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7 PM COMPILATION

January, 2024

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ULFA Peace Accord-Explained Pointwise

Recently, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the Assam government and the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) signed a memorandum of settlement.

What are the provisions in the ULFA Peace Accord?

1. **Development Measures-** The peace agreement encompasses a comprehensive package for the all-round development of Assam. It includes provisions for various developmental projects and a commitment to resolving long-standing issues. The government has pledged investment of ₹1.5 lakh crore, staggered through the years.

2. **Political Inclusion-** The agreement addresses the issue of political insecurity among indigenous people, reserving 97 out of 126 seats for them in the recent delimitation exercise. It ensures the continuation of this principle in future delimitation processes, aiming to address political insecurities.

3. **Non-Violence-** ULFA has agreed to renounce violence, disarm, disband the armed organization, vacate their occupied camps, and participate in the peaceful democratic process established by law. This commitment aims to ensure the integrity of the country and marks a shift towards non-violent engagement.

A time-bound program will be made by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, to fulfil the demands of ULFA and a committee will also be formed for its monitoring.

Note- The agreement was signed with the pro-talks faction of ULFA under Arabinda Rajkhowa while the other faction led by Paresh Baruah (known as ULFA-I) has not joined the peace process.

What is ULFA?

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is an armed militant organization operating in the Northeast Indian state of Assam. It seeks to establish an independent, sovereign nation state of Assam for the indigenous Assamese people through an armed struggle in the Assam conflict. The Government of India banned the organization in 1990 citing it as a terrorist organization.

It emerged from the All Assam Students Union anti-immigrant agitation that began in 1979 demanding a sovereign State for the Assamese people.

1. **Objectives-** The founders of ULFA wanted to establish a sovereign Assamese nation through an armed struggle against the Indian state.

2. **Approach-** During the initial years, it projected itself to help needy people. Later, they followed a violent approach marked by kidnappings and extortion, executions and bomb blasts.

3. **Early Leadership-** A group of radical thinkers, led by Bhimakanta Buragohain, Arabinda Rajkhowa, Anup Chetia, Pradip Gogoi, Bhadreshwar Gohain and Paresh Baruah were the main leaders.

4. **International Presence-** It had bases in 5 neighbouring countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar – which allowed for a strategic encirclement of the Northeast.

5. **Government's Response-** In 1990, the Centre launched Operation Bajrang to tackle growing violence, leading to the arrest of over 1,200 ULFA insurgents. Assam was declared a 'disturbed area', President's rule was imposed, and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act was invoked.

The Rajkhowa faction of the ULFA signed a ceasefire agreement with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government only in 2011, and has since been in negotiations with the Centre for a peace deal.
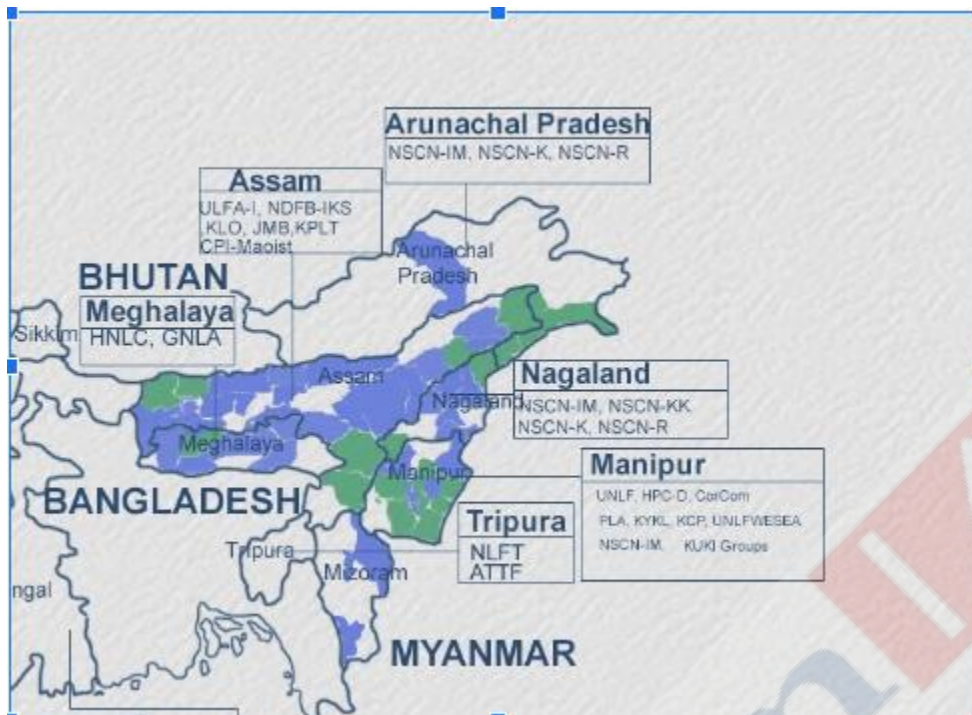
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What led to the rise of insurgency in Assam and the ULFA?

Insurgency in Assam emerged due to a combination of historical, socio-political, and economic factors. These include:

Figure 1.Source- USI Blog

1. **Historical Context-** Assam, with its distinct identity and history, has faced perceived neglect and marginalization from the central government. This sense of historical injustice fuelled resentment and provided a basis for separatist movements like ULFA.

2. **Perceived Cultural Imperialism-** The influx of migrants from other parts of India into Assam (for e.g. Bengali-speaking people during and post the Bangladesh Liberation War), altering the demographic balance, led to concerns about cultural assimilation and the erosion of the indigenous Assamese identity.

3. **Economic Grievances-** Assam's economy faced challenges, including underdevelopment, unemployment, and a lack of industrialization. Many saw the region's resources, particularly oil and tea, being exploited without equitable benefits for locals.

4. **Demand for Autonomy-** These groups demanded greater autonomy and control over Assam's resources, seeking to protect the interests of the indigenous population and assert Assamese identity.

5. **State Repression and Human Rights Violations-** Heavy-handed approaches by security forces, including misuse of AFSPA, alleged human rights violations and extrajudicial killings, further alienated the population and fueled resentment towards the government.

6. **External Support-** Insurgent groups reportedly received support, including training and refuge, from external entities, which bolstered its capabilities and prolonged the conflict.

7. **Strong Sense of Identity-** The Assamese community possesses a distinctive culture and language, fostering a strong sense of identity.

Why was the ULFA Peace Accord required?

The Indian government faces several formidable challenges in dealing with insurgent groups in the North-Eastern region, which make signing peace deals with insurgent groups extremely essential. These challenges include:

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1. **Diverse Ethnocultural Landscape-** The North-East is a mosaic of diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultures. Each community often harbors its own historical grievances and aspirations for autonomy, which complicates efforts to find a common resolution acceptable to all.

2. **Geographical Complexity-** The region's challenging terrain, dense forests, and porous international borders provide insurgent groups with hiding spots and routes for cross-border movements, making it difficult for security forces to contain them.

3. **Historical Grievances-** Long-standing historical grievances related to identity, land rights, and autonomy have fuelled insurgencies. Addressing these grievances requires delicately navigating complex historical narratives and reconciling conflicting claims.

4. **Socio-economic Development Deficit-** The North-East lags behind in terms of development indicators, including infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. This lack of socio-economic progress contributes to feelings of marginalization, making certain populations susceptible to recruitment by insurgent groups.

5. **External Support and Influence-** Insurgent groups often receive support, including sanctuary or supplies, from external entities across borders. Managing these external factors and diplomatic relationships adds complexity to resolving internal conflicts.

6. **Multiple Insurgent Groups-** The presence of multiple insurgent groups with varying ideologies, objectives, and territorial influences makes negotiations and peace-building efforts challenging, as achieving consensus among disparate groups becomes a hurdle.

7. **Security Concerns vs. Human Rights-** Balancing security measures to counter insurgencies while upholding human rights and avoiding collateral damage remains a persistent challenge for the government.

Read More- Bodo Peace Process

What are the upcoming challenges in the ULFA peace Accord?

A peace deal is a good start, however, it might not be enough to fully curb insurgency in the North-East due to several reasons:

1. **Lax Implementation-** The actual implementation of the agreed-upon terms is often challenging due to logistical, political, and social complexities. Failure to implement key provisions undermines trust and can reignite conflicts.

2. **Deep-rooted Grievances-** Insurgencies in the North-East stem from deep-seated historical grievances related to identity, autonomy, land rights, and socio-economic disparities. A peace deal might not comprehensively address all these issues, leaving underlying causes unattended.

3. **Fragmented Insurgent Groups-** Multiple insurgent groups operate in the region, each with its own objectives, ideologies, and territorial influences. A peace deal might involve only a subset of these groups, leaving others dissatisfied and perpetuating conflict.
For instance, the other ULFA faction, known as ULFA-I led by Paresh Baruah, has not joined the peace process.

4. **Socio-economic Disparities-** Insurgencies often thrive in areas with socio-economic disparities. If a peace deal doesn't address the lack of development and opportunities in these regions, it might not dissuade new recruits from joining insurgent groups.

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5. **External Factors-** Insurgent groups often have connections across borders, receiving support or sanctuary from neighbouring countries. A peace deal might not address external factors, allowing for continued sustenance and recruitment of insurgents.
For instance, ULFA still has camps in Myanmar, and previously had camps in both Bangladesh and Bhutan.

6. **Changing Dynamics of the Region-** The landscape of insurgency is dynamic, with evolving leadership, strategies, and external influences. A static peace deal might not adapt to these changing dynamics, rendering it ineffective in the long term.
For instance, ULFA reportedly has links to other insurgent outfits in the Northeast and Myanmar, as well as Islamic terror outfits like Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami, and Al-Qaeda.

To effectively curb insurgency in the North-East, a peace deal must be accompanied by comprehensive efforts addressing socio-economic development, historical grievances, inclusive governance, security measures, and sustained engagement with all stakeholders.

What Should be the way forward for ULFA Peace Accord?

Addressing insurgency in India's North-East requires a multifaceted approach that combines political, social, economic, and security measures. Here are some steps the government might consider as the way forward to curb insurgency and bring peace to the North-East and Assam:

1. **Dialogue and Negotiation-** Engage in sustained dialogues with insurgent groups to address their grievances and seek peaceful resolutions. Previous successful peace talks, like those with the NSCN-IM (National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak-Muivah), could serve as models.

