she grows in whatever quantities and sells to whomsoever at any price.
2. **Not dependent on the Inputs Used:** The payment is also indifferent to inputs used, whether chemical fertilisers and insecticides or organic manure and biological control of pests and diseases.

Thus, it's a **subsidy that is not market-distorting or encouraging chemicals-based agriculture** (as against natural farming).

### What are some changes that can be made?

Within the overall framework of PM-Kisan, certain refinements can be made:



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- 1) **Income Support on a Per-Acre Basis:** For instance, Telangana government's Rythu Bandhu scheme provides farmers up to Rs 12,000 per acre per year.
- 2) **Upper Limits on the Per-Acre Payment:** The payment under PM-Kisan can be made on a per-acre basis **up to a limit of, say, 10 acres**. This would address concerns over large landowning farmers getting a higher amount compared to poor farmers with less land.
- 3) **Additional Payment by State governments:** State governments can top up the amount under PM-Kisan with an equivalent income support (as a per-acre transfer).

### Where will the provisioned money come from?

According to the author, the money for moving from per-farmer to per-acre payments can come from the following sources:

- 1) **Savings from ending all market-distorting subsidies:** This includes subsidies on farm **inputs** (fertiliser, electricity and water) or **output** (procurement of grain at MSP beyond necessary stocking requirements). The savings can be redirected towards PM-Kisan. For e.g. the Centre's fertiliser subsidy (around Rs 1,75,100 crore), if distributed among the 8.75 crore beneficiaries, would work out to over Rs 20,000 per farmer.
- 2) **Additional savings from similar inefficient and environmentally-disastrous subsidies by states.**

For more information regarding **Issues with Farm Subsidies in India**, [read here](#).

## 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 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 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.
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

#### On gene therapy - Game-changer

**News:** Recently, the UK drug regulator and the U.S. FDA approved the gene therapies Casgevy and Lyfgenia for treating sickle cell disease in patients over 12 years.

This marks a significant advancement in gene therapy using the CRISPR-Cas9 tool for diseases traditionally treated through bone marrow transplantation.

Read more about the technology [here](#).

#### What are the advantages of Using CRISPR-Cas9?

1. **Patient's Own Blood Cells:** The use of the patient's own blood cells for gene editing is a major advantage, potentially allowing treatment for a large number of patients without the need for donor matching.
2. **Innovative Approach:** The application of CRISPR-Cas9 in these therapies is a significant leap forward in genetic medicine, offering hope for many hereditary conditions.

#### What are the challenges and considerations of using the CRISPR-Cas9?

1. **Cost and Accessibility:** Despite the potential, these treatments are expected to be extremely expensive, limiting their accessibility.
2. **Hospital Capabilities:** Only certain hospitals equipped with specific technologies can administer these therapies, further restricting access.
3. **Safety and Efficacy Monitoring:** Continuous monitoring for unintended genetic modifications and side effects is crucial due to the novel nature of these therapies.

#### EU AI Law impact - Intelligent regulation

**News:** The article discusses the EU's new AI regulation law, setting a global example. The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Summit is considering similar global AI regulations.

#### What are the key provisions of the EU AI Law?

[Read here](#).

#### How does the EU AI law impact AI usage?

1. **Risk-Based Regulation:** EU law categorizes AI systems based on their risk level. High-risk AI, including applications in medical devices and public services, faces stricter controls and must undergo registration and continuous assessment.
2. **Transparency Obligations:** It requires AI systems, especially those generating or manipulating content like deepfakes, to disclose their AI usage to users.



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3. **Ban on Manipulative AI:** The law prohibits AI that can manipulate behavior or perform social scoring. **Examples include** toys that encourage dangerous behavior and social scoring systems that classify people based on behavior, socio-economic status, or personal characteristics.
4. **Controlled Use of Surveillance Tools:** Surveillance AI, such as real-time facial recognition, is restricted and requires court approval for criminal identification.
5. **Global Regulatory Influence:** This EU legislation is seen as a potential benchmark at the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Summit, influencing global AI regulations.

### How does EU AI law impact India?

**Model for Regulation:** The EU AI law serves as a potential model for India to develop its own AI regulations. For example, India might consider similar risk-based categorization and strict controls for high-risk AI systems.

### Terminology used:

**Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI):** It is a multi-stakeholder initiative that includes 28 member countries and the European Union. **India became a founding member of the GPAI in 2020. It's important to note that China is not part of the GPAI.**

GPAI Summit for 2023 was held from December 12th to 14<sup>th</sup>, in New Delhi, India. This event was particularly significant as **India assumed the role of Lead Council Chair for GPAI and will continue to be the lead chair in 2024.**

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

## Concerns related to Generative AI – AI generates real worries of privacy and accuracy

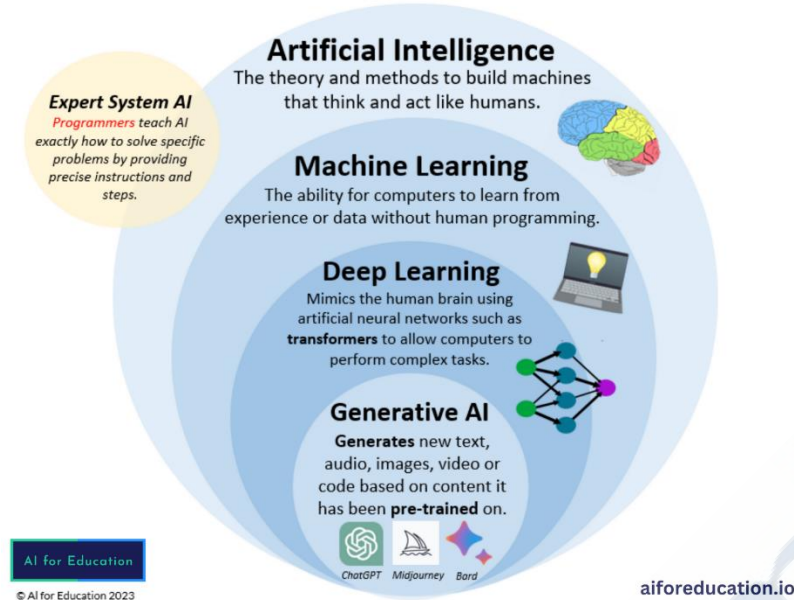
**News:** The article talks about **Google's generative AI model Gemini**, enhancing Bard for handling text, images, and video. It highlights concerns about AI chatbots' privacy, data use, intellectual property, and reliability. It compares Google's approach to AI and data privacy with **Microsoft's generative AI model ChatGPT's** methods.

### What is Generative AI?

Generative AI refers to artificial intelligence that creates new content, including text, images, music, and videos. It's powered by large, multi-tasking foundation models requiring minimal training for specific use cases. For example, AI models like DALL-E or DeepDream can generate unique images, OpenAI's Jukebox can compose new music pieces in various styles, Tools like GPT-3 can write articles, create poetry, or generate code, etc.

# Defining Generative AI

To understand generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), we first need to understand how the technology builds from each of the AI subcategories listed below.



## What are the applications of Generative AI?

- 1. Customer Interactions:** Enhances chat and search experiences for better user engagement.
- 2. Data Analysis:** Processes vast content, generating insights through conversational interfaces and summarizations.
- 3. Task Automation:** Handles repetitive tasks like responding to RFPs, localizing content in multiple languages, and checking contract compliance.
- 4. Content Creation:** Capable of generating diverse forms of media for various industries.
- 5. Research and Development:** Assists in scientific fields by

simulating experiments and predicting outcomes.

