

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



2nd Week

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Features :

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

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GS Paper 1

Subject: Indian Society

Topic: Secularism

What is the long-running legal dispute over AMU's minority character

News: The article discusses the long-running legal dispute over Aligarh Muslim University's minority character.

Background:

A 7-judge Bench of the Supreme Court recently started hearing the matter related to Aligarh Muslim University's minority character.

What is the history of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)?

AMU's origins can be traced back to the **Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MOA) College**, established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875. It was established to help Muslims overcome educational backwardness and prepare for government services.

It imparted Western education as well as Islamic theology. Sir Syed also advocated for women's education. In 1920, the institution was conferred university status.

What does a 'minority character' of an educational institution mean?

Article 30 (1) of the Constitution empowers all religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

This provision reinforces India's commitment to ensure the welfare of **minority communities** by guaranteeing that it will not discriminate in giving aid based on their 'minority' status.

What has been the Supreme Court's stand on AMU's minority character over the years?

The legal dispute over AMU's minority status started in 1967:

S. Azeez Basha and another versus Union of India 1967: Here SC was reviewing changes made in 1951 and 1965 to the AMU Act of 1920. The petitioners argued that Muslims established AMU and, therefore, had the right to manage it.

Observations of the Court:

- SC held that **AMU was neither established nor administered by the Muslim minority.**
- It emphasized that AMU was **established through a central Act** to ensure the government's recognition of its degrees.
- It also stated that the university was **not solely operated by Muslims.**

Why has this legal issue persisted?

Since 1967, the issue has persisted due to a combination of judicial interpretations and executive actions. These include:

In 1981, an amendment to the AMU Act explicitly affirmed its minority status.

In 2005, the AMU implemented a reservation policy (reserving 50% of seats in postgraduate medical courses for Muslim candidates). This was challenged in the **Allahabad High Court** which overturned the reservation and **nullified the 1981 Act**. It held that AMU, according to the SC's verdict in the **S. Azeez Basha** case, did not qualify as a minority institution.

In 2006, various petitions, including one from the Union government, contested the High Court's decision before the Supreme Court.

In 2016, the government withdrew the appeal filed by the government. It held that the government cannot be seen as setting up a minority institution in a secular state.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

On Republic Day Parade Tableaux Selection – Show of fairness

News: The article discusses the procedure for the Republic Day parade tableaux selection.

Background:

The tableaux at the Republic Day Parade reflect the country's cultural splendour and diversity. Around 15 or 16 tableaux from States/UTs are selected each year.

However, there has been frequent controversy over the final selection of these tableaux. The Opposition-ruled states have been raising questions on the alleged politically motivated decisions to exclude their tableau from the parade.

What is the procedure followed for tableau selection?

1. **Screening by Experts:** **Defence Ministry** has a screening mechanism for participants in the parade. A committee of distinguished persons from various fields, including Padma awardees, is set up to screen proposals from States and organisations.
2. **Constructing the Tableau:** The **Ministry of Culture** had empanelled 30 agencies for design and fabrication of tableaux through an open selection process and States/UTs are advised to engage these agencies for the same.
3. **Proposal of a New Rotational Plan:** **Defence Ministry** has also finalised a **rotational plan** which will ensure that all States/UTs get a fair chance to display their tableaux **within a three-year cycle**.

What should be the way forward?

The selection process should be **apolitical and transparent**. The new proposal of a rotational opportunity for each State/UT is a fairer, more transparent mechanism.

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

On Speaker's Powers in Anti-Defection Cases – The Speaker's court

News: The article discusses the recent Maharashtra Assembly Speaker's ruling in the defection case related to Shiv Sena factions.

A detailed article on **Anti-Defection Law** can be [read here](#).

The recent decision by Maharashtra Assembly Speaker's ruling in the case of disqualification petitions by rival factions of the Shiv Sena has brought to attention the Presiding Officer's powers under the anti-defection law. According to the author, if decisions on defection disputes are in the hands of Speakers instead of an independent authority, political considerations will keep leading to unfair rulings.

What was the Speaker's ruling in this case?

1. **Recognition of the Eknath Shinde Faction as Shiv Sena:** The Speaker has ruled that there was no case to disqualify members of the Eknath Shinde or the Uddhav B. Thackeray (UBT) faction. It recognizes the Eknath Shinde faction as the 'real political party'.
2. **No Violation of Whip:** The Speaker declared that the appointee of the UBT faction ceased to be the authorized whip, and that the appointee of the Shinde group was the valid whip. Hence, there was no case of the Shinde loyalists violating any whip.

What were the observations made by the Supreme Court earlier in this case?

1. The **Speaker was wrong** in recognising the Shinde faction's appointee as the **party's whip**.
2. No faction or group can argue that they constitute the original political party as a defence against disqualification on the ground of defection.
3. The **percentage of members in each faction is irrelevant** to the disqualification case (determining which faction is the real party being the relevant factor).
4. The Speaker may have to decide on which faction is the real party in this case of defection. For this, the **party constitution and leadership structure submitted to the Election Commission** could be considered.

Why is the Maharashtra Speaker's decision wrong according to the author?

- 1) In **Rajendra Singh Rana vs Swami Prasad Maurya (2007)**, the Supreme Court had said that when members of the ruling party join the Opposition party and try to form the government, they have voluntarily given up the membership of their original party. Thus, the consequence of the conduct of the Shinde group of MLAs is disqualification.
- 2) In **Subhash Desai vs Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra & Ors. (2023)**, the Supreme Court observes that a split has taken place in the Shiv Sena party, and thus two factions have come into existence. But the Tenth Schedule does not recognise a split now. So, a split in a party no longer exempts the legislators from disqualification.
- 3) It is not at all the function of the Speaker to determine which faction is the real party. This question is decided only by the Election Commission of India. This decision of the Speaker was beyond his jurisdiction.

What are the legal remedies available against the Speaker's decision?

The UBT faction may now approach the Supreme Court again, on the grounds that the Speaker's decisions are against the Court's observations.

Topic: Indian Constitution

Crisis with the Rule of Law- Curb the disillusionment with the traditional rule of law

News: The article discusses how India is updating its laws and law enforcement methods. It raises concerns about new, quicker methods like bulldozers and encounters, which might bypass fair legal processes. It emphasizes the importance of following traditional legal procedures to ensure justice and fairness.

What is the importance of Law in Society?

1. **Establishes Social Order:** Laws like the Constitution of India set clear boundaries between right and wrong, maintaining order and stability.
2. **Ensures Fairness:** Laws uphold principles of justice and equality. Gandhi's non-violent opposition to the salt tax under British rule exemplifies fighting against unfair laws.
3. **Facilitates Modern Governance:** Updating outdated laws, as seen in the Jan Vishwas Act, ensures that legislation keeps pace with modern societal needs and challenges.
4. **Protects Rights and Freedoms:** Laws safeguard individual rights and freedoms, ensuring that every citizen is treated fairly under the rule of law.

What changes are happening in Indian Laws?

1. **Modernizing outdated laws:** Laws like the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita are introduced to replace old colonial laws, aligning with modern legal thinking. The Jan Vishwas Act updated 42 old laws, including the Indian Post Office Act and Railways Act, to make them more relevant to current times.
2. **Reducing imprisonment for minor offenses:** This Act aims to ease the business environment by reducing the legal burden and fear of imprisonment for small offenses.

What is the crisis with the Rule of Law?

1. **Credibility crisis:** The rule of law in India is facing a crisis of credibility, where its integrity is being questioned.
2. **Altered law perception:** There's a shift in seeing law as a mere 'power resource' rather than a system of justice, affecting its fair application.
3. **New law enforcement methods:** The use of bulldozers and encounters for policing, replacing traditional investigation methods, raises concerns about bypassing due process.
4. **Examples of misuse:** Instances civilian deaths in Kashmir under security forces highlight the dangers of these new methods.

What are the concerns related to these changes?

1. **Bypassing fair legal processes:** New methods like bulldozers and encounters skip traditional legal procedures, risking unjust outcomes.
2. **Targeting the innocent:** Quick justice methods can mistakenly target innocent people, as seen in wrongful actions in Kashmir.
3. **Abuse of power:** These shortcuts allow for potential abuse at the ground level, as highlighted in the shooting incident in France.
4. **Loss of accountability:** Without adequate debate and democratic checks, these methods lack transparency and accountability.