2. **Development Initiatives-** Implement targeted development projects to address socio-economic disparities in the region. Investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and job creation can help alleviate grievances and reduce the appeal of insurgency. Promoting trade-induced industrialisation can create new employment opportunities, stimulate growth, and strengthen regional integration.

3. **Inclusive Governance-** Ensure inclusive governance by involving local communities in decision-making processes. Empowerment of local bodies and ensuring equitable representation can foster a sense of belonging and reduce alienation.

4. **Security Measures-** Maintain law and order through effective security measures while respecting human rights. Coordinated efforts among security forces to tackle insurgent activities and cross-border smuggling can help stabilize the region.

5. **Regional Cooperation-** Collaborate with neighboring countries, as many insurgent groups have cross-border connections. Strengthening diplomatic ties and intelligence-sharing can help address the root causes of insurgency that extend beyond national borders.

6. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration-** Provide rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former insurgents to facilitate their return to mainstream society. Skill development and psychological support can aid their transition.

7. **Addressing Root Causes-** Address underlying issues such as historical grievances, ethnic tensions, and identity politics that fuel insurgency. Promoting cultural diversity and celebrating local heritage can foster a sense of unity. There is also a need to ensure greater transparency in AFSPA.

Implementing these measures comprehensively and with a long-term perspective could contribute significantly to reducing and eventually resolving insurgencies in India's North-East.

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Read More- Business Standard
UPSC Syllabus- Security Challenges and their Management in Border Areas

Global Nuclear Order- Explained Pointwise

The Global Nuclear Order refers to the international system, agreements, norms, and structures that govern and regulate the use, possession, proliferation, and control of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy worldwide.

It encompasses a complex network of treaties, agreements, and norms that have evolved over time to manage the risks associated with nuclear weapons and promote nuclear stability, non-proliferation, disarmament, safety, and peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

What are the key components of the Global Nuclear Order?

The key components of the Global Nuclear Order are as follows:

1. **Non-Proliferation-** Efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to additional states.

2. **Disarmament-** Initiatives aimed at reducing and ultimately eliminating nuclear arsenals globally.

3. **Nuclear Material Security-** Measures to safeguard nuclear materials, facilities, and technologies from theft, sabotage, or unauthorized access.

4. **Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy-** Promotion of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes such as electricity generation, medicine, agriculture, and industry.

5. **International Agreements and Treaties-** Frameworks like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and others that establish norms, regulations, and obligations related to nuclear activities.

6. **International Organizations and Agencies-** Bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that oversee nuclear activities, inspections, and promote nuclear safety and security worldwide.

What is the current status of Nuclear Weapons?

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the global nuclear arsenal is witnessing the following developments:

1) **Modernization and Expansion-** The 9 nuclear-armed states, including the United States, Russia, and China, continue to modernize and expand their nuclear arsenals. Other nuclear-armed countries are the UK, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel.

2) **Total Global Inventory-** As of January 2023, the total global inventory of warheads is estimated at 12,512, with approximately 9,576 warheads held in military stockpiles for potential use.

3) **Dominance of Russia and U.S.-** Russia and the United States possess almost 90% of all nuclear weapons, with relatively stable sizes of their respective nuclear arsenals.

4) **Arms Control Concerns-** The suspension of the strategic stability dialogue and the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) has halted discussions for a follow-on treaty.

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Stockpile count

The nine nuclear-armed states have deployed or stored 9,576 nuclear warheads (as of January 2023)

Warhead stockpile | Stored | Deployed

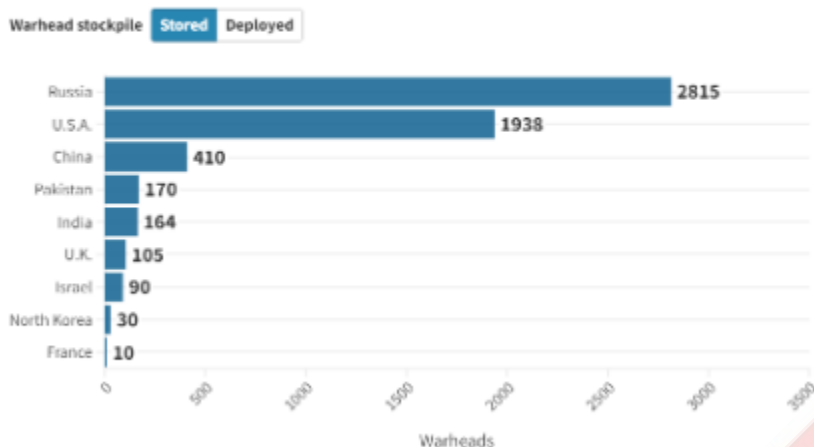| Country	Warheads
Russia	2815
U.S.A.	1938
China	410
Pakistan	170
India	164
U.K.	105
Israel	90
North Korea	30
France	10

Figure 2.Source- SIPRI

What conventions regulate the Global Nuclear Order?

1) **Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), 1968-** It was put forward by the USA, UK and USSR. It was signed in 1968 and came into force in 1970. The treaty has 3 pillars:
(a) **Non-proliferation-** Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) pledge not to transfer nuclear weapons and technology and Non-nuclear Weapon States pledge not to acquire nuclear weapons;
(b) **Disarmament-** All parties to pursue good-faith negotiations on effective measures to control nuclear arms race, and to general and complete disarmament;
(c) **Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy-** The Treaty recognizes the right of all Parties to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

India considers the treaty discriminatory as it creates a club of 'nuclear haves' and a larger group of 'nuclear have-nots' by restricting the legal possession of nuclear weapons to those states that tested them before 1967. India hasn't signed the treaty.

2) **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)-** Seeks to ban all nuclear explosions for both civilian and military purposes. It prohibits nuclear testing, thus preventing further advancement of nuclear weapons capabilities.

3) **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 2017-** It prohibits and makes it illegal to possess, use, produce, transfer, acquire, stockpile or deploy nuclear weapons. States are also prohibited from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. It came into force in 2021.

4) **Export Control Groupings-** Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regimes (MTCR) are some of the nuclear export control groupings. These ensure that nuclear fuel export doesn't result in nuclear weapons development.

5) **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Safeguards Agreement-** Governs the verification and inspection of nuclear facilities to ensure they are used for peaceful purposes and not for the development of nuclear weapons.

What is India's position in the Global Nuclear Order?

1) **Non-Signatory to NPT-** India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which distinguishes it from many other nuclear-armed nations.

2) **Nuclear Weapons Possession-** India possesses nuclear weapons and conducted nuclear tests in the past, facing sanctions but later negotiating agreements for civilian nuclear cooperation.

3) **Advocate for Global Disarmament-** India advocates for global nuclear disarmament while seeking recognition as a responsible nuclear power.

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4) **Complex Position-** India's stance is complex due to its pursuit of civilian nuclear energy for development and maintaining a nuclear deterrence policy.

5) **International Engagement-** Despite not being a signatory to the NPT, India engages in international nuclear forums, emphasizing its non-proliferation track record and commitment to global security.

6) **Nuclear Disarmament-** India supports complete disarmament within a specified timeframe which distinguishes its stance from Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) which have an ambiguous stand regarding timeline for disarmament. India also insists that disarmament must be 'non-discriminatory' and pursued 'on the basis of equality' i.e., there must be no discriminatory provisions in favor of NWS as is the case with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

What are the issues with the Global Nuclear Order?

The Global Nuclear Order faces several significant challenges and issues:

1) **Proliferation-** One of the most critical issues is the spread of nuclear weapons to additional countries. This creates concerns about regional stability, as more nuclear-armed states increase the risk of conflict and the potential for catastrophic consequences.
For instance, the **AUKUS deal** includes providing nuclear submarines to Australia (a non-nuclear state).

2) **Arms Control and Disarmament-** The existing arms control agreements, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), face challenges in implementation and adherence. Additionally, there's a lack of progress in further disarmament efforts by nuclear-armed states, which leads to concerns about the global disarmament agenda.

3) **Modernization and Technology-** Nuclear-armed states continue to modernize their arsenals, developing more advanced and potentially destabilizing technologies. Advancements in missile defense systems, hypersonic weapons, and other emerging technologies contribute to uncertainties in strategic stability.

4) **Emerging Threats and Actors-** Non-state actors or rogue states acquiring nuclear materials or technology pose significant risks. The potential for cyberattacks targeting nuclear facilities or command systems adds a new dimension of concern.

5) **Geopolitical Tensions-** Tensions between nuclear-armed states, such as those between the US, China, Russia, and other countries, create instability. Proxy conflicts, territorial disputes, and geopolitical rivalries heighten the risk of nuclear confrontation.
For instance, Russia de-ratifying CTBT; Withdrawal of USA and Russia from bilateral treaties.

6) **Safety and Security-** Ensuring the safety and security of nuclear materials, facilities, and technologies remains a persistent challenge. Accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons due to technical failures, human error, or terrorist actions is a significant concern.

What are the issues with the Global Nuclear Order in the context of India?

India's position within the Global Nuclear Order presents specific challenges and concerns:

1) **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) status-** India is not a signatory to the NPT, which creates complexities in its relationship with the global nuclear order. India's nuclear program was developed independently, leading to its status as a nuclear-armed state outside the NPT framework.

2) **Nuclear Arsenal Expansion-** India continues to expand and modernize its nuclear arsenal. This expansion raises concerns about regional stability, especially given the long-standing tensions with Pakistan and the strategic rivalry with China.

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3) **Relations with Pakistan-** The nuclear dynamics between India and Pakistan pose significant challenges. Both countries possess nuclear weapons, and historical animosities and frequent border disputes elevate the risk of a nuclear conflict, creating instability in South Asia.

4) **China Factor-** India's nuclear policy is also shaped by its relations with China. As China continues to modernize its nuclear capabilities, India might feel compelled to bolster its own arsenal, leading to an arms race and heightened tensions in the region.

Maintaining stability in its volatile region, engaging in dialogue with Pakistan and China, and ensuring the safe and responsible management of its nuclear arsenal are crucial steps for India within the Global Nuclear Order. Additionally, India's active participation in global non-proliferation initiatives and strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms can contribute to stability and security in South Asia.

What should be the way forward?