- 6. Personalization:** Tailors content and experiences to individual preferences, increasing user engagement in sectors like e-commerce and content streaming.

## What are the concerns related to generative AI?

- 1. Reliability Issues:** AI models can produce unreliable or incorrect results. For example, Bard's initial version incorrectly stated that the James Webb Space Telescope took the first pictures of a planet outside our solar system, demonstrating AI's potential for factual errors.
- 2. Privacy and Data Use Concerns:** AI models are developed using extensive datasets, which might inadvertently include personal details, posing a risk to user privacy. Additionally, the disclaimers for these AI models are often written in complex legal terms. This complexity makes it difficult to understand how they collect and use data, raising concerns about the transparency of their data handling processes.
- 3. Intellectual Property and Ownership Issues:** There's uncertainty about who owns the content AI chatbots create, posing legal and ethical challenges.
- 4. Accountability for Harmful Outputs:** AI chatbots face difficulty in being held accountable for misinformation, offensive content, or hate speech.

## What are the initiatives taken to promote AI in India?

- 1. V. Kamakoti led AI Task Force** established for exploring AI applications in various fields.
- 2. NITI Aayog's discussion paper** presents a national AI strategy focusing on healthcare, agriculture, education, smart cities and infrastructure, and smart mobility and transportation.
- 3. ICMR's "Ethical Guidelines for Application of AI in Biomedical Research and Health care"** sets out 10 key ethical principles for AI in healthcare.
- 4. DRDO's Center for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (CAIR) engages in AI research.**

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5. IIT Kharagpur collaborates with Amazon Web Services for the National AI Resource Platform (NAIRP) to enhance teaching and learning through AI.
6. **SUVAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software)**, an AI tool developed for the Supreme Court, helps translate judgments into various regional languages.

**What is the status of regulation of AI in India and across the globe?**

[Read here.](#)

### On Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) – Next level in AI

**News:** The article discusses Project Q\* which might lead to the development of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). It highlights its significant features and the associated challenges as well.

Read more about AGI [here](#).

**What is Project Q\*?**

1. Project Q\* refers to a new AI model being developed by the ChatGPT owner OpenAI.
2. It is rumoured that it can solve mathematical problems up to high-school standards, including those that are not part of its training data, with better accuracy than previous AI models like ChatGPT-4.
3. It is being considered as a breakthrough in Artificial General Intelligence.

**What are the prominent features of AGI?**

1. **Better Reasoning Capability:** Perfect scores on high-school maths could imply Q\* is capable of logical reasoning, rather than merely recognizing and duplicating familiar patterns ingrained in its training data.  
This would bring the new AI one step closer to becoming **AGI — artificial general intelligence** — a program that is capable of reasoning as well as absorbing, deciphering, and replicating variations on patterns.
2. **Not Limited to Narrow Tasks:** With more advancements, AGI may achieve a high level of intelligence, surpassing the current limitations of most AI, which predominantly focuses on specific, limited tasks through tailored algorithms.
3. **May mimic a Living Being:** An authentic AGI model would exhibit characteristics of self-awareness or consciousness, enabled by its capacity to introspect on its own being. It may possess qualities like curiosity, self-will, and an inclination toward self-preservation—traits often associated with living organisms.
4. **Ability to Teach Itself:** It would enable autonomous models to solve a really vast range of problems and tackle a wide range of tasks better than humans can. It should also be able to teach itself to perform new tasks without instructions.

Learn about the **Difference between General AI and Narrow AI** [here](#).

**What are the challenges with AGI?**

**Existential Risk:** Such immense cognitive abilities, combined with a misunderstanding of human values or goals, could lead AGI to make decisions harmful to humanity or disrupt existing systems, inadvertently posing existential risks to our civilization.

**Ethical Issues:** Ensuring such a model is "ethical" and "altruistic" would be difficult. Ethical principles vary across cultures and contexts, making it complex to codify universal rules.

## 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 Zelensky, 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?**

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.



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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.

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.

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

#### Global Goal on Adaptation and the road from Dubai

**News:** COP28 in Dubai marked a significant moment in addressing climate change adaptation, pushing for a more serious approach and building on previous efforts from COP26 and COP27.

#### What are the key outcomes of COP28?

[Read here.](#)

#### What is the difference between adaptation and mitigation?

1. **Definition:** Adaptation involves adjusting to current and expected impacts of climate change. It focuses on reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience. Mitigation targets the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to slow climate change.
2. **Approach: Adaptation** actions are often local or regional, addressing specific climate impacts like flooding or heatwaves. **Mitigation** efforts are global, aiming to reduce overall emissions through strategies like renewable energy or reforestation.
3. **Measurement:** Measuring adaptation is complex with no universal metric, focusing on varied local outcomes. Mitigation is measured in CO2 equivalents, offering a standardized metric for comparing efforts globally.

#### What is the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)?

The GGA is a commitment within the Paris Agreement aiming to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience, and reduce vulnerability to climate change.

The GGA focuses on having nations conduct comprehensive climate risk assessments, inform policy with these findings, and establish early warning systems by 2027.

#### What are the Challenges in Implementing GGA?

1. **Translating Global Goals to National Action:** Implementing the GGA is complex due to differences in national conditions, administrative capacities, and economic development levels, which affect how global goals are adopted locally.
2. **Measuring Progress:** There's no universal metric for adaptation, making it difficult to aggregate and compare progress across countries. The GGA is working on developing indicators but currently lacks specifics on development and implementation.
3. **Financing Gap:** The adaptation finance gap is widening, with a need for \$ 71 billion per year until 2030. Current finance is insufficient, with adaptation finance significantly trailing behind mitigation, reflecting a bias in climate financing priorities.

#### Way forward:

To address climate challenges effectively, global efforts must prioritize adaptation alongside mitigation, recognizing its urgency due to escalating extreme weather events. It's critical to close the adaptation financing gap, aiming for the \$71 billion needed annually. Additionally, establishing universal metrics for adaptation and implementing key strategies, such as risk assessments and early warning systems, are essential steps.

## Green Industrial strategy – No alternative to green industrial strategy

**News:** The article discusses the need for a comprehensive Green Industrial Strategy. It emphasized the importance of sustainable development, innovation, and securing significant investment.

### What is Green Industrial strategy?

A Green Industrial Strategy is a coordinated approach to economic growth that emphasizes sustainability and innovation.

It aims to secure substantial funding, estimated at \$5-7 trillion yearly globally, to meet environmental goals and promote sustainable development.

This strategy involves reorienting industries towards green technologies and practices, ensuring long-term investment in clean growth, and fostering inter-sectoral collaborations. It's exemplified by Germany's transition to a circular economy in its steel industry, driven by supportive public policies.

### What are the benefits of a Green Industrial strategy?

1. **Promoting Sustainable Development:** It aims to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, requiring substantial investment in sustainable initiatives.
2. **Economic Growth:** Green industries are poised to be engines of growth, potentially worth over \$10 trillion globally by 2050. It can drive innovation and create new industries and jobs in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and other green sectors.
3. **Enhancing Competitiveness:** By investing in green technologies and industries, countries can maintain and advance their competitive standing globally.
4. **Energy Security:** Shifting away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources reduces dependency on imported fuels and enhances national security.