5. **Risk of majoritarian misuse:** These changes could lead to law enforcement based on majority opinion, not on impartial justice, affecting minority rights and fair treatment.

What should be done?

1. Ensuring fairness requires **sticking to established legal procedures** rather than quick, forceful methods.
2. Replace encounters and bulldozer demolitions with proper investigations involving evidence gathering and due process.
3. Continue **updating laws**, like through the Jan Vishwas Act, to keep them relevant and fair.
4. Focus on law enforcement that **adheres to principles of legality**, necessity, and non-discrimination.
5. Increase **public awareness of legal rights** and processes to foster a society that respects the rule of law.

Subject: Governance

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

Issues with online gaming in India - Regulating India's online gaming industry

What is the current state of online services in India?

1. **Internet Usage:** India has the world's second-largest internet user base with 692 million users.
2. **Mobile App Engagement:** The average daily mobile app usage is at 4.9 hours, a 32% increase since 2019.
3. **Media and Entertainment Dominance:** Around 82% of app usage is for media and entertainment, with social media being a major part.
4. **Online Gaming:** The online gaming industry is booming, growing at 27% CAGR, with potential risks like addiction and financial frauds.

What are the issues with online gaming in India?

1. **Concerns of Addiction and Mental Health:** The rise in online gaming has brought issues like addiction, mental illness, and even suicides.
2. **Financial Frauds and Risks:** Players are exposed to financial frauds, especially due to the lack of distinction between legal gaming platforms and illegal gambling/betting sites.
3. **Illegal Offshore Gambling Markets:** The illegal offshore gambling market in India receives about \$100 billion per year from Indian deposits and has grown 20% in the past three years.
4. **Losses to the Exchequer:** Due to these illegal operations, India loses approximately \$45 billion annually in potential taxation.
5. **National Security and Money Laundering:** The sector has been linked to national security concerns and money laundering, as **highlighted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance**.

How is the government responding?

Response in India:

1. **Proposing New Regulations:** The Indian government is working on new forms of digital regulation to address online gaming issues.

2. **Information Technology Rules, 2021:** This initiative is a significant step towards digital oversight, although the implementation of Self-Regulatory Bodies has been delayed.
3. **Challenges with State Bans:** Some states attempted to ban online gaming, but enforcing these bans is difficult due to the Internet's cross-border nature.

For more information read [articles1](#), [articles 2](#)

Global Response (Example of the UK):

1. **Centralized Government Regulator:** The UK employs a centralized government regulator to oversee the gaming sector. This regulator publishes quarterly reports on the effectiveness of gaming regulation, showing significant fines imposed for non-compliance and a reduction in disordered gaming behavior.

Way forward:

To move forward, India needs to implement strict regulatory frameworks for online gaming, inspired by models like the UK's centralized regulator. Specialized authorities should be established to distinguish legal from illegal gaming platforms, addressing issues of addiction, financial fraud, and national security. This approach will safeguard the 373 million Indian gamers and combat annual tax losses due to illegal gambling.

Topic: Important aspects of governance

Issues related to policing in India - A case diary for the Indian police

News: The article talks about a three-day conference in Jaipur for top-level police officers from across India, focusing on various issues related to policing in India.

What are the issues related to policing in India?

1. **Low Public Trust:** The Indian police are perceived negatively by the public, leading to a lack of trust and confidence in their capabilities.
2. **Centre-State Conflict:** There is tension between the central government and some state governments regarding the Indian Police Service (IPS). States view IPS officers as outsiders and prefer recruiting their own personnel.
3. **Structural Imbalances:** The police hierarchy is skewed, with IPS officers receiving most attention and opportunities, while lower ranks lack chances to demonstrate their capabilities. This structure contrasts with many countries where officers rise through the ranks based on merit and performance.
4. **Political Influence:** Policing in India is heavily influenced by politics, with officers often struggling to resist illegal demands from politicians, affecting their autonomy and operational independence.
5. **Inadequate Training and Development:** Lower-ranking officers lack sufficient training and development opportunities, hindering their ability to effectively serve and protect the community.

Way forward:

To improve policing in India, a major restructuring is necessary, focusing on bridging the gap between higher and lower ranks and fostering empathy towards the common man. Educating lower ranks and shielding the police from political interference are crucial. This approach, mirroring global practices, can enhance the force's reputation and efficiency.

Subject: Social Justice

Topic: Issues relating to Health

On the Cervical Cancer Vaccine Drive

News: The article discusses the proposed cervical cancer vaccination drive in India.

Background:

Around **75,000 women in India die each year** of cervical cancer. India accounts for **1/5th of the world's cervical vaccine burden**. It is also the **2nd-most common cancer among Indian women**, after breast cancer. The Government is planning to roll out vaccines for cervical cancer later this year. **Cervavac** is the indigenous vaccine, developed by the Serum Institute of India (SII), that will be used in the government campaign.

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus and 90% of sexually active women already have it. At least **14 HPV types** have been identified to have the potential to cause cancer. Among these, HPV types 16 and 18 are the most lethal.

How does the HPV vaccine prevent cancers?

It **prevents the entry** of four common types of HPV (Type 16, 18, 6 and 11) thereby **preventing infections and genital warts**.

More than **95% of all cervical cancer cases** are linked to persistent infection with high-risk strains of HPV. Thus, vaccination can be effectively used to thereby prevent cervical cancer cases.

HPV infection is also linked to **cancers of anus, vagina and oropharynx**, which can also be reduced through it.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

- 1) The vaccine must be administered in **adolescent girls before they are sexually active**. This is because the vaccine can only prevent the entry of the virus. The response to the vaccine is also better in adolescence.
- 2) Although not covered by the planned government campaign, the vaccine can also be administered to **adolescent boys** and is recommended for **men who have sex with men**.
- 3) While the vaccine is not as effective among older women, it can still be administered up to the age of 45 years.

What are the challenges in preventing cervical cancer through vaccination?

1. **Expensive:** It costs about Rs 2,000 a shot, hence expensive for a large section of the country's population.
2. **Lack of Awareness:** There is a huge lack of awareness about the disease.

For instance, a minimum of two screenings of women by age 35 and again by age 45 is recommended but doesn't usually happen in India.

Topic: Issues relating to Education

Mulya Pravah 2.0 - An ambitious push for values, ethics in higher education

News: The article discusses the Mulya Pravah 2.0 guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission. These guidelines aim to promote ethics and values in higher education.

What is Mulya Pravah 2.0?

Mulya Pravah 2.0 is an updated guideline from the University Grants Commission (UGC) aimed at promoting ethical practices and human values in higher education institutions. It was introduced following unethical practices highlighted by a human resource managers' survey, such as favoritism, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination in various organizational processes. The guideline's primary focus is on building value-based institutions by developing respect for fundamental duties, constitutional values, and national bonding.

Key aspects of Mulya Pravah 2.0 include:

1. **Transparency:** It emphasizes transparent administration and decision-making based on institutional and public interest, free from biases.
2. **Accountability and Ethics:** Institutions are expected to ensure integrity, fairness, and high ethical standards in their administration.
3. **Inclusivity and Respect:** The guideline encourages respect for constitutional values, inclusiveness, and global citizenship.
4. **Confidentiality vs. Public Scrutiny:** While it stresses confidentiality, this contrasts with the right to information for accountability. Institutions are urged to disclose critical information publicly.
5. **Role of Teachers and Staff:** Teachers are expected to be role models, maintaining good conduct and standards. Staff and students' unions should support administration constructively.

For information on Mulya Pravah [read here](#)

What are the concerns related to Mulya Pravah 2.0?

1. **Suppression of Dissent:** The guidelines may inadvertently suppress different opinions, crucial for institutional growth.
2. **Vague Terminology:** Terms like 'dignified manner' for raising issues are not clearly defined, **leading to potential misuse and misinterpretation.**
3. **Threat to Unions:** There's a concern that the guidelines could be used to **undermine the voices of staff and student unions.** Past instances of banning and suspending unions and accusing their representatives suggest a risk of similar actions under these guidelines.

Way forward:

To improve Mulya Pravah 2.0, clear definitions of terms like 'dignified manner' should be provided to prevent misuse. Ensuring a balance between confidentiality and public scrutiny is crucial. The guidelines should foster open dialogue and respect diverse opinions, especially from unions, to strengthen the integrity and growth of higher education institutions.