Creating a just, safe, and improved Global Nuclear Order involves a multifaceted approach that integrates various elements of diplomacy, technology, governance, and international cooperation. Here are some key steps that could contribute to achieving such a vision:

1) **Disarmament and Reduction of Nuclear Weapons-**
a. Encourage nuclear-armed states to commit to significant and verifiable reductions in their nuclear arsenals through bilateral or multilateral agreements.
b. Support dialogue and negotiations among nuclear-armed states to create a conducive environment for disarmament efforts.

2) **Strengthening Non-Proliferation Efforts-** Strengthen international efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology and materials.

3) **Inclusive Dialogue and Multilateral Diplomacy-** Encourage open and inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders, including nuclear-armed and non-nuclear-armed states, to address concerns and build trust.

4) **Engagement with Emerging Technologies-** Monitor and address potential risks associated with emerging technologies, such as cyber threats to nuclear facilities, to ensure a secure nuclear order.

5) **Support for New Treaties and Agreements-** Advocate for and support initiatives like the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) while engaging nuclear-armed states to participate in discussions toward a world without nuclear weapons.

6) **Education and Public Awareness-** Foster awareness and education regarding the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons, promoting public support for disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

Read More- ORF
UPSC Syllabus- GS 2 India and international order

India's debt burden- Explained Pointwise

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently raised long-term sustainability concerns about India's debt burden.

It states that India's government debt could be 100% of GDP under adverse circumstances by fiscal 2028. According to the IMF, "Long-term risks are high because considerable investment is required to reach India's climate change mitigation targets and improve resilience to climate stresses and natural disasters. This

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suggests that new and preferably concessional sources of financing are needed, as well as greater private sector investment and carbon pricing or equivalent mechanism."

In light of this, it is important to take a detailed look at India's Debt Burden.

What is Public Debt, and what is the status of India's Debt Burden?

Public Debt- Public debt refers to the amounts owed by the different levels of government and used to finance public deficits resulting from a higher level of program spending to budgeted income. Debt can be acquired within the same country or abroad and usually takes the form of bonds, paper and government securities

Status of India's debt- The Union government's debt was ₹155.6 trillion, or 57.1% of GDP, at the end of March 2023 and the debt of State governments was about 28% of GDP.
As stated by the Finance Ministry, India's public debt-to-GDP ratio has barely increased from 81% in 2005-06 to 84% in 2021-22, and is back to 81% in 2022-23.
This, however, is way higher than the levels specified by the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBMA).** The 2018 amendment to the Union government's FRBMA specified debt-GDP targets for the Centre, States and their combined accounts at 40%, 20% and 60%, respectively.

Why do governments need to take public debt?

Governments borrow money for several reasons:

1. **Budgetary Needs-** Sometimes, a government might spend more money than it earns in revenue through taxes. This budget deficit can occur due to various reasons like infrastructure projects, social welfare programs, defence spending, etc. Borrowing allows governments to cover these deficits without cutting essential services or raising taxes immediately.

2. **Smooth Economic Cycles-** During economic downturns or recessions, governments might stimulate the economy by increasing spending. Borrowing allows them to inject money into the economy to create jobs, boost demand, and support businesses.

3. **Capital Expenditure-** Governments often invest in long-term projects like building roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals. Borrowing funds these projects upfront, and the cost is spread over many years, aligning with the benefits these projects bring over their lifetime.

4. **Cash Flow Management-** Governments might borrow to manage short-term cash flow mismatches. They might have incoming revenue delayed, but need immediate funds to cover ongoing expenses.

Governments usually issue bonds to borrow money, promising to repay the borrowed amount with interest over a specified period. These borrowings are often a fundamental part of fiscal policy, allowing governments to manage their economies and provide essential services.

What are the advantages of borrowing by the governments?

1. **Funding Infrastructure-** Borrowing allows governments to fund large-scale infrastructure projects that have long-term benefits for society, such as building roads, bridges, airports, and utilities. These projects often stimulate economic growth and productivity.

2. **Investment in Social Programs-** Governments borrow to invest in social programs like education, healthcare, and welfare to improve the quality of life for their citizens.
For instance, due to sustained demand for employment under MGNREGA, a sum of ₹79,770 crore has already been spent till December 19, 2023, as against the budgeted ₹60,000 crore and an additional sum of ₹14,520 crore has been allocated.

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3. **Economic Stimulus-** During economic downturns, borrowing funds for stimulus packages can help jumpstart the economy by increasing consumer spending, supporting businesses, and reducing unemployment.

4. **Interest Earnings-** If governments can borrow at low-interest rates, they can invest borrowed funds in projects or initiatives that generate higher returns, potentially boosting economic growth.

5. **Spreading Costs Across Generations-** Some experts argue that borrowing allows current generations to share the cost of infrastructure and services with future generations that will also benefit from these investments.

6. **Debt Refinancing-** Governments also borrow to refinance existing debt. This involves replacing old debt with new debt that has better terms or lower interest rates, reducing the overall cost of debt servicing.

What are the issues with a large debt burden?

A large debt burden for a government can lead to various issues such as:

1. **Higher Debt Servicing Costs-** As the debt increases, so do the interest payments on that debt. A significant portion of government revenue might then be allocated to paying interest on the debt, reducing the funds available for essential public services and investments.

2. **Reduced Fiscal Flexibility-** High debt levels can limit a government's ability to respond to economic downturns or emergencies. It constrains fiscal policy options, as a substantial portion of the budget might already be committed to servicing the debt, limiting the ability to spend on critical needs or implement stimulus measures.

3. **Increased Risk of Default-** If debt levels become unsustainable and the government struggles to make interest payments or refinance debt, it can lead to a risk of default. Defaulting on debt can have severe consequences, including a loss of investor confidence, higher borrowing costs in the future, and economic turmoil.

4. **Crowding Out Investment-** High government borrowing can lead to increased competition for available funds. This can crowd out private investment as the government absorbs a significant portion of available capital, potentially slowing down economic growth and private sector development.

5. **Pressure on Future Generations-** Excessive debt burdens can pass on economic challenges to future generations. They might inherit a weaker economy, higher taxes, reduced public services, and limited opportunities due to the need to allocate substantial resources to debt repayment.

6. **Credit Rating Downgrades-** Persistently high levels of debt relative to GDP can lead credit rating agencies to downgrade a country's creditworthiness. A lower credit rating makes borrowing more expensive and can further exacerbate debt problems.
For instance, Fitch Ratings and S&P Global Ratings have kept India's credit rating unchanged at 'BBB- with stable outlook' since August 2006 (BBB- is the lowest investment grade rating). These agencies believe that India's stronger fundamentals are undermined by the government's burdensome debt stock.

7. **Currency and Inflation Risks-** In extreme cases, high government debt can lead to currency devaluation or inflation if the government decides to monetize the debt by printing more money. This can erode the value of savings and create instability in the economy.

What should be the way forward?

Managing public debt burdens requires a combination of prudent fiscal policies, responsible borrowing practices, and strategic debt management. These are some steps that the Indian government can follow:

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1. **Fiscal Discipline-** Governments should aim for balanced budgets or surpluses during economic expansions to create buffers for potential downturns. This involves controlling spending, increasing revenue through fair taxation, and avoiding excessive borrowing for non-essential expenditures.

2. **Debt Management Strategies-** Implement effective debt management strategies to minimize borrowing costs and risks. This includes refinancing existing debt at favorable rates, considering fixed vs. variable interest rates, and optimizing the debt maturity structure.

3. **Transparent and Credible Fiscal Policies-** Clear communication and transparency regarding fiscal policies, debt levels, and strategies for managing debt are essential. This helps build confidence among investors, citizens, and international markets.

4. **Prioritize Investments-** Governments should prioritize borrowing for productive investments that yield long-term economic benefits, such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare, rather than for recurrent expenses or inefficient projects.

5. **Diversify Funding Sources-** Governments can diversify their sources of funding to mitigate risks. Instead of relying heavily on short-term debt or foreign currency-denominated debt, they can consider longer-term financing or domestic borrowing.

6. **Sustainable Economic Growth Policies-** Encouraging policies that foster sustainable economic growth can expand the tax base, increase revenue, and reduce the relative size of the debt burden.

By implementing these measures, the government can strike a balance between meeting their financing needs for development and infrastructure while ensuring that public debt remains at sustainable levels to safeguard the economy and future generations from excessive debt burdens.

> **Read More-** The Hindu
> **Syllabus- GS 3-** Fiscal Policy-Indian Economy

[Kurukshetra Summary December 2023] Accelerating Economic Growth in Villages- Explained Pointwise

Accelerating economic growth in Indian villages presents a multifaceted challenge rooted in intricate socio-economic barriers. Despite abundant potential, challenges like inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and low agricultural productivity persist. However, through comprehensive solutions encompassing infrastructure development, agricultural reforms, skill enhancement, and market access, the transformation of rural landscapes becomes feasible. This article highlights the challenges hindering rural economic progress while exploring viable solutions to propel these villages towards sustainable and inclusive growth.

What are the steps required to accelerate economic growth in villages in India?

Boosting economic growth in Indian villages involves a multi-faceted approach that addresses various aspects of development. Here are steps that could help accelerate economic growth in rural areas-

Infrastructure Development- Improve roads, electricity, water supply, and connectivity to enhance accessibility and encourage investment.

1. **Agricultural Reforms-** Implement modern farming techniques, provide access to high-quality seeds, irrigation facilities, and educate farmers about sustainable practices.

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2. **Skill Development and Education-** Establish skill development centers and promote education to equip villagers with the necessary skills for various job opportunities.
3. **Access to Finance-** Ensure availability of microfinance and easy access to credit for small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers to initiate or expand their businesses.
4. **Promote Entrepreneurship-** Encourage entrepreneurship by providing training, mentorship, and support for setting up small businesses and startups.
5. **Technology Adoption-** Introduce and facilitate the use of technology for agricultural practices, marketing, and financial transactions to enhance productivity and efficiency.
6. **Market Linkages-** Create linkages between rural producers and urban markets, enabling better access to larger consumer bases and fair pricing for their products.
7. **Social Welfare Programs-** Implement programs that focus on health, sanitation, and women empowerment, as these are essential for overall development.
8. **Investment in Renewable Energy-** Encourage the adoption of renewable energy sources like solar power, which can provide sustainable energy solutions in rural areas.
9. **Encourage Community Participation-** Involve local communities in decision-making processes, empowering them to take charge of their own development initiatives.
10. **Promote Cottage Industries-** Encourage the growth of cottage industries by providing training, financial support, and market access for products made by local artisans.