### What are the issues with Green Industrial strategy?

1. **Financing Gap:** Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires an immense investment of \$5-7 trillion per year, presenting a significant funding challenge.
2. **Long-term Uncertainty:** Investors need confidence in the stability of policies over decades, which is currently hindered by political and policy fluctuations.
3. **Coordination Across Sectors:** Effective strategy requires robust collaboration across different supply chains, which is complex and difficult to manage.
4. **Need for a Just Transition:** Ensuring the transition is fair to all workers and sectors is vital but challenging, requiring careful planning and execution.

### What are India's initiatives in green industrial strategy?

1. **Renewable Energy Production:** Increasing renewable energy with the aim to achieve 500 GW capacity by 2030.
2. **Innovation and Infrastructure:** Launched E20 fuel and emphasized biofuels, with development of waterways for greener transport logistics.
3. **Green Credits and Policies:** Implementing green credit, PM KUSUM Yojana, and vehicle scrapping policy to encourage sustainable practices.
4. **Ethanol Blending and Incentives:** Achieving 10% ethanol blending in petrol 5 months early, with a goal of 20% by 2025-26.

### Way forward:



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To tackle worldwide climate and economic challenges, countries should adopt mission-driven industrial strategies centered on green innovation and sustainability across all sectors. This involves fostering public-private partnerships and channeling investments towards ambitious objectives. Ultimately, this approach unlocks a \$10 trillion green industry potential, fostering economic growth, environmental sustainability, and an equitable transition for everyone.

### On Increasing Coal-based Power Generation

**News:** The article discusses India's plans of increasing coal-based power generation. It also highlights the issues with renewable sources of energy, and why coal-based power is the way forward for India.

A detailed article on **UNFCCC COP28** can be [read here](#).

At the recently concluded COP28, a strong pushback was recorded by India, China and some other countries to a proposal advocating that no new coal-fired power plants can be commissioned without an in-built carbon capture and storage facility. This finally led to the omission of the clause from the final climate deal that was agreed upon. This proposal would have put India's future coal-based power generation at risk, given the added costs of adding carbon capture and storage facilities.

#### What are India's plans of increasing coal-based power generation?

The Union Power Ministry recently decided to increase India's coal-powered generation capacity by at least **80 GW by 2031-32**.

It shows India's plans to revert to coal for fulfilling the increasing **baseload capacity** (the minimum amount of power or electricity generation required to meet the constant energy demand of a region or system).

#### What is the current state of India's renewable-based power generation?

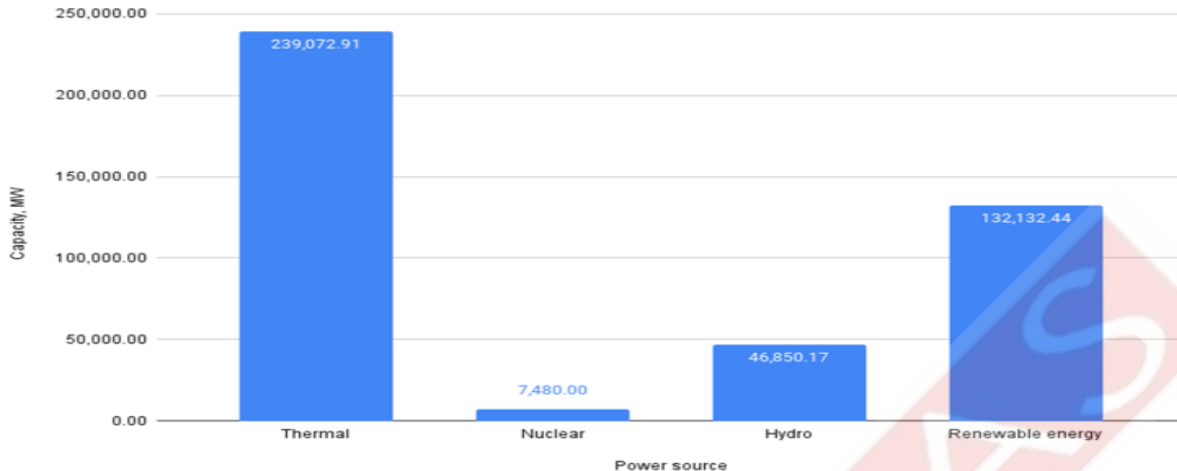
India is the world's **3<sup>rd</sup> largest producer** of renewable energy.

More than **40% of installed electricity capacity comes from non-fossil fuel sources** (including large hydropower plants).

**Solar and wind energy forms more than 30%** of the total installed capacity.

This has resulted in a **24% reduction in Emission Intensity** (ratio of total greenhouse gas emissions to the GDP) — between 2005 and 2016.

## 9 PM Compilation for the Month of December 2023



India's Energy Mix as on October 31, 2023. Source: Central Electricity Authority.

### What are the issues with renewable sources of energy?

1. **Intermittency:** Renewable electricity (solar and wind) is generated only when the sun shines or when the wind blows, which is not always in sync with the demand cycle. This creates the problem of intermittency (or inconsistency/variability in power supply).
  2. **Lack of Energy Storage:** Without energy storage facilities to counter intermittency, renewable power poses problems for grid managers. Energy storage technology is also expensive currently.
  3. **High Cost:**
    - a. **Cost of Power Generation:** According to an expert, the idea that renewables would achieve **grid-parity** (cost of generating electricity from renewable sources equaling or becoming lower than the cost of electricity generated from traditional sources, typically fossil fuels) is proving to be incorrect.
    - b. **Cost of Maintaining Thermal Units:** To counter the problem of intermittency, power utilities are forced to keep old thermal units operational on standby, which results in high fixed costs.
  4. **Rigid Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs):** Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) Ltd, the state-owned company conducting solar auctions, has come into rigid PPAs with green developers, with no scope for innovation.
- Note:** A PPA is a long-term contract between an electricity generator and a purchaser to purchase power under some pre-determined conditions.

According to the author, until these issues are resolved, increasing thermal power is the way forward.

## Circular economy

**News:** The article discusses the importance of adopting Circular Economy for India in the context of the recently released National Circular Economy Framework (NCEF).

A detailed article on **Circular Economy** can be [read here](#).

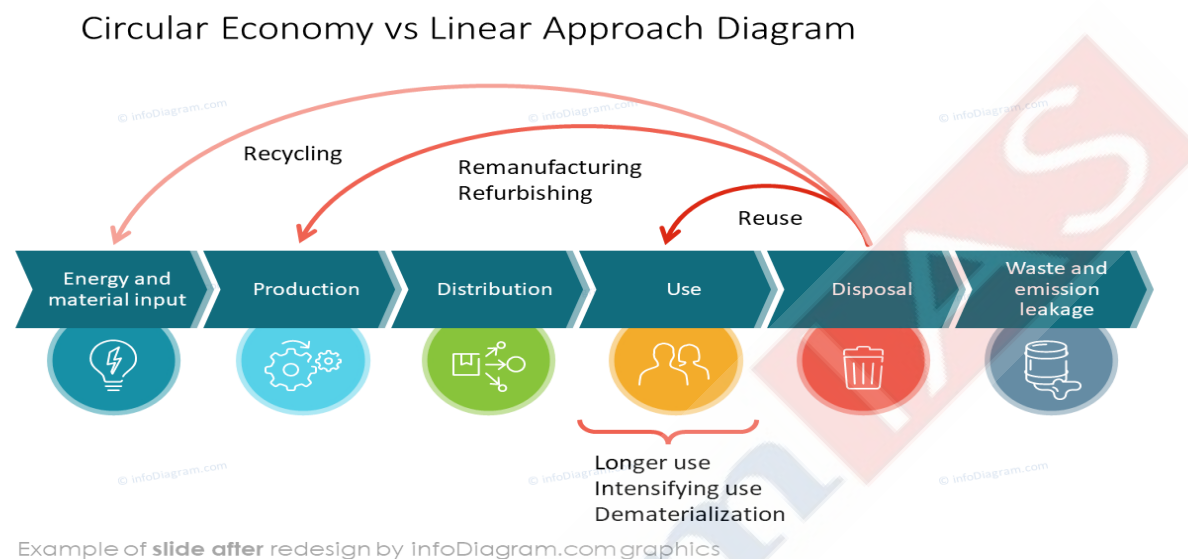
### Background:

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) recently brought out the **National Circular Economy Framework (NCEF)**. It aims to provide a blueprint for India's shift towards a circular economy.