Subject: International Relations

Topic: India and its neighborhood- relations

Emerging Challenges for India after the Bangladesh Elections

News: The article discusses the emerging challenges for India in the wake of the recent Bangladesh Elections. It highlights the allegations against the Awami League government and suggests a way forward for India.

Background:

Ms. Sheikh Hasina (Awami League) recently came back in power in Bangladesh for a record 5th time (4th in a row). However, concerns were raised about the lack of participation of the principal opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party-Jamaat-e-Islami coalition.

What are the positive outcomes for India?

- 1. Continuity in Bilateral Relations:** There will be continuity in the excellent bilateral relationship with Bangladesh, addressing India's security and connectivity concerns.
- 2. Power Purchase Agreement:** Power purchase agreement has been recently signed by the Hasina government.

What are the allegations against the Awami League?

- 1. Election Irregularities:** Large-scale false voting (such as the use of under-age children voting by turn several times) has been reported. This signals a firm step towards a one-party police state.
- 2. Allegations of Corruption:** Controversies such as stock market scams, large-scale money laundering, bank defaults, and crony capitalism have emerged.
- 3. Anti-Secular Islamist Agenda:** The Awami government plans to create model mosque cum islamic cultural centres. These can replace the syncretic and secular Bengali linguistic culture, threatening Bangladesh's secular identity.

What are the emerging challenges in front of India?

- 1. Harming India's Image:** According to the author, there will be allegations against India of supporting autocracies abroad to suit strategic interests.
- 2. Anti-India Sentiment in Bangladesh:** Anti-Indian sentiments (especially among the youth) are rising in Bangladesh due to its support for an increasingly autocratic regime.
- 3. Support to a Problematic Dispensation:** Massive corruption scandals, mismanagement of economy, and abnormal price rise has tainted the Hasina government lately.
- 4. Opposing Stand of India's Strategic Partners:** India's strategic partners (such as the USA, and its European and Asian allies) have criticized Bangladesh elections.
- 5. Lack of pro-Indian Elements in the Government:** Most pro-Indian elements in the Awami League have been eliminated.

What should be done?

India's loss of influence in the neighbourhood, from Nepal to the Maldives, reflects badly on India's "Neighbourhood First" policy. Hence, the following steps can be taken:

1. India should push hard to induct some pro-Indian leaders in the cabinet.
2. Secular alternatives to the Awami League should be explored.

On India-Maldives Bilateral Relations – Change for the worse

News: The article discusses the recent developments which signal a decline in India-Maldives relations. It highlights the importance of maintaining sound bilateral relations which will be in both countries' interest.

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

Background:

There has been a rapid decline in ties between India and the Maldives, especially after the Maldives' newly elected President Mohamed Muizzu came to power on the back of his **"India Out" campaign**.

The recent incident involved tweets by 3 Maldivian Ministers, attacking Indian Prime Minister for promoting the Lakshadweep islands for tourism and made derogatory remarks about Indians. The Ministers were then suspended, and the Maldivian government has distanced itself from them.

What other incidents signal a decline in bilateral relations?

1. State visits of the Maldives' President to Turkey and China — the first President to not visit India on the first state visit.
2. Withdrawal of India's military personnel.
3. [Revoking of the joint Hydrography Pact](#).

How should both countries respond to this situation?

Both countries need to reassess their responses to this situation.

Maldives:

It cannot afford to alienate India because:

1. **India's proximity to Maldives.**
2. **India's rising economic stature:** Indian tourists made up the most arrivals to Maldives post-COVID-19.
3. India's historical position as a **net security provider** in the Indian Ocean.
4. India's **support to Maldives during the COVID-19 pandemic**.
5. India's **infrastructure and development projects** in the islands.

India:

India must realise that hostility towards a much smaller neighbour serves no purpose.

Instead, both countries can benefit from a stronger relationship through the intense **strategic partnership** and **cooperation on the international stage** shown in the past.

Hence, India should ensure that these developments do not change the basic structure of bilateral ties or affect regional stability.

Why is the Maldives important to India?

1. **Strategic Location:** The Maldives archipelago, with its 27 atolls, is strategically positioned in the Indian Ocean, integral to India's maritime security.

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2. **Exclusive Economic Zone:** It has a nearly one million square km exclusive economic zone, vital for regional influence and security.
3. **Proximity to India:** Located just 700 km from Kochi, India, the Maldives offers a significant geographic advantage.
4. **Historical Importance:** The British maintained a base on Maldives' Gan Island until 1976, indicating the long-recognized strategic value of the region.

What is the issue with India's diplomatic approach?

1. **Continental Fixation:** India's focus has been more on land-based defense, leading to sporadic and random maritime initiatives. India needs to keep the countries like Maldives close, it will help in strengthening India's maritime position.
2. **Perception of Dominance:** Indian diplomacy can seem patronizing, particularly in smaller neighboring nations like the Maldives..
3. **Impact of Domestic Politics:** Domestic issues in India, such as unchecked communal speeches, can negatively impact its image abroad.
4. **Need for Sensitive Diplomacy:** India's approach has sometimes been seen as overbearing, underlining the need for more sensitivity and balance in its diplomatic relations, particularly with smaller nations.
5. **China's Maritime Investments:** China's politico-economic strategies include investments in regional countries, enhancing its influence in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, the development of strategic ports like **Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan, along with leasing a military/naval base in Djibouti**, further challenges India's regional influence.
6. **Use of the "Islamic Card":** Coupling its influence with Pakistan's religious incitement, China is positioning itself as a significant player in predominantly Muslim nations like the Maldives.

What initiatives have been taken by India to overcome maritime issues?

1. **Creation of a Specialized Naval Unit:** In 2005-06, India established a dedicated naval organization for foreign cooperation, led by a two-star admiral.
2. **Equipment Transfer to Neighboring Countries:** India transferred patrol boats, aircraft, and helicopters from its own navy to Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, and Seychelles.
3. **Training and Advisory Support:** The Indian Navy has provided training and advisors to maritime neighbors.
4. **Responsive to Regional Crises:** India has consistently been the first responder in regional crises, such as the 1988 Maldives coup attempt, the 2004 tsunami, and the 2014 water crisis in Maldives.
5. **Maritime Diplomacy Enhancement:** India's maritime diplomacy initiatives aim to shape the maritime environment favorably, aligning with its foreign policy and national security objectives.
6. **Promotion of SAGAR Vision:** India's 2015 SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative emphasizes broad regional maritime cooperation.

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

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

On the India-Oman Free Trade Agreement – Bridging The Gulf

News: The article discusses the status of trade between India and Oman and the Gulf. It also highlights the possible benefits and challenges arising due to the proposed India-Oman Free Trade Agreement.

The text of the proposed trade agreement between India and Oman has been substantially concluded, indicating that a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) (a free trade agreement, or FTA) may be signed over the next few weeks.

What is the current status of trade between India and Oman and the Gulf?

Oman is India’s 29th largest trading partner, but the **3rd largest export destination** among the 6 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

India exports gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery to Oman, and imports petroleum products, urea, propylene, and ethylene polymers.

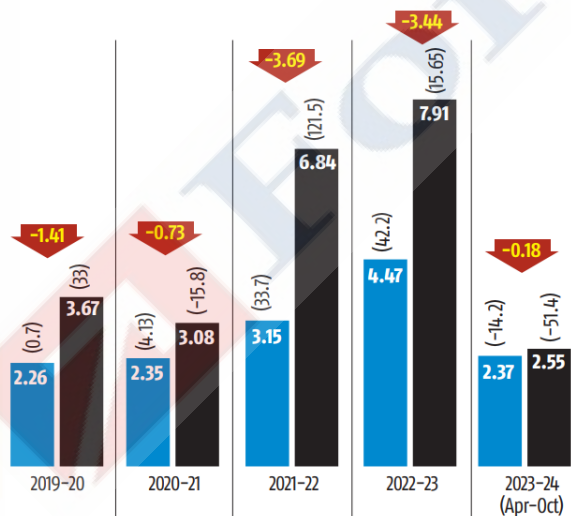
Bilateral trade has been growing, increasing from \$3.15 billion in 2021-22 (FY22) to \$4.48 billion during FY23 (**42% growth**).

The GCC countries contribute about **1/6th of India’s total trade**. The trade balance, however, is in favour of the GCC (due to India’s petroleum imports).

What could be the potential benefits of the India-Oman CEPA?