What are the challenges in ensuring economic growth in villages in India?

Several challenges hinder economic growth in Indian villages-

1. **Infrastructural Deficiencies-** Poor roads, inadequate access to electricity, water, and internet connectivity hinder economic activities and limit market access.
2. **Lack of Access to Finance-** Limited availability of credit facilities and financial services for small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers restricts their ability to invest and expand.
3. **Low Agricultural Productivity-** Outdated farming techniques, dependency on monsoons, and lack of access to modern technology and quality seeds result in low agricultural productivity.
4. **Limited Education and Skill Development-** Inadequate educational facilities and a lack of skill development programs lead to a shortage of skilled labor, hindering economic diversification.
5. **Unemployment and Underemployment-** Lack of job opportunities and overreliance on agriculture result in high rates of unemployment and underemployment in rural areas.
6. **Market Linkages and Price Volatility-** Poor market linkages and dependency on middlemen lead to price volatility, affecting the income of rural producers.
7. **Healthcare and Sanitation-** Inadequate healthcare facilities and poor sanitation conditions impact the productivity and well-being of rural inhabitants.
8. **Gender Disparities-** Limited access to education and economic opportunities for women restricts their participation in economic activities, hindering overall growth.
9. **Climate Change and Environmental Challenges-** Climate change-related issues such as erratic weather patterns, droughts, and floods adversely affect agricultural productivity and livelihoods.
10. **Migration to Urban Areas-** Rural to urban migration in search of better opportunities depletes the rural workforce, leading to a lack of skilled labor and resources in villages.
11. **Policy Implementation Challenges-** Ineffective implementation of government policies, bureaucratic hurdles, and corruption can impede progress in rural development initiatives.

What are the various initiatives by the Government of India to address rural economic growth?

The Government of India has launched several schemes and programs to address rural economic growth. Some of the prominent ones include-

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1. **Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY)-** A scheme focused on providing all-weather road connectivity to unconnected rural habitations.
2. **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)-** A flagship program guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to rural households, enhancing livelihood security.
3. **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM – Aajeevika)-** A program aimed at reducing poverty by promoting diversified and gainful self-employment and wage employment opportunities for rural poor.
4. **Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY)-** Focused on rural youth, this scheme aims to enhance their skills for wage employment.
5. **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY – Gramin)-** A scheme providing financial assistance for the construction of pucca houses to rural households living without proper shelter.
6. **National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP)-** A program focused on providing safe drinking water in rural areas by ensuring piped water supply.
7. **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) – Gramin-** A mission aimed at achieving universal sanitation coverage and making villages open defecation-free.
8. **National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)-** Provides financial assistance to the elderly, widows, and disabled individuals living below the poverty line in rural areas.
9. **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)-** A scheme supporting states in achieving enhanced agriculture productivity and ensuring a decentralized planning process.
10. **Kisan Credit Card (KCC) Scheme-** Provides farmers with credit facilities for purchasing agricultural inputs and meeting other expenses.
11. **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)-** A program aimed at providing accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare to rural populations.

Way Forward:

1. **Infrastructure Development-** Focus on improving rural infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, and internet connectivity to facilitate economic activities and market access.
2. **Diversification of Livelihoods-** Encourage diversification of livelihoods beyond agriculture by promoting cottage industries, skill development, and entrepreneurship to create non-farm job opportunities.
3. **Access to Finance and Markets-** Ensure easy access to credit facilities for small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers. Facilitate market linkages to provide fair prices for rural produce.
4. **Policy Reforms and Implementation-** Ensure effective implementation of policies, eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, and continuously adapt policies based on ground realities for better outcomes.
5. **Education and Skill Development-** Invest in education and skill development programs to equip rural youth with the necessary skills for various job opportunities, reducing unemployment.
6. **Healthcare and Sanitation-** Improve healthcare facilities and promote better sanitation practices to enhance productivity and the overall well-being of rural inhabitants.
7. **Women Empowerment-** Focus on empowering women through education, skill development, and creating opportunities for their active participation in economic activities.
8. **Climate Resilience-** Implement measures to address climate change challenges by promoting sustainable practices, introducing climate-resilient crops, and improving water conservation techniques.
9. **Community Participation and Governance-** Encourage community participation in decision-making processes and empower local governance bodies to drive development initiatives.
10. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)-** Foster collaborations between the government, private sector, NGOs, and local communities to leverage resources and expertise for rural development projects.

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This comprehensive approach requires sustained efforts, investment, and collaboration among various stakeholders to create a conducive environment for sustainable economic growth in rural India. It's crucial to tailor interventions based on the specific needs and contexts of different regions while maintaining a focus on inclusive and equitable development.

Piracy in Arabian Sea – Explained Pointwise

Recently, marine commandos (MARCOS) of the Indian Navy thwarted a hijacking attempt in the North Arabian Sea. They managed to secure and safely evacuate the 21 crew members, including 15 Indians, from the merchant vessel Lila Norfolk.

This incident has brought to attention the issue of Piracy in Arabian Sea.

Figure 3.Source- IMB annual piracy report

What are the reasons behind piracy in Arabian Sea?

Piracy in the Arabian Sea has been a longstanding issue due to the below-mentioned causes-

1. **Geopolitical Instability-** Political instability and conflict in East African countries like Somalia have contributed to the rise in piracy.

2. **Economic Distress and Destruction of livelihoods –** Widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunities in countries like Somalia, Yemen have drawn them towards piracy. For ex- The destruction of the livelihoods of the local fishing communities.

3. **Maritime Vulnerabilities-** There is inadequacy of maritime security in the vast expanse of the Arabian Sea. This makes the global cargo ships prone to maritime piracy.

4. **Means of terrorism financing-** The fundamentalist and radical groups use the piracy route to extract heavy ransom for financing their group's activities. For ex- Houthi rebels of Yemen.

What are the implications of piracy in Arabian Sea?

1. **Global Trade Disruptions-** The waters of the Indian Ocean carry 80% of the world's oil. Increased piracy in the Arabian Sea affects crucial trade routes and severely impacts the global economy.

2. **Endangers Energy Security-** Disruptions due to piracy in the Rea Sea and Arabian route pose significant energy security risks for Asian economies like India, as it is a key route for oil and gas shipments.

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3. Rise in geopolitical Tensions- The involvement of multiple nations like U.S., China, Iran and Saudi Arabia for countering piracy has also led to increased geopolitical contestations amongst them. For ex- China's base in Djibouti, Port of Doraleh, has seen increased Chinese militarisation in the name of piracy protection.

What are the challenges in dealing with piracy in Arabian Sea?

1. Geographical Expanse- Pirates take advantage of the geographical expanse and vastness of the Arabian Sea to target the shipping routes.

2. Weak Governance and Political Instability- Lack of political stability in countries like Somalia and Yemen have hindered their diplomatic engagements. Thus, no joint naval and military exercises with these countries takes place in the Arabian Sea region.

3. Lack of International cooperation- The UNCLOS mechanism remains defunct due to lack of effective cooperation amongst the major global powers. USA, Germany and Great Britain have refused to sign the UNCLOS 1982 agreement, leaving a huge void in the establishment of a rule based order in the international waters.

4. Legal Challenges- The prosecution of pirates is challenging due to different jurisprudence mechanism in different countries of the world.

5. Lack of resources and information sharing Mechanism- Nations like Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen lack naval assets, technology, and personnel to effectively patrol and secure their waters against piracy.

What are the International and National Initiatives to control piracy in the Arabian Sea?

Global Initiatives Related to Maritime Piracy

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)	It establishes the legal framework for combating piracy, as outlined in. The UN Security Council and General Assembly have consistently emphasized on the application of UNCLOS in combating maritime threats.
Operation Prosperity Guardian	The United States has initiated Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational security initiative to ensure security in the Red Sea.
Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the safety of Maritime Navigation (1988)	It is a multilateral treaty. The main purpose of the treaty is to ensure that appropriate action is taken against people who commit unlawful acts against ships. It was adopted in 1988 at the Suppression of Unlawful Acts(SUA) Convention in Rome.
Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)	The CMF is a multinational naval partnership with primary focus areas aimed at defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, fostering regional cooperation, and promoting a secure maritime environment. CMF has 39 member nations including India.

India's Initiatives Related to Maritime Piracy
1. SAGAR policy.
2. India has reiterated its support for the UN Convention on Law of Sea (UNCLOS).
3. International Fusion Centre (IFC).
4. Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

What should be the way ahead to counter piracy in Arabian Sea?

Controlling piracy in the Arabian Sea involves a multifaceted approach. Some of them are mentioned below

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1. Enhanced Naval Patrols- Increased naval presence and patrols by both national and international maritime forces help deter pirate activities. India must increase its frequency of joint naval exercises with Saudi Arabia, UAE.

2. Collaborative Efforts- Collaborative task forces, such as the Combined Task Force 150 (CTF-150), must be effectively used to counter the piracy threats in the region and secure strategic points like the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

3. Enhanced Naval Protection- Countries must bolster their naval presence to safeguard commercial shipping. For ex- India's Operation Sankalp, which began in 2019 to escort India-flagged ships, must be replicated by other countries as well.

4. **Establishing back channel talks with Non-State Actors-** Countries must open a channel of communication with Non-state actors like Houthis, who are involved in piracy to fund their wars.

5. **Capacity building-** Capability building approach must be adopted in countries like Somalia and Yemen to address the root causes of poverty and livelihoods of local population and reduce their dependence on 'piracy as a means to livelihood'.

Combating piracy in the Arabian Sea is a complex and ongoing challenge that necessitates a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving multiple stakeholders at regional and international levels.

Office of Governor- Issues and Suggested Reforms- Explained Pointwise

The role, powers, and discretion of the Office of Governor have been the subject of Constitutional, Political, and Legal debate for decades. The relationship between the Office of Governor and the elected Government has been strained and tense in multiple States in recent times. The recent political controversies between Governors and State Government pose challenge to the functioning of the federal structure as envisaged in the Constitution. These also tarnish the standing of the dignified Constitutional post.