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## What is circular economy?

The circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible. In this way, the life cycle of products is extended.



Source: InfoDiagram.com

## What is the importance of adopting Circular Economy for India?

1. **Mitigate Environmental Impacts:** As manufacturing grows and consumption habits evolve, there's a likelihood of generating more jobs and higher individual incomes. However, this rise in production and consumption can have adverse impacts on the environment.
2. **Offset the Lack of Natural Resources:** India, possessing just 2% of global land area and 4% of freshwater resources, would face limitations in its manufacturing and broader economy if it follows a linear economic model of "Take-Make-Dispose"
3. **Tackle Poor Waste Management:** India ranks 4th on the **Mismanaged Waste Index (MWI)** which highlights the country's poor ability to manage plastic waste (India recycles only 12.3% of its plastic waste).
4. **Secure Green Investment:** By applying circular economy in their applications, the private sector can get an advantage in securing green investment.
5. **Reduce Compliance Costs in Exports:** India must adopt circular-economy models to **reduce compliance costs** (in light of instruments such as EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism which places higher tariffs on import of carbon-intensive products) and **mitigate scope-3 emissions**.

**Note: Scope 3 emissions** are those not produced by the company itself, but by those up and down its value chain that the company is indirectly responsible for.

In this regard, the circular economy can be a powerful strategy to minimise dependence on natural resources, curtail waste, and encourage sustainable design practices.

## What are the highlights of the National Circular Economy Framework (NCEF)?

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1. It focuses on areas like municipal solid and liquid waste, electronic waste, toxic and hazardous industrial waste, faecal sludge, plastics, and construction material.
2. It aims to reduce reliance on imported resources, decouple economic growth from resource consumption, reduce resource consumption and pollution, enhance resource security, improve competitiveness, and attract investment.
3. **Economic Growth and Job Creation:** CII also stressed that **by 2050**, the sector is likely to contribute **\$2 trillion to the domestic economy** and create close to **10 million additional jobs**.

### What should be the way forward?

1. **Collaboration between Companies:** It should help in the exchange of byproducts across the value chain. Rather than discarding byproducts as waste, collaboration allows for their efficient utilization at different stages of production among companies.
2. **Investing in Waste-Management Techniques:** India must invest in waste-management policies like **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** (which holds manufacturers accountable for the entire lifecycle of their products, including proper disposal or recycling). By this, India can effectively manage waste and promote the reuse of resources.

### On the Challenges of Reducing Emissions – Why climate efforts fail to cut emissions

**News:** The article discusses the challenges in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It also highlights the steps that India should take to fulfill its climate change commitments.

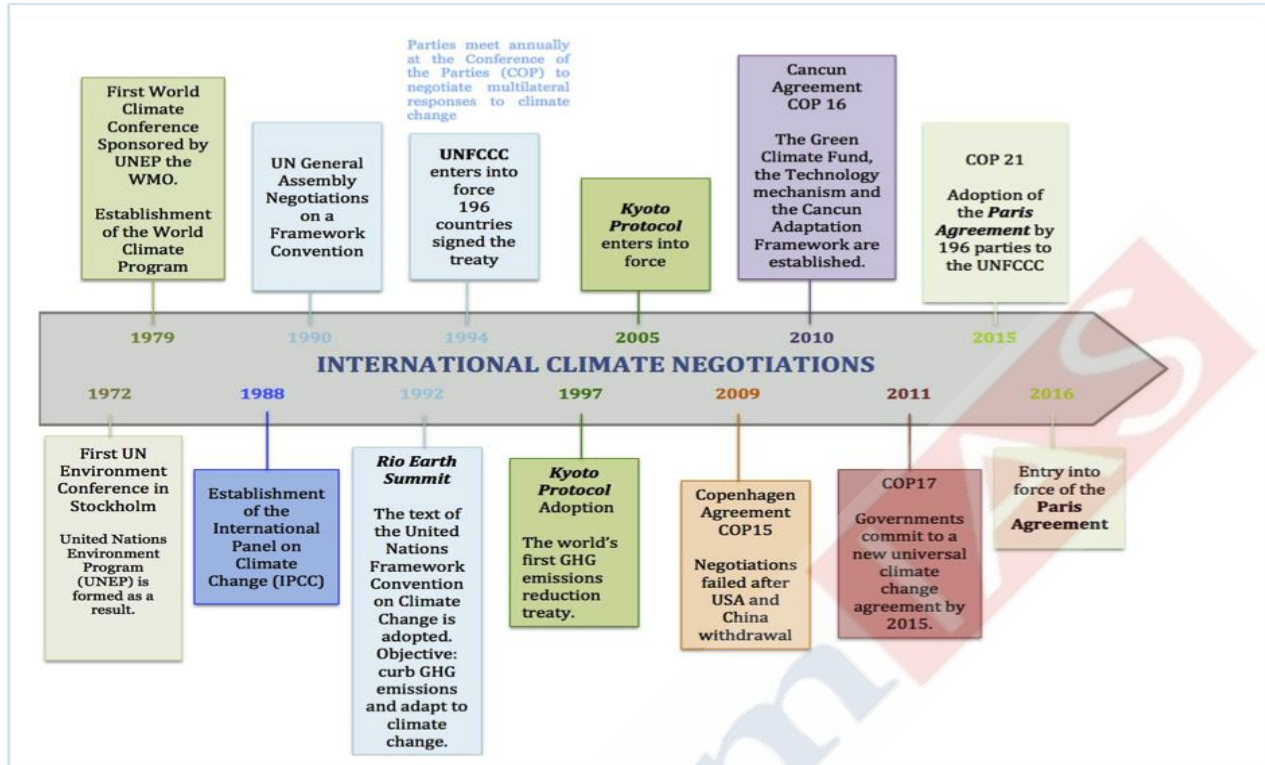
### What is the current status of global climate change?

**Rising Temperatures:** Global temperatures have already increased by 1.4 degrees Celsius and might rise to 3 degrees Celsius by 2100.

**Rising Emissions:** Greenhouse gas emissions have been continuously increasing, requiring a 42% decrease in emissions by 2030 to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

### Timeline of Climate Negotiations:





Source: Clim'Blog.

Read more about the **Kyoto Protocol** and **Paris Climate Accord** [here](#).