INDIA-OMAN TRADE

■ Exports ■ Imports ▼ Trade Balance
 Figures in brackets denote growth in %



Source: Department of Commerce

- Facilitate Trade:** It could substantially reduce the customs duties, and even bring them down to zero in some instances.
- Provide a Market for Indian Exports:** Oman has a high per capita income of \$25,060 (India’s being \$2,370). Thus, it could emerge as a market for more expensive exports from India.
- Strategic Outreach in the Gulf:** India is looking to improve its relations with the Persian Gulf nations as a balancing act in the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas conflict.
- Balance Tilted in India’s Favour:** There is hardly any item sold by Oman that can threaten Indian industry. On the other hand, India might get important market access for its exports to Oman in the form of finished products. For instance, raw material from Oman such as petrochemicals, chemicals, and crude oil will enter India at a lower/zero duty. In return, India will get market access for finished products such as

engineering, chemicals, plastics, textiles.

What are the challenges?

Limited Opportunities: Oman is a much smaller country than India, growth in trade between the two is expected to be limited. With a population of 1.4 billion, compared to Oman's 5 million, India represents a much larger consumer market for Oman.

India and Singapore are strengthening their economic and trade relationships

News: This article explains how India and Singapore are strengthening their economic and trade relationships.

What is India's economy situation?

1. **Fastest Growing Large Economy:** India is the world's fastest-growing large economy, projected to move from fifth to third in global economic size by 2030.
2. **Strong Fundamentals:** India's robust economic fundamentals are attracting significant global investments.
3. **Global Influence:** India's economy is poised to drive a fifth of global growth by 2031, reflecting its significant global impact.

What initiative are taken for strengthening economic and trade relationships between India and Singapore?

1. **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement:** Signed in 2005, this agreement significantly boosted bilateral trade, which quadrupled to reach \$35.6 billion by 2022-23.
2. **100% FDI Policy in India:** India's policy allowing 100% Foreign Direct Investment in most manufacturing sectors attracted numerous Singaporean conglomerates and institutions to ramp up investments in India.
3. **Growth of Indian Companies in Singapore:** From 2014 to 2023, the number of Indian companies in Singapore increased from 6,000 to over 9,000, covering diverse sectors like tourism, telecommunications, financial services, and e-commerce.
4. **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)-PayNow Linkage:** Launched in 2023, this is the first real-time payment systems linkage in the world, facilitating easier and faster financial transactions between the two countries.
5. **Trade Trust Framework:** Introduced in 2023, this framework utilizes blockchain technology for electronic Bills of Lading, enhancing efficiency in trade finance transactions between Singapore and Indian entities.
6. **Focus on Renewable Energy:** India's renewable energy initiatives, with 92% of its 2022 power capacity growth from renewables, attract interest from Singapore for investment and sourcing.

How does this partnership affect global trade and Investment?

1. **Global Trade Influence:** The India-Singapore economic corridor is influential in shaping global trade and investment patterns.
2. **Leadership on the Global Stage:** India, with Singapore as a key ally, is increasingly influential in global economic and political matters, such as its role in the G20.

On the UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC) - The UAE-India partnership has a new catalyst in play

News: The article discusses the recent growth in UAE-India bilateral relations due to Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). It also highlights the objectives of the UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC).

The United Arab Emirates-India relationship is one of the region's most dynamic partnerships. It highlights the positive benefits that can be achieved through **open, consistent and constructive dialogue; visionary leadership; and mutual respect.**

It has shown exemplary progress in ensuring **free and open trade, promoting the development of resilient and sustainable economies, to multilateral cooperation.**

The [Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement \(CEPA\)](#) remains fundamental to the continued dynamism of this partnership.

What have been the outcomes of India-UAE CEPA?

The CEPA has led to:

1. Expanded market access for Emirati and Indian businesses seeking to enter each other's respective markets.
2. Significant decrease in tariffs.
3. Streamlined customs procedures.
4. Introduction of a series of robust and transparent regulations that support rules-based competition.

Due to this, UAE has become one of India's most important economic partners. It has risen to the position of **India's 4th largest investor, 3rd largest trading partner and 2nd largest export destination.**

What have been the outcomes of the CEPA in addition to strengthened economic bonds?

According to the author, the CEPA has done much more than strengthen our economic bonds. This includes:

1. Led to much **deeper and more nuanced** (which consider all factors and stakeholders) **relations.**
2. Encouraged **strategic and political alignment** never seen before in the history of the relationship. This includes:
 - a. **Support at Multilateral Fora:** India's support throughout the UAE's presidency of CoP-28, and that of the UAE of India's G20 presidency, are indicative of the mutual support.
 - b. **BRICS Membership:** UAE's recent addition to the BRICS grouping will serve to further catalyse bilateral ties and promote peace and prosperity at the global level.

Apart from this, at this year's Vibrant Gujarat Summit, the **UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC)** will be officially unveiled.

What will be the objectives of the UICC?

1. **Outlet to Deepen Commercial Ties:** It will provide a dynamic new outlet for the business communities of the two countries to deepen commercial ties.
2. **Leverage India-UAE Strategic Partnership:** The Council seeks to leverage the rapidly developing strategic partnership between the two governments.
3. **Encourage Business Partnerships:** It seeks to encourage partnerships across all levels of the two business communities. It will focus on critical spheres such as startups, women's entrepreneurship, MSMEs and the services sector.
4. **Holding Events to build Trust:** It will facilitate a range of events that support trust, dialogue and open engagement among the business communities.

Topic: Thus, the Council will provide business communities with the resources they need to fully unlock the benefits and opportunities of CEPA.

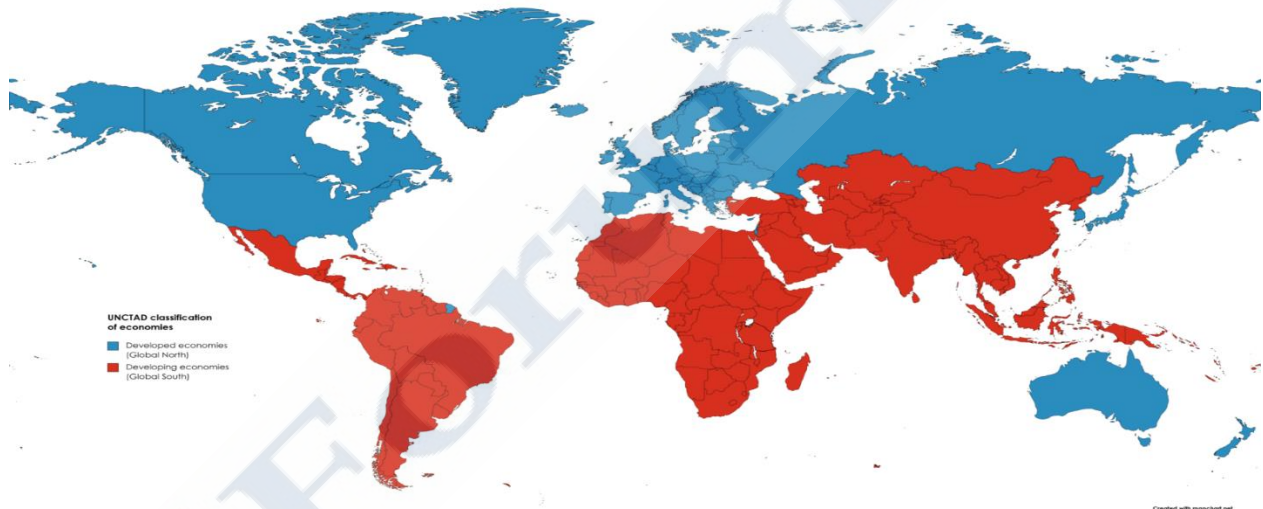
Who are the Global South?

News: The article discusses the history of the term 'Global South (GS)'. It also highlights the variations (based on population, income, conflict levels) within the Global South countries.

A detailed article on **India and Global South** can be [read here](#).

What is the Global South?

- The Global South refers to countries often characterized as developing, less developed, or underdeveloped, mainly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
- These nations have higher levels of poverty, income inequality, and challenging living conditions compared to the wealthier nations of the Global North.
- The Global North are richer nations that are located mostly in North America and Europe, with some additions in Oceania and elsewhere.



Source: Wikipedia.

What is the history of the term?