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Office of Governor- Issues and Suggested Reforms

Issues With Office of Governor with Examples	Recommendations of the Commissions and Rulings of SC
Affiliation Based Appointment. Ex- Recent appointments belonging to a particular ideological group	1. Sarkaria Commission 1988- The Governor should be eminent person in some walk of life and detached from politics. Appointment must be in consultation with the CM of the state. 2. Venkatachaliah Commission 2002- Appointment by a Committee comprising the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Minister of the State concerned.
Arbitrary Removal of Governors, especially after the change of the government at the centre.	1. Sarkaria Commission 1988- Removal before the end of the term (5 years), only on the grounds of morality, dignity, constitutional propriety etc., with consultation of the state government. 2. Punchhi Commission 2010- Removal through impeachment process (similar to that of the President) by the State Legislature. 3. BP Singhal vs Union of India (2010)- Removal of Governor cannot be based on arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable grounds.
Misuse of Article 356 to recommend President's Rule	1. Rameshwar Prasad Case (2006)- Motivated and whimsical conduct of the Governor in recommending president's rule falls under judicial review. 2. Punchhi Commission (2010)- Article 355 and 356 should be amended to bring specific troubled areas instead of the whole state. 3. Sarkaria Commission (1988)- Art 356 should be used very sparingly and as a matter of last resort.
Governor withholding assent to Bills and **Serving as Chancellors of Universities**	Punchhi Commission (2010)- Prescribed a time limit of 6 months for the governor to take a decision on a Bill. The convention of making the Governors as chancellors of universities should also be done away with.

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What are the recent controversies associated with the office of Governor?

Tamil Nadu	Governor refusing to read some parts of the Governor's address which is prepared by the State govt. Governor withholding the assent to the NEET Bill to exempt TN from NEET
West Bengal	Governor and state govt face off after the WB Assembly passed a Bill paving the way for making the Chief Minister the Chancellor of State Universities replacing the Governor from the position.
Kerala	Governor touring the state without any previous announcements. Governor's warning of action against the individual ministers that lower the dignity of the office of the Governor. Dispute with state government over the approval of Bills.

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Jharkhand	The Governor didn't act on the advice of the Election Commission of India to disqualify the Chief Minister of Jharkhand for violation of electoral norms. This resulted in prolonged political uncertainity in the state.
Maharastra	The Governor hastily removed the Governor's rule and administered oath to a CM who lacked majority support.
Rajasthan	The Governor inordinate delay in convening the assembly session for the government to prove its majority.

What is the history and rationale behind the office of Governor?

Pre Independence	**Government of India Act 1858-** Provincial Governors were agents of the crown, functioning under the supervision of the Governor-General. **Government of India Act 1935-** The governor was now to act in accordance with the advice of Ministers of a province's legislature, but retained special responsibilities and discretionary power.
Post Independence	The Office of the Governor was retained Post Independence. Governor was envisaged to be the Constitutional Head of a state. However, the Governor retained special responsibilities and discretionary power.

What are some of the important Constitutional Provisions Related to the office of Governor?

Article 153	Provides that there shall be a Governor for each state. One person can be appointed as Governor for two or more states.
Article 155	The Governor of a State shall be appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal.
Article 156	The Governor shall hold office during the pleasure of the President.
Article 161	Power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment, or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence in matters of crime where the state legislature has power to make laws.
Article 163	Provides Discretionary Powers which include- 1. Appointment of a chief minister when no party has a clear majority in the state legislative assembly. 2. In times of no-confidence motions. 3. In case of failure of constitutional machinery in the State (Article 356). 4. The power to withhold assent to a Bill and reserve a Bill for Consideration of President. (Article 200 and 201).
Article 361	The Governor of a State, shall not be answerable to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and duties.

What are the Issues Related to the Post of Governor in India?

1. **Affiliation Based Appointment-** Politicians and former bureaucrats affiliated with the ruling party have been appointed in several instances as Governors. This has led to questions about the post's impartiality and non-partisanship.

2. **Arbitrary Removal of Governors-** There are no written grounds or procedures for removing governors. This leads to arbitrary removals especially when there is change of political power at the Union Govt. level.

3. **From Centre's Representative to Centre's Agent-** The governors have become the 'agents of the Centre' as they are appointed and removed by the Central Government.

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4. **Governor recommending President's Rule-** The discretionary power of governor recommending president's rule on account of the failure of constitutional machinery in the state has has not always been based on 'objective material'. Political partisanship, whims and fancies have also played their part.

5. **No Clear Distinction Between Constitutional and Statutory Role-** The constitutional mandate of the Governor to act on advice of the council of ministers is not clearly distinguished from his statutory authority as chancellor. This has resulted in many conflicts between the governor and the state government. For ex- The was a recent appointment of a Vice Chancellor in a university by the Kerala Governor, bypassing government nominations has caused a conflict.

6. **Misuse of Discretionary power of appointment of CM-** The Office of governor has been accused of playing a partisan role in the appointment of CM in cases where a single party lacks the majority.

7. **Convening and Dissolution of Assembly-** The Office of Governor has been associated with the politics of delay in the convening and dissolution of state legislative assembly.

8. **Delay in giving assent to the Bills-** There is no time limit set for how long a Governor can withhold assent to a Bill. This has been misuded by the Office of the Governor to withhold assents to Bills passed by the State legislative Assemblies.

Read More- The Issue of Governors Withholding Assent to Bills

What are the Constitutional Reforms suggested by Various Committees and Supreme Court?

Various Rulings of the Supreme Court arranged in Chrnological Order-

1. **Shamsher Singh vs. State of Punjab(1974)-** The Supreme Court held that the Governor is bound to act in accordance with the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister. Article 154(1) makes it clear that the executive power of the State is vested in the Governor, but shall be exercised by him in accordance with the Constitution.

2. **SR Bommai vs. Union of India (1994)-** The case was concerned with the use of Article 356 and the Governor's power to dismiss a State Government. The Supreme Court ruled that whether the State Government has the majority should be tested on the floor of the House. It shouldn't be based on the subjective assessment of the Governor.

3. **Rameshwar Prasad vs. Union of India (2006)-** The Supreme Court held the Governor's decision to dissolve the Assembly as unconstitutional and mala fide. Motivated and whimsical conduct of the Governor in recommending president's rule is amenable to judicial review.

4. **BP Singhal vs Union of India (2010)-** The SC held that the removal of Governor cannot be based on arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable grounds.

5. **Nabam Rebia vs. Deputy Speaker (2016)-** The Governor had went against the advice of the State Cabinet and called the session of the Legislative Assembly at an earlier date (against the recommended date). The SC confirmed that the Governor does not enjoy broad discretionary powers and is always subject to Constitutional standards. The Court concluded that the Governor's discretion did not extend to the powers conferred under Article 174 (Article 174 is related to the Sessions of the State Legislature, prorogation and dissolution). Hence, the Governor could not summon the House, determine its legislative agenda or address the legislative assembly without consultation.

Recommendations of Various Commissions in Chronological Order

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1. **The Administrative Reforms Commission (1969)-** The Commission recommended that non-partisan persons having long experience in public life and administration should be appointed as the Governors of a State.

2. **Sarkaria Commission (1988)-**
(a) Appointment of Governor-
(i) The Governor should be appointed after consultations with the Chief Minister of the State
(ii) The Governor should be eminent in some walk of life and from outside the State
(iii) The person should be a detached figure without intense political links, or should not have taken part in politics in the recent past
(iv) The person should not be a member of the ruling party

(b) Removal of Governor-
(i) The Governor should be removed before the end of the term (5 years) only on the grounds if doubts are raised about his morality, dignity, constitutional propriety etc.
(ii) In the process of removal before the end of the term, the State Government may be informed and consulted

(c) Use of Article 356-
This article should be used very sparingly and as a matter of last resort. It can be invoked only in the event of political crisis, internal subversion, physical breakdown, and non-compliance with the Constitutional directives of the Centre.

3. **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), 2002-** The Governor should be appointed by a Committee comprising the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Minister of the State concerned.

4. **The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), 2008-** The Inter-State Council needs to come up with some guidelines for governors to follow when they are using their discretionary power.

5. **Punchhi Commission (2010)–**
(a) It proposed giving Governors a fixed term of 5 years and removing them through an impeachment process (similar to that of the President) by the State Legislature. The doctrine of pleasure (for removal of Governors) should be deleted
(b) It reiterated the recommendation of the Sarkaria Commission regarding appointment of Governors. The person shouldn't be active in politics
(c) The convention of making the Governors as chancellors of universities should be done away with
(d) Article 355 and 356 should be amended to allow the Union Government to bring specific troubled areas under its rule for a limited period, instead of the whole State.

Conclusion

The Governor's discretion and Constitutional mandate should be guided by certain 'norms and principles', which can be defined in a 'Code of Conduct'. Discretion must be a decision that is guided by reason, motivated by good faith, and temperated by caution. Certain codification can be undertaken regarding discretionary powers like determining the areas in which they have discretion, establishing a time frame within which they must act, and stating unequivocally that they are required to follow the advice of the Cabinet when dealing with Bills etc.

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> **Read More-** The Hindu
> **Syllabus- GS II,** Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; **GS II,** Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive; **GS II,** Appointment to various Constitutional posts.

Remission Policy in India- Bilkis Bano Case- Explained Pointwise

The Supreme Court has struck down the remission granted to 11 men convicted in the Bilkis Bano gang rape case of 2002. The court has ruled that the Gujarat government's decision to remit their sentences and set them free was illegal.

Remission In India- Bilkis Bano Case

SC Judgment on Remission of Bilkis Bano Convicts

» **Bilkis Bano Case-** Bilkis Bano was gangraped and seven members of her family were murdered during the Gujarat riots of 2002. The 11 convicts were released by the Gujarat government under its remission and premature release policy on August 15, 2022.

» **SC Judgement-** The court has ruled that the Gujarat government's decision to remit their sentences and set them free was illegal. Supreme Court has ruled that the appropriate government to decide remission is the state within whose jurisdiction the accused were sentenced. The remission cannot be granted by the state within whose territorial limits the offence was committed, or the accused were imprisoned. Thus, the competent government in this matter to grant remission would be the Maharashtra Government, as the convicts were sentenced in Maharashtra.

Provisions and Grounds for Remission

» Remission refers to the reduction or cancellation of a penalty or punishment imposed by a court by executive authority.

» **Constitutional Provision-** Art 72 and 161 provide the president and governor the power to grant remission respectively.

» **Legal Provision-** Section 432 of CrPC provides the state governments the powers to remit sentence, since prisons is a state subject.

» **SC Judgement-** In Kehar Singh vs. Union of India (1989), SC held that the courts cannot deny a prisoner the benefit of remission.