### What are the challenges in reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

- Rising Energy Demand:** More renewable energy is being generated, but overall energy demand has risen too, leading to more fossil fuel usage.
- Environmental Issues of Renewable Sources:** A key renewable source - Hydroelectric power may lead to wildlife disruption, impact on the watershed, etc.
- Technology challenges in transitioning to solar and wind:** We don't have the technology yet to run a power grid solely on solar or wind energy. This is due to:
  - Intermittent Nature:** Solar and wind power's inconsistency (as their generation depends on weather conditions) demands substantial energy storage solutions to handle their fluctuations.
  - High Investments Required:** Significant upgrades to current grid infrastructure and substantial investment in new technologies and grid modernization will be required.
  - Unsuited for energy-dense applications:** Like the production of steel or heavy trucking.
- Costlier than Conventional Sources:** For instance, Renewable energy sources such as Green Hydrogen are expensive.
- High Import Bill:** A high import bill is a concern as most inputs for setting up solar capacities come from China.
- Non-Binding Nature of Climate Resolutions:** The voluntary nature of NDCs raised doubts about their adequacy in achieving the ambitious temperature targets.
- Continued financial support for fossil fuels by developed countries:** Advanced countries (which have caused 89% of historical emissions) provided \$1.8 trillion in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry in 2020.

### What are India's climate goals?

India has committed to the various climate goals under the Paris Agreement. These include generating 50% of its electricity from non-fossil fuels by 2030, reducing its emissions intensity by 45% from 2005, and aiming for net-zero emissions by 2070.

### What should India do to deepen its climate efforts?

- 1. Maintain Green Transition without taking on new commitments:** This is because India needs cheap energy to progress to a middle-income country. It already has low per capita emissions (2.4 tCO<sub>2</sub>e) compared to the US (17.6 tCO<sub>2</sub>e) and China (8.6 tCO<sub>2</sub>e).
- 2. Broaden the scope of climate action:** India should also address issues like habitat loss, biodiversity decline, and water scarcity, apart from Net Zero.
- 3. Invest in high-quality climate research:** There is a need to move beyond dominant Western narratives to find the real truth regarding climate change.
- 4. Employ tech-savvy experts:** Experts should develop and lead practical climate strategies, focusing on realistic transitions, since generalists may not understand technological gaps.

### Benefits of Underground Mining in India

**News:** The article discusses the importance of coal for India's energy needs. It discusses the advantages of Underground Mining as a solution for making coal mining environment-friendly.

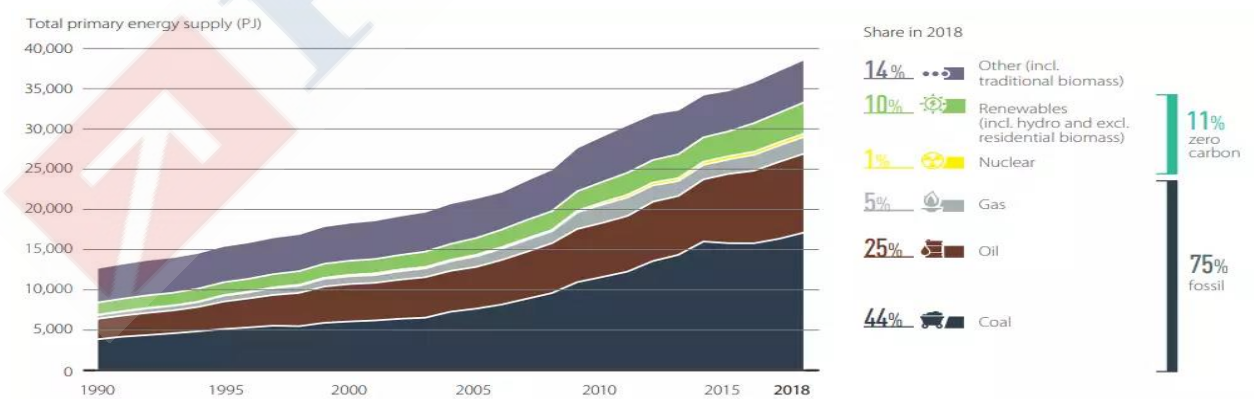
### What is the status of Renewable Energy (RE) production in India with respect to Coal?

Despite India having the fastest RE capacity growth among major economies of the world, RE generation represents only 13.36% of the country's total generation.

Coal-based generation is 5.24 times RE production.

As renewable energy (RE) is anticipated to grow, the total energy demand is also on the rise. Consequently, although the proportion of coal in the energy mix will decrease, the actual amount of coal needed will still increase.

### India's Energy Mix:



Source: Economic Times.

Since cutting down coal's use drastically may hamper the country's energy sector, India should explore the mining of coal in an environment-friendly manner to meet its climate commitments. In this, **Underground (UG) Mining** can play an important role.

### What is UG Mining?

Underground mining is used to extract ore from below the surface of the earth safely, economically and with as little waste as possible. The entry from the surface to an underground mine may be through a horizontal or vertical tunnel, known as a shaft or decline.

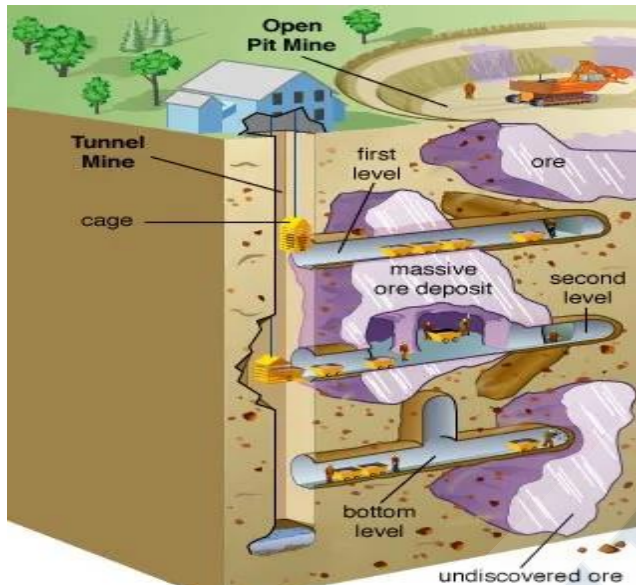


Figure 6 Open Cast and Underground Mine. Source: Britannica, Inc.

### What are the benefits of UG Mining?

#### 1. Environmentally Cleaner:

- Forest cover is not required to be displaced.
- Prevents land degradation. Leaves the fertile topsoil intact.
- Much smaller pollution load compared to Open-cast mine. This is because around half of the total pollution load in OC mines is due to overburden removal and associated steps, which is not applicable in UG mines.
- It has no impact on water pollution.
- Ambient noise levels are significantly lower.

#### 2. Society-friendly:

- It does not dislocate people, necessitating rehabilitation and resettlement.
- Traditional livelihoods are not lost.
- Agricultural land is left undisturbed.

#### 3. Better Quality Fuel:

UG coal is qualitatively superior and helps reduce imports of higher grades of coal.

### What factors can help UG mining to grow in India?

Indian coal extraction is predominantly Open-Cast. In 2022, of the total coal produced world over, UG accounted for around 55%. India's UG output was just 4%. Coal India has drawn up an aspirational plan to quadruple its UG production to 100 MTs by FY 2030.

UG Mining can succeed in India due to the following factors:

- Better Human resources:** Well-trained skilled operators, outsourcing to contractors, efficient mine developers and operators, etc.
- Availability of Mass Production technologies:** This includes **operationally flexible continuous miners** (a machine that cuts and loads coal in one continuous operation) suitable for Indian coal seams, the punch entry method for extraction of UG coal at low cost through existing infrastructure, deployment of high wall machines that bypass land acquisition and rehabilitation and resettlement issues, and the use of paste fill technology.

In the current geopolitical landscape, achieving self-sufficiency in energy security is crucial for development. Coal has the potential to provide the highest indigenous resource base among the energy sources. Underground mining can balance these – India's climate change commitments as well as energy security.