The term Global South (GS) was possibly first used by **Carl Oglesby**. It became popular due to the **Willy Brandt (former German Chancellor) Report**, which highlighted the massive gap in standards of living between the North and the South (separated by the Brandt Line). The term has become more popular over the last 40 years (as a reference to “developing countries”).

What are the variations within the Global South countries?

According to the author, the best way to study the composition of GS is to look at data on population and per capita income of GS nations. Data on the 50 most populous GS countries (with over 20 million population) brings out the following insights:

The situation of these countries varies enormously with respect to income and population, both across continents and within them.

1. **Population Levels:** 4 out of the 5 most populous nations of the world are in Asia (including China and India).
2. **Economic Growth:** In recent decades, Asian economies (especially in East Asia) have grown the fastest and are expected to do so in the future as well.
3. **Income Levels:** Latin American countries (except Venezuela) are either upper-middle or high-income. The African members of the GS are generally poorer with 7 of the 20 countries having per capita income of less than \$1,000.
4. **Conflict Situation:** 3 large African nations (Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan) have been affected by long and bloody civil conflicts. Civil conflicts have halted development in 4 Asian nations too (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Myanmar).

How much is the Global South's influence in world affairs?

The North is much more advanced than the South in power, wealth and technology. There is also no GS organisation with a secretariat, like the OECD of the Global North. Thus, the role of GS has been low. However, the situation is changing in the following ways:

1. **Increased Participation:** GS is building forums within important North-created international institutions, such as IMF, WTO and UN agencies.
2. **Increased Cooperation:** GS has created membership-limited organisations such as OPEC, ASEAN, and the African Union. Organisations such as the OPEC have been effective in advancing the interests of its members.

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

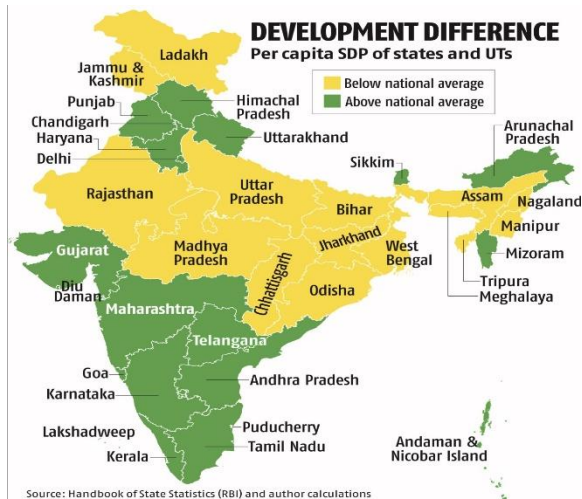
Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it

Economic divide among India's States - The geography of unequal growth

News: The article discusses the growing economic gap between India's states over the last 30 years.

What is the current economic divide in India's States?

Wealthier states are mainly south, west, and northwest, while poorer states are in the north, center, and east. The economic divide is marked by a 2.5 times higher per capita SDP in wealthier states compared to poorer ones in 2019-20, growing from a 1.7 times difference in 1990-91.



What are the reasons for economic divide in India's States?

- 1. Sectoral Growth Gap in Manufacturing:** The gap in manufacturing between higher- and lower-income states grew significantly, with the former's per capita GDP being 3.6 times higher in 2019-20, up from 2.4 times in 1990-91.
- 2. Service Sector and IT Boom:** In services, the gap also widened, with a rise in the GDP ratio from 2.0 to 2.9 during the same period. Post-liberalization, the growth in services, particularly IT companies, has been significant, contributing to the economic disparity.
- 3. Infrastructure vs. Power Availability:** Despite having comparable road and rail infrastructure, lower-income states, particularly in the Gangetic and eastern regions, lag in per capita power availability.
- 4. Shift in Investment:** There's been a shift from public to private sector investment. The public sector's share in gross fixed capital formation dropped from 40% to 23% between 1990-91 and 2019-20, while the private sector's share rose from 18% to 38%, leading to a concentration of investment in wealthier states.
- 5. Labor Availability Variations:** Lower-income states (especially in the north and central regions), have lower urban labor force participation rates and fewer workers with regular wage/salary income, affecting their industrial growth.
- 6. Entrepreneurship Concentration:** The higher-income states accounted for around 75% of organized-sector factories in 2019-20. Additionally, out of 91 richest Indians residing in India, 87 live in these high-growth states.
- 7. Education and Skill Disparity:** About 70% of engineering seats in India are in higher-income states, indicating a major imbalance in access to higher education and consequently, a disparity in attracting high-tech industries.

Way forward:

To bridge India's economic divide, it's essential to boost entrepreneurship and skill development in the poorer states, upgrade power infrastructure in regions like the Gangetic and eastern areas and expand access to technical education. Additionally, forming interconnected national value chains that link the resources of wealthier states with the potential of poorer ones can foster balanced economic growth.

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

On the Atal Setu and Indian Economy – Bridge to prosperity

News: The article discusses the significance of the recently inaugurated Atal Setu and the positive signs for the future growth of the Indian economy.

Recently, the country's longest sea bridge, the **22-km long six-lane Atal Setu (or the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link)** was inaugurated.

It is a significant step in India's bid to project itself as a key investment destination.

What are the positive signs for the Indian economy?

1. **Structural Reforms:** Over the past decade, the government has carried out various structural reforms which are helping India deal with its **twin-balance sheet problem** (both banks and corporates facing financial distress simultaneously).
2. **Healthy Banking Sector:** Indian banks have recovered, and they are capable of financing India's growth.
3. **Infrastructure Creation:** The government has taken the lead in boosting infrastructure. It has done this by higher capital expenditure and improving the implementation of projects. The pace of creation and quality of roads, railways, ports, airports or bridges has risen sharply from the long-term average.
4. **Other Advantages:** India has a young and ambitious labour force, a free-market economic system and a vibrant democracy.

Why is infrastructure creation important?

Good infrastructure — be it physical or digital — is important for India to take advantage of companies moving out of China. Developed country markets and investors are looking for countries that can replace China in the global supply chain.

What should be the way forward?

Most of the capital expenditure in the economy is due to **direct government spending**. Since there are limits to how much the government can spend, the private sector needs to contribute as well. India can leverage this opportunity to become a developed country in the next 25 years.

Issues associated with inverted import duties in India - Our import duty regime needs urgent correction

News: The article discusses India's plan to fix inverted import duties.

Inverted duty structure is a situation when inputs are taxed at higher rates than finished products, which can make domestic industry import dependent.

What are the problems with India's import duties?

1. **Increased Production Costs:** Inverted duties elevate production costs. This impacts sectors like textiles and engineering, diminishing their global competitiveness.
2. **Complex Tax System:** India's import tax system is marked by complexity, with multiple layers of tariffs and a perplexing inverted duty structure. This sector-specific, item-by-item tariff approach not only deters foreign investment but also undermines domestic manufacturing competitiveness.
3. **Negative Global Perception:** The rise in average import tariffs from 13.5% in 2014 to 18.3% in 2021 contradicts global trade trends, drawing international criticism.
4. **Hindered Global Integration:** High tariffs and a complex system make it challenging for Indian manufacturers to integrate into global value chains, crucial for economic growth in a globalized economy.

What government initiatives are in place to overcome these issues?

1. **Inter-Ministerial Coordination:** The commerce ministry has reportedly reached out to the finance ministry to rectify these distortions for over a dozen items in the Union budget, indicating a collaborative approach to tackle the issue.

2. **Focus on Rationalization:** Previous efforts focused on increasing tariffs on imported final products. The current initiative takes a broader approach, aiming to simplify the tariff system by reevaluating basic customs duties and other charges.

What should be done?

- 1) **Revise Inverted Duty Structure:** Reform the import duty system to lower taxes on inputs, particularly in critical sectors like textiles and engineering, to reduce production costs and enhance global competitiveness.
- 2) **Simplify and Rationalize Tariffs:** Make the tariff system more transparent and investor-friendly, to attract foreign investment and integrate Indian manufacturing into global value chains.

On India's K-Shaped Recovery - SBI report: K-shaped questions

News: The article discusses the recent report by SBI on India's K-shaped recovery. It highlights the flaws in the arguments presented in the report.

A new research report by the **State Bank of India (SBI)** seeks to debunk claims of India's "K-shaped" economic recovery.

Note: K-shaped recovery occurs when, following a recession, different parts of the economy recover at different rates, times, or magnitudes. This contrasts an even, uniform recovery across sectors, industries, or groups of people.