» **Grounds of Remission-** Laid by SC in 'Laxman Naskar v. Union of India' (2000). Some of these include- Nature of Crime, Chances of repeat of crime, good behaviour of convict and his socio-economic condition.

Arguments For and Against Remission

Arguments For	Arguments Against
1. Promotes Rehabilitation and Reintegration 2. Humanitarian approach of reformation 3. Prevents overcrowding in Prisons 4. Improvement of Efficiency of Judicial and Correctional System 5. Cost Saving	1. Raises Concerns About Public Safety 2. Leads to Public Outcry over Controversial Cases like Rajiv Gandhi Convicts remission 3. Potential for Political Influence 4. Undermines Deterrence 5. Concerns about rights of Victims and Survivors

There is a need to develop a rational and comprehensive remission Policy which must encompass humanitarian considerations and the convicts' scope for reform, without violating the rule of law or societal interests.

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What is Remission?

Remission- Remission refers to the reduction or cancellation of a penalty or punishment imposed by a court. It provides the government or relevant authorities with the discretion to either completely release a person from their sentence or reduce the severity of the sentence.

*Remission is distinct from both furlough and parole. Furlough and parole refers to a break from prison life. However in remission there is a reduction in sentence, while the nature of the sentence remains untouched.

Remission not an automatic process- Remission is not an automatic process. It is subject to the discretion of the relevant authorities. The specific procedures and criteria for remission can differ based on the legal framework governing a particular offense.

Read More- Why the 11 convicts in Bilkis Bano gangrape case walked out of jail

What are the Constitutional provisions laws and grounds that govern remission in India?

Constitutional Provisions

Article 72	The President can grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person. This can be done for any person convicted of any offence in all cases where- a. The punishment or sentence is by a court-martial b. In all cases where the punishment or the sentence is for an offence under any law relating to the Union government's executive power c. In all cases of death sentences.
Article 161	The Governor can grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment, or suspend, remit or commute the sentence. This can be done for anyone convicted under any law on a matter which comes under the State's executive power.

Statutory Provisions

Prison Act, 1894	Remission system has been defined under the Prison Act, 1894.
Section 432 CrPC	Section 432 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provides the state governments the powers to remit sentence, since prisons is a state subject.
Section 433A CrPC	Puts restriction of minimum 14 years jail term for convicts, who have been awarded life imprisonment for crimes attracting the maximum punishment of death sentence.

SC Judgements

Kehar Singh vs. Union of India (1989)	SC observed that the courts cannot deny to a prisoner the benefit to be considered for remission of sentence. Denial of remission is against the principles of reformation and pushes the convict into a dark hole.
State of Haryana vs. Mahender Singh (2007)	No convict has a fundamental right of remission. The State in exercise of its executive power of remission must consider each individual case, keeping in view the relevant grounds for remission.

Grounds for remission
In 'Laxman Naskar v. Union of India' (2000), the SC laid down five grounds on which remission is considered-

a. Nature of Crime affecting the society
b. Chance of the crime being repeated in future

c. Convict loosing the potentiality to commit crime

d. Pupose being served by keeping the convict in prison

e. Socio-economic conditions of the convict's family.

Convicts serving life sentences are entitled to seek remission only after serving a minimum of 14 years. Data from Prison Statistics, 2020 show that 61% of convicts in jail are serving life sentences.

What are the famous remission cases in India?

Rajiv Gandhi Assassination Case (1991)	In 2018, the Tamil Nadu government recommended the release of A.G. Perarivalan, one of the convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, on grounds of good behavior. The recommendation was made to the governor for his consideration.
Assassination of Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh (1995)	In 2014, the Punjab government, led by Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, decided to release some of the convicts involved in the assassination of Chief Minister Beant Singh on grounds of good behavior and conduct during imprisonment. This decision was controversial and sparked debates about justice and the rights of victims' families.
Jessica Lal Murder Case (1999)	In the high-profile Jessica Lal murder case, Manu Sharma was sentenced to life imprisonment. In 2011, the Delhi government recommended premature release for Sharma, citing good conduct. However, this decision was later overturned, and Sharma's release was rejected.

These cases illustrate instances where the question of remission or early release from imprisonment became a matter of public debate and legal scrutiny.

What are the arguments provided in favour of provision of remission?

The concept of remission in India, is associated with certain advantages, both from the perspective of the individuals serving sentences and the criminal justice system. Some of the potential advantages are mentioned below-

1. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration-** Granting of remission is an acknowledgment of positive change in an individual convicted of crime. This fosters the idea of rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

2. **Humanitarian approach of reformation-** The concept of Remission is grounded in humanitarian considerations such as old age, health conditions and other compassionate reasons.

3. **Prevents overcrowding in Prisons-** Remission helps in alleviating the issue of overcrowding in prisons by reducing the number of individuals serving sentences. This contributes to better living conditions for prisoners and improve the overall management of correctional facilities.

4. **Development of Good Behavior of the prisoners-** The possibility of remission serves as an incentive for prisoners to exhibit good behavior, follow prison rules, and actively engage in rehabilitation programs. This creates a positive environment within correctional facilities.

5. **Improvement of Efficiency of Judicial and Correctional System-** Remission enables authorities to focus resources on cases where incarceration is deemed necessary while providing an avenue for the release of individuals who may no longer pose a significant threat.

6. **Cost Savings-** Remission results in cost savings associated with the maintenance and management of prisons.

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What are the arguments provided against the provision of remission?

While remission in India has certain advantages, it also poses potential disadvantages and challenges. Hence some critics argue against the provision of remission.

1. **Concerns About Public Safety-** Critics argue that in certain cases, the focus on rehabilitation and good behavior might not adequately address the risk to public safety associated with certain offenders involved in crimes of heinous nature.

2. **Controversial Cases and Public Outcry-** Decisions regarding remission, especially in high-profile or controversial cases, can lead to public outcry. For ex– Remission to convicts of Rajiv Gandhi Murder case by Karunanidhi.

3. **Inconsistency in Application-** The discretionary nature of remission may lead to inconsistency in its application. Similar cases with similar circumstances might be treated differently, raising questions about fairness and equality before the law.

4. **Potential for Political Influence-** There is a risk of political interference or influence in the decision-making process for remission. Politically motivated decisions could compromise the principles of justice and the integrity of the legal system. For ex- Alleged political influence in Bilkis Bano Case.

5. **Undermines Deterrence**– Critics argue that the availability of remission may undermine the deterrent effect of criminal penalties. If individuals believe they can be released early for good behavior, it might reduce the perceived severity of consequences for criminal actions.

6. **Victim and Survivor Concerns-** In cases where remission is granted, the concerns and rights of victims or their survivors may be overlooked. Victims might feel that the legal system is not adequately addressing their needs, particularly if the release of an offender causes distress or fear.

7. **Lack of Transparency-** The decision-making process for remission is not always transparent, leading to skepticism about the criteria considered by authorities. Lack of transparency can erode public trust in the criminal justice system.

What Should be the Way Forward?

It's essential to strike a balance between recognizing positive behavioral changes in prisoners and ensuring the safety and well-being of society. Following should be the way forward-

1. **Careful consideration of individual cases-** The cases must be carefully considered for remission. All the principles laid by SC in the 'Laxman Naskar v. Union of India' (2000) must be justified by the authorities in their remission judgement.

2. **Transparency in decision-making-** The remission process must be transparent and politically unbiased.

3. **Fairness and reasonability-** The remission process should be fair and reasonable, and based on a set of relevant parameters such as whether the crime involved affected society at large, whether the convict retained the potential for committing similar offences or is capable of reform.

4. **Rational and comprehensive remission Policy-** The remission policy must encompass humanitarian considerations and the convicts' scope for reform, without violating the rule of law or societal interests.

Read More- The Hindu
UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

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Opportunities and Challenges For Aviation Sector In India – Explained Pointwise

Aviation Sector in India has experienced significant growth in recent years. India has become the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), by the year 2030, India is expected to overtake China and the United States as the world's third-largest air passenger market. However, the aviation sector in India also faces numerous challenges, as highlighted by the recent insolvency of Go First Airlines and grounding of Spice jet aircrafts on account of safety concerns.

Aviation Sector In India - Status, Opportunities and Challenges

Status of the Industry

» India is now the world's third-largest domestic aviation market

» Number of Operational Airports In India has doubled from 74 in 2014 to 148 in 2023.

» Number of PPP airports is likely to increase from 5 in 2014 to 24 in 2024.

» FDI Investment has reached to USD 3.73 billion from April 2000 to December 2022.

Potential of the Sector

» Increased Global Market Share will boost India's growth and GDP

» Promotes balanced regional economic growth. For ex- Development of North East by air connectivity.

» Promotes the Growth of Indian Tourism sector

» Boost to manufacturing sector like the growth of maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facilities.

» It has attracted significant FDI to the tune of around ~3 bn dollars in the aerospace infrastructure.

» Increased Employment opportunities like the requirement of 10,900 additional pilots by FY30.

Challenges

» Increase in number of Grounded Unsafe Aircrafts. Over 160 aircraft are currently grounded (25% of the total fleet size)

» Supply Chain Disruptions causing delays in aircraft deliveries and original equipment manufacturing.

» Duopoly in Indian Aviation Market with IndiGo (60% market size) and Tata group airlines (20% market size).

» Heavy Financial Losses to the tune of $1.6 to 1.8 billion in FY24.

» Operational Disruptions like increase in turn-around time of airlines due to crew shortage

» Inflated Projections causing bankruptcy. Failure of Kingfisher, Jet Airways and Go First on this front.

Way Forward

» Initiate reforms in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) like the head of DGCA must be a aviation professional rather than bureaucrats.

» Promote 'Start-up India' initiative in the field of maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities aviation sector

» Rationalisation of taxes like the aviation fuel taxes which is the highest in the world.

» Modification of the India's Aircraft Act, 1934 and Aircraft Rules, 1937 to keep pace with the modern technology in aerospace, growth of industry and passenger traffic.

For detailed Reading- 7 PM Link

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What is The Potential of Aviation Sector In India?

1. **Increased Market Size of Indian Aviation Sector-** According to IATA, India is expected to surpass the aviation sector of the United States and China by 2030. This will make India a lucrative market for airlines and related businesses.

2. **Promotes Balanced Economic Growth-** Passenger airlines and air cargo overcome geographic barriers by connecting remote areas which are alienated from the mainstream. For ex- Development of North-East due to enhanced airline connectivity.