## 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.

### 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 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.

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 launch 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.

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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:

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

#### On Civilian deaths in Kashmir

**News:** The article discusses the history of the Rajouri and Poonch districts in the context of cross-border terrorism. It also highlights why the recent death of 3 civilians allegedly in the military's custody is a setback to the military's efforts to curb terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir.

The recent **death of 3 civilians allegedly in the military's custody** in the aftermath of the Poonch ambush (by the People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF)) is a setback to the military's efforts to curb terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir. It can **decrease the population's support** for the security forces. The security situation in the border districts of **Rajouri and Poonch** in the Jammu region has a social and political dynamic, due to a mixture of religious, ethnic and linguistic communities.

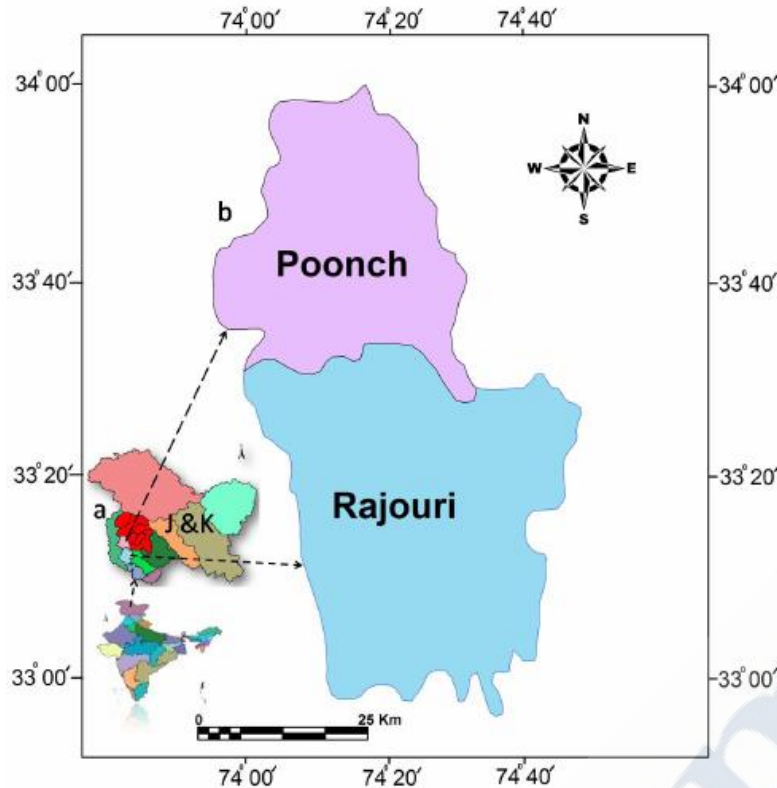


Figure 7. Source: Anzar Ahmad Khuroo (Research Gate).

**What has been the history of the two districts in the context of cross-border terrorism?**

- 1) **Early Years of militancy in the 1990s:** The districts were used to access the Valley by exploiting the terrain for concealed movement.
- 2) **Post 1996-97:** This region has served as a fallback option for terror groups whenever they were driven away from the Kashmir Valley.
- 3) **Late '90s and early 2000s:** This period witnessed rising terror activities in the area. The Indian Army conducted **Operation Sarp Vinash** in 2003, dealing a deadly blow to the base of militancy in the region. In this operation, support from the majority community of **Gujjars and Bakarwals** was not just passive but also active, wherein **Village Defence Committees** fought along with the Indian Army.

Indian

4) **Present:** In 2023 alone, Rajouri, Poonch and Reasi districts in the Jammu region reportedly witnessed the deaths of 55 individuals (including security personnel and terrorists). The two districts continue to provide a fertile ground for terrorist operations and enable them to assert control.

**Why is the region being used as a base for terrorist operations?**

- 1) **Sending a Message of Mass Support:** By striking outside the Valley, terrorists try to depict the mass appeal of their resistance.
- 2) **Difficult Terrain:** The treacherous terrain gives the terrorists an advantage — they need not seek a mass support base for their survival. They can sustain themselves among the higher ridges of the thickly wooded semi-mountainous terrain merely by support of a few **Overground Workers**.
- 3) **Lack of Attention:** The general focus on the Kashmir Valley has led to the Rajouri-Poonch region being at a disadvantage in terms of development funds, implementation of government programmes, infrastructure development, etc.

The once well-consolidated support of locals has been decreasing.

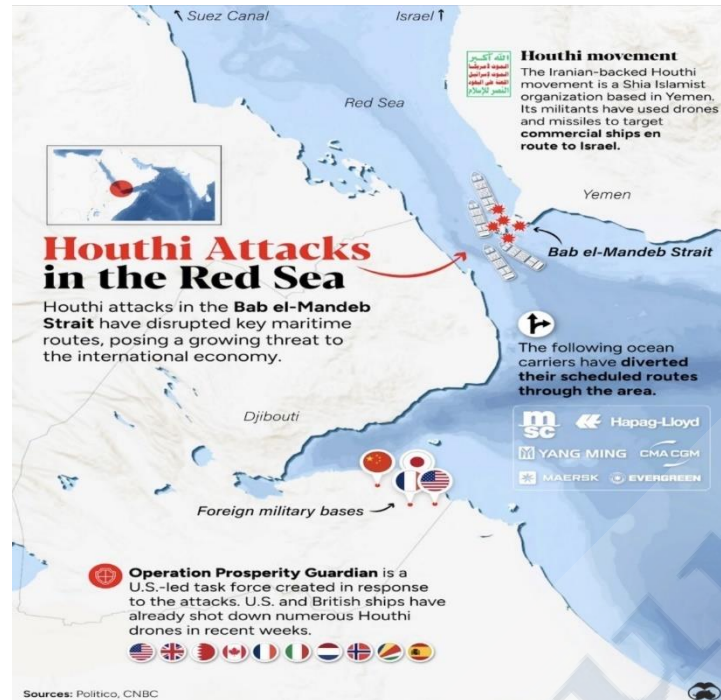
**What should be done by the Indian military?**

- 1) Moving beyond mere military operations, **bold and imaginative initiatives and countermeasures** should be undertaken.
  - 2) **Including non-kinetic means**, as part of a **whole-of-government approach**. This includes preventing terrorist activities through diplomatic, economic, political, informational, or cyber means
- Note-** Non-kinetic warfare generally refers to action against an adversary without a direct conventional military action.



## Drone attack on merchant ship in the Indian Ocean

**News:** The article discusses a suspected drone attack on a merchant ship in the Indian Ocean, India's response, and the challenges and strategies of maritime forces, including India's, in dealing with new threats like armed drones and the evolving tactics in anti-drone warfare.



### What are the responses to a drone attack on a merchant ship in the Indian Ocean?

#### India's Response:

**1. Swift Military Deployment:** India dispatched the Coast Guard and Navy ships to the attack site, demonstrating quick reaction capabilities.

**2. Naval Adjustments:** Indian Navy, traditionally focused on piracy, is now considering anti-drone tactics and strategies.

#### Global Response:

**1. Operation Prosperity Guardian:** Initiated by the US with allies like the UK, Bahrain, and Canada to protect maritime traffic from drone threats.

**Note:** Operation Prosperity Guardian, started in December 2023, is a US-led

international mission. The aim is to protect ships in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden from Houthi attacks. This effort, under Combined Task Force 153, seeks to secure freedom of navigation and enhance regional security and prosperity.