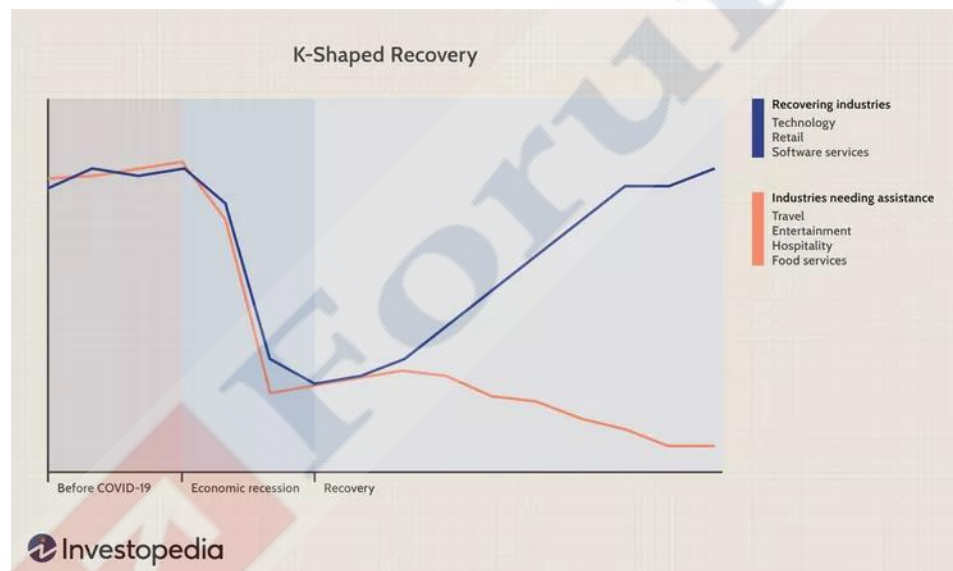


Figure 1. Source: Investopedia.

In the case of **India**, according to the author, there has been a stark difference in the way different sectors of the economy recovered after the pandemic. While the overall economic growth figures look robust, there is a growing underlying inequality.

What are the SBI report's arguments against India's recovery being K-shaped?

1. **Positive Emerging Patterns:** It highlights patterns of income, savings, consumption, expenditure and policy measures aimed at public welfare.
2. **Questions Parameters:** It questions the use of old parameters like **low two-wheeler sales** or **fragmented land holdings**.

For instance, low sales of two-wheelers could reflect savings being utilised to buy physical assets (real estate) and buyers shifting to purchasing used/entry-level cars.

3. **Rising Disposable Incomes in Non-Metro Areas:** It cites data from Zomato as an example of rising disposable income in non-metro areas.

4. **Decrease in Inequality:** It refers to the income tax data for FY22 to note that the **Gini coefficient had declined significantly** from 0.472 to 0.402 between FY14 and FY22.

It highlights that 36.3% of individual tax return filers belonging to the lowest income in FY14 have left the lowest income group and shifted upwards.

Why are the SBI report’s arguments against it flawed?

1. **High Welfare Spending indicated Economic distress:** The government has been forced to extend the scheme of subsidized food grain to 800 million Indians.

2. **Tax Data does not reflect Broader Economy:** Only a very small minority of people pay direct income tax. Hence, it is not reasonable to draw conclusions from tax data about broader inequality.

Income tax data is nominal and is affected by overall inflation, thus making it unviable for drawing conclusions.

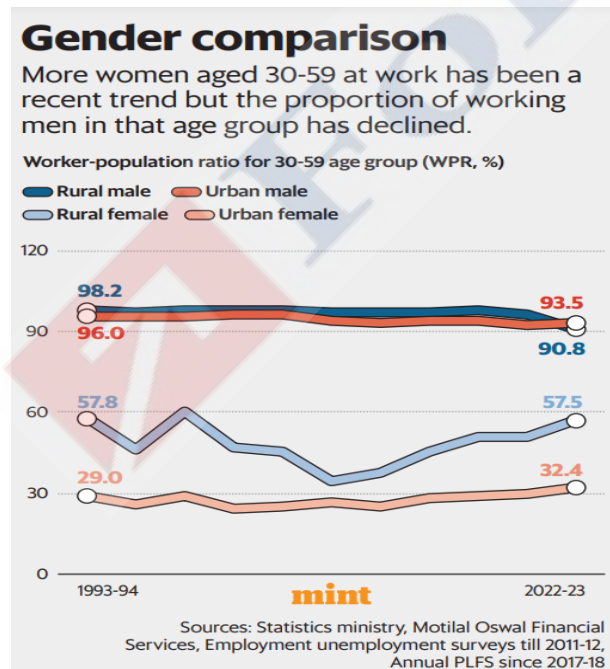
3. **Use of Tractor Sales Data:** Tractor sales (in place of two-wheeler sales) may be a better representative of the farm economy but not the overall rural economy.

On the Trends in Male and Female LFPR – Does India need to worry about a decline in its male workforce?

News: The article discusses gender-based employment trends presented in the 2022-23 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

The 2022-23 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) has highlighted a decent growth in India’s total employment, a rising female labour force participation ratio (LFPR) and a higher share of self-employment.

What are some findings that have not received enough attention according to the author?



First, while the LFPR and worker population ratio (WPR) of males aged above 15 years have increased in 2022-23, they have fallen for all ages, and **decreased sharply for the prime working age group of 30-59 years.**

Second, the female LFPR for the 30-59 years group has increased to 50.2% in 2022-23, the highest since 2004-05. Similar trends are visible in the WPR as well—up for females aged 30-59 years and down for males aged during the corresponding periods.

Third, while the LFPR and WPR for females have improved across urban and rural areas, these ratios for males have declined in both urban and rural India, with a substantial fall in urban areas.

What are the reasons behind these patterns noticed in the male rates?

A simultaneous rise in both male rates for the 15-29- years age bracket and fall in the 30-50-years group is surprising. There could be at least two plausible causes for this:	
1. Reversal of pandemic-related migration trends: Leading to a fall in male workers in rural areas, thus resulting in a WPR contraction.	2. Rise in the number of discouraged workers (one who is unemployed and not actively looking for work).
What are the problems with this reasoning? One , there should have been a sudden rise in WPR during the pandemic (2019-20 or 2020-21), as population estimates would not have fully captured reverse migration (from urban to rural). However, as the graph depicts, it was not so. Two , no simultaneous rise in urban male LFPR and WPR or a rise in the urban male unemployment rate. Three , higher-than-pandemic demand for work under the (MGNREGA raises doubts over a substantial reversal of reverse migration.	What could be the reasons behind discouragement? One , lack of job opportunities in rural areas (especially non-farm) led to a lower workforce. It fits well with sustained strong demand for MGNREGA work. Two , fiscal support to males (in the form of rural job, free/subsidized gas cylinders, free food, subsidized housing, etc.) was sufficient to make them stay out of the workforce. This scenario, according to the author, would be one of the worst situations because such lazy behaviour is unwarranted and indicates acceptance of subsistence living, which is unproductive for any economy.

What are the reasons for the rise in female LFPR?

It could be attributed to a lot of factors such as:

1. **Fiscal support:** It may have freed up time for women, which allowed more to join the workforce. However, the majority (up to 85%) of the increase in female employment is in the agriculture sector and self-employment category.
2. **Reversal in Male Migration:** It could also be due to a reversal in the trend of male migration, resulting in more time available to women, who have chosen to enter the agricultural sector.

Topic: Infrastructure

Develop Lakshadweep but protect its ecology

News: The article discusses the development of Lakshadweep into a high-end, eco-friendly tourist destination. This plan aims to limit visitor numbers to protect the environment, avoiding the environmental issues seen in the Maldives due to tourism.

What is the need for developing Lakshadweep?

1. **Alternative to the Maldives:** Tensions with the Maldives highlight the need for India to have its own high-end tourist destination.

2. **Preventing Environmental Damage:** The negative environmental impact in the Maldives underscores the need for a sustainable tourism model in Lakshadweep.
3. **Limited Space Management:** Lakshadweep's small size necessitates a controlled development approach to avoid overcrowding and ecological harm.
4. **Economic Development:** With only 10 of its 36 isles inhabited, developing Lakshadweep addresses the need for economic growth in this region.

What are the challenges in developing Lakshadweep?