3. **Growth of Tourism sector-** Aviation industry function as a growth pole by promoting spill-over & trickling-down of economic growth. For Ex- Aviation sector gives a boost to tourism sector which in turn drives the supporting infrastructure in a region, like roads, railways, hotels, markets. This helps in providing employment opportunities to the locals.

4. **Boost to manufacturing sector-** India's expanding aviation sector offers potential for the growth of maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities, as well as the development of a domestic aerospace manufacturing industry. For ex- Enhanced employment opportunities in aerospace engine maintenance.

5. **FDI in the Expansion of Infrastructure-** Booming aviation sector has attracted significant FDI to the tune of around ~3 bn dollars in the development of aerospace infrastructure like airports, arrow bridges, airstrips. For ex- Greenfield airport development like Navi Mumbai, Noida (Jewar) airport and expansion of Bengaluru airport.

6. **Increased Employment opportunities-** The growth of aviation sector in India has created a need for skilled professionals, including pilots, cabin crew, and maintenance staff. For ex- Indian scheduled operators are likely to require 10,900 additional pilots by FY30 (IATA projection).

What are The Challenges With India's Aviation Sector?

1. **Increase in number of Grounded Unsafe Aircrafts –** Airlines like Air India, Spice Jet, Go Air, and IndiGo face issues of poor financial performance due to grounded unsafe aircrafts. For ex– Over 160 aircraft are currently grounded which represents about a quarter of the total fleet size of Indian carriers.

2. **Supply Chain Disruptions-** Delays in aircraft deliveries and supply chain issues with original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) has hindered the industry's capacity to meet growing demand.

3. **Duopoly in Indian Aviation Market-** India's domestic aviation market is heading in the direction of a duopoly of market leader IndiGo (60% market size) and the Tata group airlines (20% market size).

4. **Heavy Financial Losses-** Indian airlines are projected to record a consolidated loss of $1.6 to 1.8 billion in FY24, due to heavy financial bleeding of Go first, Spice Jet and Jet Airways.

5. **Operational Disruptions due to crew shortage-** Lack of skilled pilots, maintenance engineers, and cabin crew members have led to operational disruptions like increase in turn-around time of airlines.

6. **Low per-capita penetration of domestic air travel-** India's per capita penetration of domestic air travel (0.13 seats deployed per capita) remains significantly lower than countries like China (0.49) and Brazil (0.57). This indicates the failure of aviation industry in India to tap the maximum potential of domestic air market.

7. **Inflated Projections-** Airlines in India often announce ambitious growth plans without adequately analysing their financial security, infrastructural and personnel requirements. For Ex- Failure of Kingfisher, Jet Airways and Go First on account of inflated projections.

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8. **Regulations acting as barriers-** Tough entry barriers for new entrants, high fuel prices on account of high taxes on ATF (Air Turbine Fuel) and monopoly of inefficient public sector airports have all acted as barriers in the rapid growth of the airlines sector.

9. **Policy Lacunae-** The Aircraft Act, 1934 and Aircraft Rules, 1937 have not kept pace with modern technology in aerospace. This has led to increased costs of the industry's operation and ultimately affected passenger growth.

10. **Poor rural connectivity-** With mega airports controlling air and ground space, there has been challenge of enhancing the rural air connectivity. For ex- Less number of flights to tier 2 and tier 3 towns despite the UDAN scheme.

11. **Environmental Concerns-** The Indian aviation industry faces increasing pressure to reduce its carbon footprint and adopt sustainable practices (The Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation or CORSIA). This has also posed a challenge for growth and expansion of the airline sector.

Read More- CORSIA

What are The Government Initiatives For Aviation Sector In India?

National Civil Aviation Policy, 2016	This aims to improve the international footprint of India-based airline services. Airlines can commence international operations, provided they deploy 20 aircrafts or 20% of their total capacity (whichever is higher) for domestic operations.
UDAN Scheme	This aims to expand access to air travel for Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and shift the traffic pattern away from Metro routes.
Open sky policy	Aims to liberalise the aviation sector in India by opening the airport sector to private participation. Currently, 6 PPP airports are being developed and 60% of airport traffic is handled under PPP.
Open Sky Air Service Agreement	Open Sky Air Service Agreement allows for airlines from the two countries to have an unlimited number of flights as well as seats to each other's jurisdictions. India has signed these agreements with multiple nations like the US, Greece, Jamaica, Japan, Finland, Sri Lanka.
FDI Policies, Tax and Duty cuts	100% FDI is being allowed under the automatic route for greenfield projects, whereas 74% FDI is allowed under automatic route for brownfield projects. 100% tax exemption has been provided for airport projects for a period of 10 years. Indian aircraft Manufacture, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) service providers have been completely exempted from customs and countervailing duties.

What Should be The Way Forward?

1. **Initiate reforms in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)-** DGCA should be modernized, well-staffed and incentivised. DGCA should be headed by aviation professionals rather than bureaucrats.

2. **Promote 'Start-up India' initiative in the aviation sector-** Entrepreneurship must be promoted in the maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities of the aviation industry.

3. **Rationalisation of taxes-** Tax rationalisation must be initiated in aviation fuel taxes (State and Central, which in India are among the highest in the world), air cargo and airport operations.

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4. **Modification of the India's Aircraft Act, 1934 and Aircraft Rules, 1937-** These acts must be updated to keep pace with modern technology in aerospace, growth of industry and passenger traffic.

By addressing these challenges and implementing the suggested reforms, India can pave the way for a thriving aircraft leasing industry, making the country a global leasing hub and bolstering the aviation sector.

> **Read More-** The Business Standard
> **UPSC Syllabus-** GS III, Infrastructure: Airports

Relations Between India-UAE- Explained Pointwise

PM Narendra Modi at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2024, stated that the India-UAE relations are 'stronger than ever'. **Relations Between India-UAE**, PM Modi held bilateral talks on the sidelines of the summit with the UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, who was the Chief Guest of the summit.

> **Some key outcomes of the recent India-UAE Bilateral talks**
> a. India-UAE to explore the establishment of grid connectivity between the two countries.
> b. Four MoUs were signed covering areas such as renewable energy, healthcare, food parks and logistics (DP world and Gujarat Govt to set up logistics parks in Gujarat).
> c. The two leaders expressed satisfaction on the progress of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in 2022 aiming to increase the bilateral trade and investment.
> d. Launch of the UAE-India CEPA Council (UICC) which aims to enhance strategic cooperation in industries like startups, women entrepreneurs, and MSMEs.

India-UAE Relations

PM Narendra Modi at the Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2024 has stated that the India-UAE relations are 'stronger than ever'.

India-UAE Relation-History

- India and the UAE established diplomatic relations in 1972
- India-UAE relation was upgraded to comprehensive strategic partnership in 2017.
- India-UAE relation has entered into a phase of intense engagement. PM Modi has visited UAE six times since 2015. UAE premier has visited India four times since 2016.

Significance of Relations

- Geostrategic Significance
  1. Security- Conflicts in Middle east fuel ISIS recruitments from Kerala.
  2. Countering Piracy in the Arabian Sea- Through exercises like Zayed Talwar (Naval) & Desert Eagle (Air force).
  3. Energy Security- UAE is 6th largest exporter of crude oil to India.
- Geopolitical Significance
  1. Cooperation in International fora- India's UNSC Bid, UNFCC, ISA.
  2. Countering growing China's Influence in Middle East
  3. Crucial for India's OIC membership and India-GCC FTA
- Geo-economic Significance
  1. Remittances- UAE one of the top sources as home to 3.5 million Indian expatriate population (2021).
  2. Trade and Investment- India-UAE trade targeted to reach $100bn by 2030 (India-UAE CEPA), UAE is the ninth largest investor in India.

Recent Achievements

- India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement- Reduced tarrifs on 80% of goods and zero duty access to 90% of India's exports
- Rupee-Dirham deal- Enables the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions.
- Lunch of I2U2 and IMEC- These platforms to promote connectivity and cooperation in fields of technology, infrastructure and sustainibility.
- Religious Freedom- UAE allowing to open the first Hindu temple on its soil- BAPS Hindu Mandir Abu Dhabi

Challenges

- Large Non Tariff Barriers (NTBs) in trade has dampened Indian Exports.
- China's Cheque Book Diplomacy crowding out Indian companies from the UAE
- Inhumane conditions imposed by the Kafala system on Indian immigrants
- Arab-Iran Conflict puts India in a diplomatic tight spot.

Way Forward

- Establishment of 2+2 Dialogue with UAE
- Predictability in the use of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)
- Reformation of Kafala System

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What is the history of India-UAE relations?

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) enjoy strong bonds of friendship based on age-old cultural, religious and economic ties between the two nations.

Initial Phase of Engagement	**1966-** The relationship flourished after the accession of H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan as the Ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1966. **1971-** Federation of UAE was created. **1972-** India and the UAE established diplomatic relations in 1972. **1981-** Indian PM Indira Gandhi visited UAE.
Phase of Active Involvement	**Indian PM's visits to UAE-** Indian PM Narendra Modi visited UAE in 2015. It was after 24 years that any Indian PM visited the country, after Indira Gandhi's visit in 1981. PM Modi has visited UAE six times so far since 2015. PM will visit UAE in Feb 2024, where he will inagurate the BAPS Mandir and address 'Ahlan Modi', a mega diaspora event. **Saudi's Pince Visits to India-** UAE's President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has visited India for four times since 2016, twice as crown prince and twice as President.

What have been some of the major achievements of the India-UAE relations?

India-UAE relation was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership, during the visit of the Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in January 2017. This gave momentum and impetus to India-UAE relations, which has seen some major achievements in recent years.

1. **India-UAE CEPA-** India and the UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) came into force on May 1, 2022. CEPA has led to slashing of tariffs on more than 80% of goods and gives zero duty access to 90% of India's exports to the UAE.
It has led to increase in the value of trade. The non-oil trade has reached US$50 billion between May 2022, and April 2023. The target of non-oil trade hitting $100 billion by 2030 seems an imminent possibility.

2. **Launch of <u>India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)</u>–** UAE is a vital cog in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) that would boost connectivity and act as a credible alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

3. **Launch of I2U2 Initiative-** I2U2 is a grouping launched by India and UAE along with Israel and the United States. This grouping aims to deepen technological and private sector collaboration in the region to tackle transnational challenges in areas like water, energy and transportation.