- 2. Coalition Changes:** France, Italy, and Spain withdrew from the coalition, reflecting challenges in unified action.
- 3. Anti-Drone Technologies:** Emphasis on developing jamming and spoofing techniques, although these are not widely available or fully effective against drones.

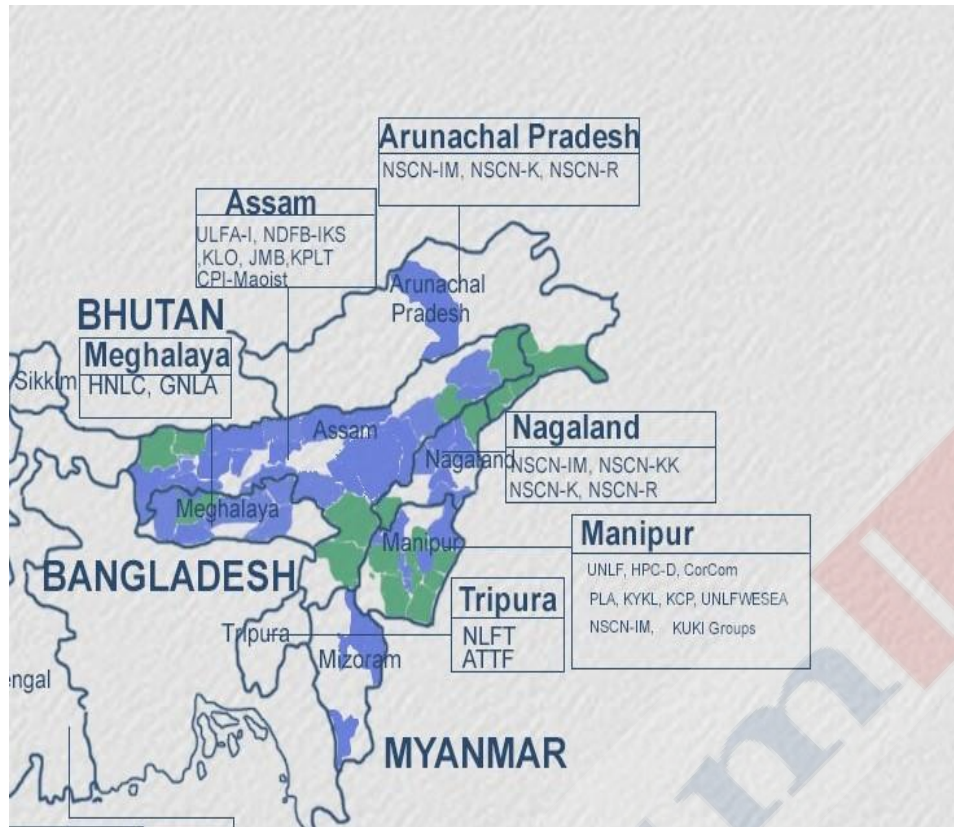
### What are the challenges in maritime security?

- 1. Technology Gaps:** Effective anti-drone technologies like jamming and spoofing are not widely accessible or proven under all conditions, making defense difficult.
- 2. Coalition Dynamics:** Disagreements within international coalitions, evidenced by nations withdrawing from Operation Prosperity Guardian, complicate unified responses.

### What are the implications of a drone attack on a merchant ship in the Indian Ocean?

- 1. Regional Security Concerns:** The drone attack near Porbandar raises the specter of a new, unpredictable threat in maritime regions, prompting urgent security reassessments.
- 2. Navigation and Commerce Impact:** Such attacks threaten commercial shipping routes, leading to broader economic implications and heightened calls for maritime security.

### What should be done?



1. **Join International Coalitions:** India might consider joining forces like Operation Prosperity Guardian for a coordinated response, as the CMF's task forces specialize in regional maritime security.

2. **Adopt Anti-Drone Technology:** Navies should invest in and deploy effective anti-drone technologies such as jamming, spoofing, and directed energy weapons to counteract the new aerial threats.

3. **Enhance Maritime Communication and**

**Intelligence:** Improve surveillance and intelligence sharing among maritime nations to detect and respond to threats promptly.

4. **Regular Training and Adaptation:** Naval forces need continuous training in anti-drone strategies and tactics, moving beyond traditional anti-piracy measures to address the evolving maritime security landscape.

### 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.

**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.**
- 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.



## Topic: Money-laundering and its prevention

### Supreme Court's observations on the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

**News:** Supreme Court (SC) of India's narrowing interpretation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), has sparked criticism due to the perceived overreach of the Enforcement Directorate. This overreach is particularly noted in opposition-governed states, raising significant concerns about the impact on federalism and democratic values.

#### What is the PMLA Act?

[Read here.](#)

#### What are the Supreme Court's observations on the PMLA?

1. **Proceeds of Crime definition:** In Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India (2022), the Supreme Court noted that only property derived from criminal activity related to a scheduled offence qualifies as "proceeds of crime" under Section 2(1)(u) of the PML Act 2002.

#### 2. ED's style of functioning:

a) **ED's Overreach-** Criticism of the Enforcement Directorate's overreach was especially noted in the case Pankaj Bansal vs Union of India, where the Supreme Court highlighted issues with the ED's approach.

b) **Need for Fairness-** In the same case, the Court emphasized the need for the ED to act with fairness, highlighting inconsistencies and lack of transparency in its operations.

3. **Violations of Procedure: Judicial Misuse-** In the handling of cases like Pavana Dibbur vs The Directorate of Enforcement, 2023 INSC 1029, the Supreme Court observed procedural violations and misuse, pointing out the need for strict adherence to legal standards by the ED and other authorities.

For more information on the **SC Judgment on the PMLA**, [read here](#)

#### What are the concerns related to the misuse of the PMLA Act?

**Impact on Federal Structure:** Actions perceived as biased or overreaching by central agencies like the ED are seen as **eroding the federal structure and democratic principles of the country.**

## Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism

### Grass-root democracy as a bulwark against Maoists

**News:** The article discusses the low voter turnout in Maoist-affected areas in Chhattisgarh's elections, by highlighting how Maoists discourage tribal people from voting. It emphasizes the need for empowering tribal communities and implementing the PESA Act effectively to counter Maoist influence and strengthen democracy at the grassroots level.

#### Background:



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India has the **second-largest tribal population in the world**. As per the Census 2011, the tribal population constitutes about **8.9% of the total population in India**. Around **92% of the ST population lives in rural areas**.

### How do Maoists impact democracy?

1) **Election Boycotts:** Maoists actively promote election boycotts, undermining the democratic process. This contradicts their claim of representing tribal interests, as it **prevents tribal communities from exercising their voting rights**. For example, In Maoist-affected areas like Bijapur and Konta in Chhattisgarh, the voter turnout was drastically low, ranging from 3% to 4%.

2) **Exploitation of Legislative Gaps:** The improper implementation of the PESA Act, which aims to empower tribal communities, is exploited by Maoists. They use these legislative gaps to maintain control in their strongholds.

### What are the initiatives for empowering democracy in tribal communities?

1. **Constitutional initiatives:** The makers of the Constitution of India made special provisions for the protection of tribal culture and the development of Scheduled Tribes.

These include the conservation of their language, script and other cultural elements (article 350), ensuring their educational interests (article 46), providing economic safeguards and taking steps for political empowerment (article 330, 332, 243, fifth schedule).

For more information on **Constitutional Safeguards for tribal community**, [read here](#).