1. **Limited Area:** Lakshadweep's small size (32 sq km) and limited inhabited islands (10 out of 36) pose a challenge for large-scale development.
2. **Exclusivity for High-End Tourism:** Due to space limitations, even with land reclamation, Lakshadweep is likely to cater only to the upper tier of travelers, making it an exclusive destination. This approach, though seemingly unfair, is a strategic choice to manage the area's constraints.
3. **Waste Management:** As seen in the Maldives, efficiently handling waste to prevent environmental degradation is a significant challenge.
4. **Balancing Exclusivity and Accessibility:** Developing high-end resorts while preserving the local environment, as opposed to the overcrowding seen in places like Goa, requires careful planning.
5. **Sustainability:** It's essential to adopt sustainable practices early on to prevent future environmental problems. Constructing new facilities, such as the planned airport, while preserving the environment, presents a significant challenge.

What can be learn from Maldives?

1. Maldives' experience shows how excessive tourism can lead to environmental degradation.
2. In the Maldives, waste disposal became a significant issue, with an estimated 300 tonnes of hard and soft waste dumped daily on a small island. This situation transformed a once-beautiful island into an overrun garbage dump, as highlighted in a 2012 BBC report. This example underscores the importance of effective waste management in Lakshadweep to avoid similar environmental degradation.
3. The swift rise in tourism in the Maldives emphasizes the fragility of small island ecosystems, underscoring the need to maintain a balance between tourist numbers and ecological conservation.

What should be done?

1. **Conduct Sustainability Surveys:** Carry out detailed surveys to ensure development in Lakshadweep is environmentally sustainable.
2. **Target High-End Tourism:** Cater to wealthier tourists, who can be taxed for the additional expenses, to manage the demand and fund eco-friendly initiatives.

Subject: Agriculture

Topic: Marketing of agricultural produce

On India's Agricultural Export Sector – Export potential

News: The article discusses the status of India's Agricultural Export Sector. It also highlights the challenges faced by the sector and suggests steps that need to be undertaken to overcome these challenges.

What is the current status of India's Agricultural Export Sector?

In 2022-23, the value of India's agricultural exports was **\$52.50 billion**, while in 2021-22 it was \$50.21 billion.

India's export basket includes:

- a. Basmati rice, non-basmati rice, sugar, spices, and oil meals (around **51.5% of India's agricultural exports**).
- b. Other agri products include coffee, tea, tobacco, fresh and processed fruit and juices, groundnuts, fresh vegetables, dairy products, and live animals.
- c. India is also a large exporter of buffalo meat and marine products.

The Union government expects agricultural exports to almost double to around **\$100 billion by 2030**.

What are the challenges faced by India's Agricultural Export Sector?

1. **Low on the Agri-export Value Chain:** Majority of India's exports are **low-value and semi-processed**.
2. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** This includes **lack of cold chain infrastructure** and **inefficient logistics**. This leads to spoilage and decreases the export competitiveness of Indian products (due to **quality issues** and **higher costs**).
3. **Structural Issues:** Issues such as the **small size of landholdings** and a **lack of access to credit** leads to farmers not transitioning to commercial production.
4. **Arbitrary Export Curbs:** India has recently banned exports various agricultural products (such as rice). This harms India's credibility as a reliable source of food exports.
5. **Lack of Diversification in Export Products:** According to a report, India's agri-export basket is concentrated (a few products accounting for a large share of exports).
6. **Recent Logistical Challenges:** This includes high freight rates and container shortages due to the Red Sea crisis.

What are the government initiatives undertaken to boost agriculture exports?

1. **Agri-Export Policy:** It calls for overhauling infrastructure and logistics, a greater involvement of state governments, and developing export-centric clusters as well as ensuring surplus quality produce.
2. **Agri-Cells in Indian embassies** across 13 countries have also been set up.

What should be done?

1. **Regarding Export Curbs:** Instead of opting for a protectionist trade policy, the government should make smart changes in the trade policy to control food inflation.
2. **Regarding Lack of Diversification:** India should aim to increase diversification in its food export basket to contain the risk to overall exports declining due to a decline in the production of one item or the other. For instance, India hopes to give a boost to exports of value-added **millet products**.
3. **Moving Up the Value Chain:** Attracting private investment in processing and related activities will help boost exports over time.

This will help push agricultural growth in the country as well as raise farmers' incomes.

Topic: Issues of buffer stocks and food security

Gap between India's cereal production and consumption - India's great grain mystery

News: The article discusses the gap between India's cereal production, which is around 300 million tonnes, and its consumption, less than 200 million tonnes. It explores reasons for this surplus, like changes in people's diet and possible underestimation of cereal used for feed and industrial purposes.

What is India's current Cereal status?

1. **Production Levels:** India's cereal production is around 300 million tonnes annually, with recent figures showing 304 million tonnes in 2022-23.
2. **Consumption Trends:** People consume less than 200 million tonnes, possibly even below 180 million tonnes, as per capita cereal consumption (PCCC) has been declining since the late 1970s.
3. **Surplus Situation:** A significant surplus exists, with a gap of about 100 million tonnes between production and consumption.

What are the reasons for the gap between production and consumption of cereal?

1. **Decreasing Per Capita Consumption:** Cereal consumption per person has been dropping, with figures showing a decrease from 15.3 kg per month in rural areas in 1977-78 to 11.3 kg in 2011-12.
2. **Changing Dietary Habits:** Urbanization, higher education levels, and diversification in food intake have contributed to reduced cereal consumption.
3. **Increased Export:** There's a significant rise in cereal exports, with 23 million tonnes in 2020-21 and 32 million tonnes in 2021-22.
4. **Underestimation in Feed Usage:** Experts suggest that the Economic Survey overestimates cereal 'net availability' due to a low allowance for seed, feed, and wastage (SFW- 5%,5%,2.5% respectively), set at 12.5%. They argue the 5% feed component is underestimated. Doubling it to 10% could decrease the cereal surplus by about 15 million tonnes, yet a significant surplus would persist.
5. **Industrial Uses of Cereals:** There's a possibility of increased industrial use of cereals, for products like beer and biscuits, which might not be fully accounted for in consumption estimates.
6. **What are the implications of this Cereal Gap?**
7. **Agricultural Policy Challenges:** The cereal surplus creates a challenge for policymakers to balance farmer incomes and market demands, questioning the effectiveness of current agricultural policies.
8. **Potential Resource Misallocation:** With declining per capita consumption (from 15.3 kg to 11.3 kg monthly in rural areas between 1977-78 and 2011-12), the surplus suggests possible overinvestment in cereal production.
9. **Impact on Global Trade:** India's increased exports, reaching 23 million tonnes in 2020-21 and 32 million tonnes in 2021-22, indicate the surplus's role in shaping India's position in the global cereal market.

What should be done?

1. India should consider **diversifying agriculture away from just rice and wheat.**
2. **Leveraging the surplus for increased exports**, as seen with 32 million tonnes exported in 2021-22, can be beneficial.
3. **Investigate and potentially expand cereals' industrial applications**, considering the speculated rise in use for products like beer and biscuits.
4. **Evaluate the impact of the public distribution system** on cereal consumption and distribution efficiency.

Subject: Environment

Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

On the Role of Political Decision-making and Public in curbing Air Pollution

News: The article discusses how the problem of air pollution involves making choices based on multiple trade-offs.

Background:

The problem of air pollution in India, especially in NCR, has now become a perennial problem rather than a seasonal one. Addressing it requires making difficult choices and tough decisions, both at the societal and governmental levels.

What are the trade-offs required in the case of air pollution?

A trade-off is a decision that involves losing something in exchange for gaining something else. It can also be defined as a compromise between two things.

The problem of air pollution involves making choices based on **multiple trade-offs between development and environmental preservation**.

Who should make these decisions?

According to the author, it is not the scientists (academia), or environmental activists that should make these decisions, but the politicians (governments).

The job of **academicians** is to generate and present evidence so that these trade-offs are done in an informed manner. Whereas **activists** have already made the trade-offs (generally pro-environment) which derails further discussion.

The **political class**, given that they are the chosen representatives of the people, should be the ones to make decisions regarding trade-offs. Unfortunately, they have been unable to do so.

What are the previous examples of political decision-making to curb air pollution?

1) **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor:** It segregated traffic to expand road space for public transport at the cost of private four-wheelers. It resulted in increased speed of public transport, increased travel time of private cars and improved pedestrian safety.