2. **Legislative initiatives: PESA Act:** The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) aims to empower tribal gram sabhas (village councils) to govern their socio-economic aspects, enhancing local self-governance. The Act is designed to align with the tribal way of life, respecting their historical and traditional governance structures.

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

3. **Separate Ministry: Ministry of Tribal Affairs was set up in 1999** with the objective of providing a more focused approach to the integrated socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes (STs).

### What should be done?

1. **Increase Tribal Voting:** Tackle low turnout in Maoist areas like Bijapur and Konta by motivating tribal communities to vote, overcoming Maoist boycotts.
2. **Proper Implementation of PESA Act:** Ensure the PESA Act is fully enacted to empower tribal gram sabhas, countering the legislative gaps Maoists exploit.
3. **Strengthen Tribal Democracy:** Empower tribal communities through democratic means, recognizing and nurturing tribal leadership.
4. **Focus on Tribal Aspirations:** Address the genuine issues of tribals, such as their constitutional rights, highlighted in movements like Pathalgadi in Jharkhand.

## Topic: Organised crime

### Drug problem in Punjab - A promise to keep

**News:** The article discusses Punjab's struggle with drug problems and efforts by the government to stop it.

#### What is the scale of the drug problem in Punjab?

From April 2022 to February 2023, Punjab Police filed **11,156 drug-related FIRs, with 25% pertaining to pharmaceutical drugs** (such as nasheeli goliyan).

The number of individuals grappling with addiction at 10 lakhs.

**Women are notably involved in 10% of these drug cases**, highlighting gender-specific impacts. The state has seen a persistent rise in drug activities since 2019, except for a brief dip during 2020 due to COVID-19.

Despite efforts, **266 deaths were reported due to overdoses from 2020 to 2023**,

#### What are the reasons for the drug problem in Punjab?

1. **Geographical Vulnerability:** Punjab's position as part of the **Golden Crescent (Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan)** facilitates its role in the heroin and cocaine trade, leading to widespread substance abuse.
2. **Poverty and Socioeconomic Issues:** The involvement of women in drug cases, many from denotified tribes or rural backgrounds, illustrates how poverty pushes individuals into the narcotics trade.
3. **Systemic Loopholes:** Major drug dealers continue to evade arrest shows the challenge in dismantling organized networks.
4. **Availability:** The transition from heroin (Chitta) to pharmaceutical opioids (nasheeli goliyan) reflects **changing drug preferences and availability**.

#### What initiatives have been taken by the Punjab government?

1. **Awareness and Rehabilitation Campaigns:** Initiatives like cyclothons, street plays, and gully cricket aim to raise awareness and promote rehabilitation.
2. **Setting Up All-Women Anti-Drug Committees:** In some villages of the Malwa region, these committees are formed to combat drug abuse and support affected families.
3. **Legislative Action:** FIRs and legal actions under the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act** have been significantly employed, with 11,156 cases filed between April 2022 and February 2023.

For more information on **India's initiative to regulate drugs trafficking**, [read here](#).

#### Way forward:

Punjab must escalate actions against the drug networks and improve education and employment options for those most at risk. Strengthening legal systems is essential to close loopholes that allow trafficking to persist. Sustained focus on rehabilitation programs and targeting top-tier traffickers will help diminish the narcotics supply and demand.

## Topic: Basics of Cybersecurity

### Issues with Digitization of Healthcare in India

**News:** Recently, personal details of more than 80 crore people including Aadhaar and phone numbers, passport details, and health records had been leaked from the ICMR website and put on sale on the dark web. This incident highlights the risk associated with the digitization of health records and a need for robust cyber security.

For further reading on the **ICMR Data Breach**: [Click Here](#)

#### What are the benefits of digitization of health records?

1. **Quicker Diagnosis:** Electronic repositories of patients' medical histories, diagnoses, treatments and other healthcare information can lead to quicker diagnosis.
2. **Better Treatment Decisions and Improved Safety Standards:** Electronic repositories can also lead to better treatment decisions and improved safety standards.
3. **Accessibility:** Patients can easily access their medical history from anywhere, allowing them to be more informed in their healthcare decisions.
4. **Continuity of Care:** Healthcare providers can seamlessly share patient information between different hospitals and clinics, ensuring continuity of care even if a patient changes doctors or facilities.
5. **Personal Health Management:** Patients can track their health data, such as medication schedules, which can help them manage chronic conditions more effectively.

#### What are the concerns associated with the digitization of health records?

1. **Disclosure of Personal Information:** Concerns arise regarding the unauthorized disclosure of information related to financial transactions, personal communications, and medical details. The breach also causes worries about violations of privacy.
2. **Issues with Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission:** The scheme has elevated digital healthcare. It operates on a federated architecture where data flows among participants rather than being stored centrally. Despite this, a **World Bank study raised concerns** as health insurers can access patient data within the ecosystem, posing potential data security issues.
3. **Cyber-attacks:** It can disrupt the functioning of medical systems. **For example**, a ransomware attack on AIIMS servers last year forced the hospital to switch a significant portion of its operations to manual mode for nearly two weeks.

#### What vulnerabilities do other countries face in terms of cyber-attacks on health data?

The healthcare systems of both the US and the UK have experienced cyberattacks. **Legal frameworks such as the** Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act in the US and the UK's Data Protection Act have not entirely succeeded in preventing breaches.

#### What can be the way ahead for India?

India's recently introduced [Data Protection Act](#) has faced criticism for not prioritizing the security of health-related information. Hence, there is a need for policymakers to enhance the robustness of the system to prevent such attacks.

## 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'.

#### 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.

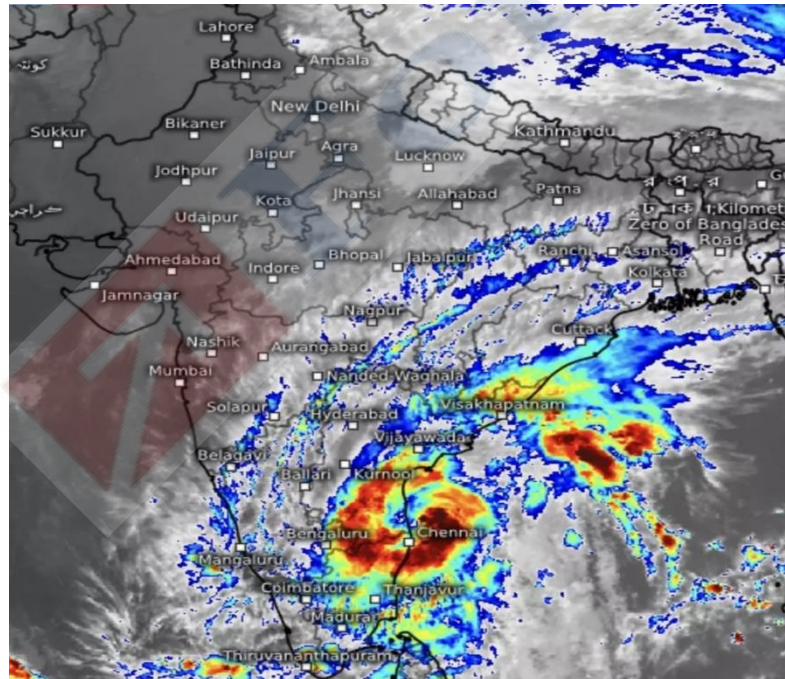


Figure 8. Cyclone Michaung. Source: The Hindu BusinessLine

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:



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- 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 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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 III 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](#).