However, it was deemed a failure and discontinued. This was because the car-using-middle-class rejected this trade-off between the inconvenience and the multi-fold benefits of using public transport.

2) **Odd-Even:** Despite a lack of clear evidence of its usefulness and the severity of public inconvenience, it is considered a politically acceptable alternative, perhaps due to its short period.

3) **Smog Towers:** The lack of effectiveness of smog towers has not prevented them from being installed and actively pursued even now. These promote a public perception of politicians being sensitive to the concerns of the people.

How can the crop-burning issue be addressed effectively?

1. **Multifaceted package:** Given the complexity of the problem, it will need a package of **technical, regulatory, fiscal, and informational interventions** to succeed.

2. **Right Marketing:** The solution needs to be marketed well so that all stakeholders feel that an effort is being made and all are contributing their share to the solution.
3. **Right Political Narrative:** This can only be done by setting up the right political narrative, which is being hampered due to the fear of the political fallout of such decisions.

What is the role of the public in this case?

Only the public's support can make it politically acceptable for this issue to be effectively addressed. However, the public is ready for short-term inconveniences like odd-even, but not for hard decisions like the Diwali firecracker ban. **Incentivisation of people** by appropriate public policies is required.

Challenges to India's Climate Goals

News: The article discusses the challenges in front of India, especially its electricity policies, in transitioning to non-fossil energy. It also highlights other negative outcomes of India's electricity policies.

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

The 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) concluded with a statement calling for the **phase-out of fossil fuels**.

However, achieving these climate targets will be difficult without immediate and decisive action by India, the **world's third-largest greenhouse-gas (GHG) emitter**. India accounted for **7.6% of global GHG emissions in 2022**.

What are the challenges in front of India in transitioning to non-fossil energy?

1. **Taxation Policy on Petroleum Products:** India reduces taxes on petroleum products when global prices increase and raises them when prices drop (countercyclical taxation). This resulted in a low effective carbon price in India. Lower prices prevent shift to costlier renewable sources.
2. **Electricity Pricing and Subsidies:** Electricity, which accounts for **34% of India's emissions**, is heavily subsidised in India (Subsidies mean fossil energy appears artificially cheaper than it actually is).
3. **Difficulties in Reforming Electricity Pricing:** Reforming electricity pricing is difficult as electricity prices are not set by one central authority, but by the states and UTs. Additionally, the expectation of subsidised power has become part of the country's politics.
4. **Lack of Clean-Energy Investments:** Heavy subsidisation strains state governments' finances – which prevents clean-energy investments.

What are the negative outcomes of India's electricity policies?

1. **Depletion of Water:** In agricultural regions, it has contributed to the rapid degradation and depletion of water resources.
2. **Health Issues due to Emissions:** Reliance on fossils (such as coal) for power generation causes severe pollution-related health problems.
3. **Populism leading to even more Subsidies:** In Indian politics, the popularity of electricity subsidies as a tool for winning elections may lead to competitive populism between state governments, leading to even more subsidies.

What should be done?

- 1) For the transition to renewables to be economically feasible, renewable energy and storage must be cheaper.
- 2) International financial support will be required for renewable energy and storage projects in developing countries.

Evolution of wildlife laws and its impact- A look at Project Tiger, 50 years on

News: The article discusses how India's Project Tiger, started in 1973, has expanded tiger reserves and increased tiger numbers. It also covers the challenges faced by forest-dwelling communities due to these conservation efforts, including issues related to their relocation and the recognition of their rights.

What is Project Tiger?

Project Tiger was **launched in 1973** to promote conservation of the tiger. It came at a time when the population of tigers in India was rapidly dwindling, due to unfettered hunting and habitat loss.

For more information [read here](#)

How Did the Wildlife Laws Evolve?

1. **1972 Wildlife (Protection) Act (WLPA):** National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries were established, affecting the rights of forest-dwellers and strengthening state control. Under this act, **Critical Tiger Habitats (CTHs), also known as the core areas of tiger reserves, are identified.**
2. **Project Tiger (1973):** A result of WLPA, leading to the creation of tiger reserves.
3. **2006 Amendment of WLPA:** Formation of the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** and **introduction of tiger conservation plans**, modifying rights of forest-dwellers in tiger reserves.
4. **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA):** Recognized rights of forest-dwellers in tiger reserves and established Gram Sabhas as authorities for forest management.
5. **Introduction of Critical Wildlife Habitat (CWH) under FRA:** Different from CTH under WLPA, **once notified as CWH, land couldn't be diverted for non-forest purposes.**
6. **Notification of FRA Rules (2009) and Challenges:** Planned but overshadowed by the NTCA's rush to delineate CTHs, leading to notification of tiger reserves without full compliance with WLPA provisions.
7. **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (LARR Act):** This law mandates fair compensation and rehabilitation for relocated people.

What are the implications of legal changes in Wildlife Laws?

1. **Expansion of Tiger Reserves:** From nine reserves in 1973 to 54 in 2022, covering 78,135.956 sq. km across 18 states.
2. **Increase in Tiger Population:** Due to enhanced protection, tiger numbers rose to 3,167-3,925 by 2022.
3. **Challenges in Implementing the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA):** Though recognizing forest-dweller rights, the implementation has been problematic, leading to disputes over land use in tiger reserves.
4. **Lacked buffer area:** Under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, India designated 26 tiger reserves across 12 states as Critical Tiger Habitats (CTHs), covering 25,548.54 sq. km, 91.77% of which are CTHs. However, except for Odisha's Simlipal, these lacked Buffer Areas until mandated by a 2012 Supreme Court order.

5. **Relocation and Rehabilitation Challenges:** Relocation and rehabilitation under wildlife conservation laws like the LARR Act face challenges. Despite legal mandates for fair compensation and resettlement, the process often lacks transparency and adequate compensation, leading to disputes and dissatisfaction among relocated communities.
6. **Conflict with the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) Directives:** The NTCA's 2007 directive for delineating CTHs conflicted with the FRA's provisions, complicating the balance between tiger conservation and community rights.
7. **Fixed compensation:** The Union and State governments offer ₹15 lakh, increased from ₹10 lakh in 2021, for either cash or relocation under the Project Tiger 2008 guidelines. However, this doesn't fully cover the legal requirements for compensation, resettlement, and relocation under LARR Act

What should be done?

1. **Respectful and Informed Relocation:** Implement relocation policies as per the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act, ensuring that relocation from tiger reserves is voluntary, informed, and includes fair compensation.
2. **Addressing Conflicts Proactively:** Develop strategies to proactively address and resolve conflicts that arise from the expansion of tiger reserves and the increased protection measures, **balancing conservation needs with the rights of local communities.**

Subject: Internal Security

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas

On Issues with the Counter-Terrorism Approach in J&K – The delusion of eliminating ‘the last terrorist’

News: The article discusses the issues with the current strategy of focusing on the numbers of terrorists killed. It suggests an alternative approach to curb terrorism in J&K.

Background:

Recently, in a terror strike in the Rajouri-Poonch districts resulted in martyrdom of 4 soldiers. This was followed by the death of 3 civilians allegedly in the military's custody.

In this backdrop, the Director General of Police, J&K, emphasized on the number of terrorists killed. According to the author, it cannot be denied that neutralizing terrorists is a crucial objective of security operations. However, it should not become the only factor, especially in the present context of a lower number of terror incidents.

For more on this terror attack, [read here](#).

Why is focusing on the numbers of terrorists killed not the right strategy?

1. According to the author, terrorists cannot be eliminated to the last man.
2. The number of ‘kills’ as parameters of a successful counter-terror campaign **addresses only the symptoms**, and not the broader underlying causes.
3. This approach may lead to **prioritizing the ends (number of kills)** with a total disregard for the means.

4. **Based on mala fide considerations** such as primacy of short-term gains, competitive career environments, and a false sense of glory.

This has resulted in lapses such as the recent death of 3 civilians in DKG. This raises a question on the values, ethics and traditions of the security forces.

What should have been the approach?

1. There should be a focus on **peace building, consolidation and conflict management**.
2. Tactical-level operations, backed by psychological operations, must be **people-centric**.
3. **Winning the hearts and the minds** of the population should be a priority. This can be achieved by addressing people's aspirations
4. **Due political process**, with enhanced **political participation and stakeholding of the people**.