4. **Rupee-Dirham deal-** Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Central Bank of the UAE have agreed to establish a framework for enabling the use of their local currencies for cross-border transactions. This will reduce the reliance on US Dollars and promote the Internationalisation of Indian Rupee.

5. **Convergence on Politically sensitive Issues-** UAE has been deeply understanding towards India's politically sensitive issues such as Kashmir and has stood with India on Abrogation of Art 370.

6. **Religious Freedom-** UAE has shown great religious acceptance and allowed the construction of the first ever temple on its Land- the BAPS Hindu Mandir Abu Dhabi.

What is the significance of India-UAE relations?

Geostrategic Significance

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1. **Security-** The Middle-east region is a theatre of warfare like the Israel-Hamas war, Conflicts in Syria, Iraq,Yemen etc. These conflicts have several security implications in India. For ex- Rise of ISIS recruitments from Kerala. Hence, India-UAE relationship becomes significant to bolster internal and external security of both the nations.

2. **Countering Piracy and terrorism-** Better India-UAE relations are necessary to strengthen the security of the Arabian Sea and Indian ocean region, that is prone to piracy. Also India and UAE have been collaborating in joint exercises to counter terrorism. For ex- Desert Cyclone (Military), Zayed Talwar (Naval) and Desert Eagle (Air force).

3. **Energy Security-** UAE is one of India's key energy providers (6th largest exporter of crude oil to India). UAE is also the first international partner to invest in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves Program.

Geopolitical Significance

1. **Close Cooperation in International fora-** UAE supports India's bid for entry in the UNSC. Also, India and UAE have been collaborating closely in UNFCCC, ISA, I2U2 and IMEC etc.

2. **Countering China's Influence in the Middle East-** China has been increasing its influence in the middle east through initiatives like BRI, brokering of peace talks between Saudi and Iran. India must improve its relation with UAE to counter the Chinese growing Influence in the middle east.

3. **Better Coordination with Regional Groupings antagonistic to India-** UAE commands a significant respect in regional groupings like OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council). An improvement in relation will open India's door for an OIC membership and India-GCC FTA.

Geo-Economic Significance

1. **Remittances-** UAE is the second home to 3.5 million Indian nationals. UAE is one of the top sources of remittance inflow in India.

2. **Trade and Investment –** UAE is India's third-largest trading partner, with the trade volume close to ~$60bn. The CEPA agreement aims to increase the non-oil trade to $100 bn by 2030. UAE's investment in India is estimated to be around U.S.$11.67 billion, which makes it the ninth-biggest investor in India. Indian companies have set up manufacturing units either as JVs or in Special Economic Zones for cement, building materials, textiles, engineering products, consumer electronics.

4. **Gateway to Africa –** Engagement with the UAE paves the way for India to leverage UAE's easy access to the African market and its various trade partners (GCC and Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) Agreement). This can help India to become a part of the supply chain especially in handlooms, handicrafts, textiles and pharma.

Cultural and P2P significance

1. **Protection of interests of Indian Diaspora –** Good India-UAE relationship is crucial to protect the economic and socio-cultural interest of 3.5 million large expatriate community, as of 2021. For ex- Opening of First ever Hindu Temple in Abu Dhabi.

2. **Enhancement of India's Soft Power –** Good relations with the UAE is a sine qua non for enhancing India's Soft power in the Middle-east region. For ex- Abu Dhabi and Dubai celebrating Diwali.

What are the challenges to the India-UAE Relationship?

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1. **Non Tariff Barriers (NTBs)-** The Non-Tariff Barriers like Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) adopted by the UAE, has dampened Indian exports related to poultry, meat and processed food.

2. **China's Cheque Book Diplomacy –** China with its deep pockets has been offering low interest loans and crowding out Indian companies from the UAE and Middle-east region.

3. **Arab-Iran Conflict –** The differences between Iran and the Arab world also puts India in a diplomatic tight spot to balance its relationship with both UAE and Iran.

4. **Kafala System –** The inhumane conditions imposed by the Kafala system on immigrants engaged in blue collar jobs in the UAE is a major challenge in India-UAE relations. It gives employers disproportionate control over migrant workers' immigration and employment status.

5. **Extension of Loans to Pakistan –** UAE is a major lender to Pakistan. Pakistan sponsors cross border terrorist attacks in India. The money provided by the UAE seems to be used in endangering India's national security.

What steps should be taken to further enhance the India-UAE relationship?

1. **Transparency and predictability in the use of Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)-** There must be regular information sharing on labelling, licensing, permit requirements, import monitoring and surveillance requirements.

2. **Establishment of 2+2 Dialogue –** India must establish more strategic dialogue platforms like India's 2+2 dialogue with U.S., Russia.

3. **Alignment with 'Vision 2021'-** UAE through its 'Vision 2021', seeks to diversify its economy and reduce its dependency on oil. India must use areas like renewable energy, start-ups, fintech to deepen its engagement with the UAE.

4. **Reformation of Kafala System –** India should actively engage with the UAE to reform the Kafala system. For Ex- Qatar has promised to reform the Kafala system on India's insistence.

Read More- Moneycontrol
UPSC Syllabus- GS II- International Relations- India's Bilateral Engagements

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Increasing Antimicrobial Resistance in India- Explained Pointwise

According to a recently released report by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in India, is one of the highest in the World. The World Health Organization has recognized AMR as one of the top 10 global public health threats.

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Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)

According to a report by Global Research on Antimicrobial resistance (GRAM) project, AMR has directly contributed to about 30% of deaths due to neonatal sepsis across India. Moreover, over 30% of the COVID-19 deaths in India, were due to failure to treat secondary bacterial infections caused by Multi Drug Resistant pathogens.

Anti Microbial Resistance

» AMR- Resistance of microorganisms (bacteria, virus, parasites and fungi) to an antimicrobial agent (antibiotics, fungicides, antiviral agents and parasiticides), to which they were first sensitive

» Examples of AMR in India- Bacteria like E. coli, Klebsiella, Acinetobacter have developed AMR. Third-generation antimicrobial drugs like cephalosporins, imidazoles have become ineffective

Challenges

» Threat to the health care system- Increase the mortality rates in Africa and Asia.

» Economic Brunt- To the tune of US$ 1 trillion by 2050 for the world economy.

» Looming possibility of next pandemic- C. Auris superbug has raised severe concerns.

Initiatives

» Delhi Declaration on AMR

» Red Line campaign

» National programme on AMR containment

» WHO's Global Action Plan (GAP) on AMR, 2015

Causes of AMR

» Misuse of antimicrobial medicines- Use of over-the-counter antibiotics & Overuse during Covid-19

» Inadequate healthcare facilities- Lack of large network of laboratories for bacterial culture tests & adequately trained healthcare personnel

» Improper usage in agriculture and allied sectors- Use of Colistin as growth promotional agent in poultry farming

» Crony capitalism- Pharmaceutical industry incentivising the sale of antibiotics

» No new antimicrobial development- Exit of big pharma from antibiotic development

» Inadequate sanitation facilities- Candida auris acquired by hospital patients

Way Forward

» Chennai Declaration on AMR- Implement new H1 rule which bans the use of only second and third-line antibiotic.

» One Health Approach- Reduce use of biopesticides and fungicides in agriculture.

» Awareness Generation- Peru's efforts on patient education

» R&D of new antibiotics- Use of AMR Fund for support

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What is Antimicrobial Resistance? What are The Different Kinds of Antimicrobial Resistance?

Definition- Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is the resistance of microorganisms (bacteria, virus, parasites and fungi) to an antimicrobial agent (antibiotics, fungicides, antiviral agents and parasiticides), to which they were first sensitive.

Extent of AMR in India According to The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) Report on AMR

1. Bacteria like E. coli, Klebsiella, Acinetobacter, Staphylococcus aureus, enterococcus have become resistant to even the latest generation of antibiotics.
2. Third-generation antimicrobial drugs like cephalosporins, imidazoles, amino-glycosides, ceftriaxone, metronidazole, amikacin and piperacillin, used to treat cold, fever, skin diseases and urinary tract infection have become ineffective.

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3. Inappropriate use of antibiotics in human, animal and agricultural sectors has generated superbugs that are resistant to these antibiotic drugs, which spread due to inadequate sanitation and improper infection prevention in healthcare.

Types of Antimicrobial Resistance

Natural (intrinsic, structural) resistance	Natural resistance is caused by the structural characteristics of microbes. It is not associated with the use of antimicrobials. It has no hereditary property.
Acquired resistance	Acquired resistance develops due to the changes in the genetic characteristics of microbes, like changes in structures of chromosomes. This makes the microbes resistant to previous antimicrobial treatment.
Cross resistance	Resistance developed in microbes against antibiotics having similar structure.
Multi-drug resistance and pan-resistance	Resistance of microorganisms to a range of antimicrobes used to kill them. Multiple drugs and their enhanced generation is also not able to kill them.

What are The Reasons Behind The Growth of Antimicrobial Resistance in India?

1. **Misuse of antimicrobial medicines-** The use of antibiotic medicine in non-bacterial infections, use of over-the-counter antibiotics, self-medication and emergence of fixed drug compositions, have contributed to the increase in antimicrobial resistance in India. **For ex-** Overuse of antimicrobial medicines during the Covid-19 outbreak.

2. **Inadequate laboratory facilities-** India lacks severely in the laboratory network and capacity to support Clinicians/Doctors with the bacterial culture test and suggesting an appropriate antibiotic.

3. **Lack of trained healthcare personnel**– There is lack of adequate training of healthcare personnel in antibiotic selection, escalation, and de-escalation.

4. **Inadequacy of healthcare facilities-** Overcrowded hospitals have left very little time for the doctors to examine patient's medical history, conduct proper blood tests and then recommend proper antimicrobial treatment.

5. **Inappropriate use of antimicrobes in agriculture and allied sectors**– The overuse of antimicrobials in agriculture and allied sector have led to increase in AMR. **For ex-** Use of Colistin as growth promotional agent in poultry farming has led to Colistin AMR in India.

6. **Inadequate monitoring-** India lacks proper monitoring system to control the antibiotic prescription and dispensing practice by health system. **For ex-** Ineffective monitoring to stop the sale of over the counter antibiotics.

7. **Crony capitalism-** The pharmaceutical industry incentivises the sale of antibiotics by being hand in gloves with the health care personnel like doctors, pharmacists etc.

8. **Contamination around pharmaceutical manufacturing sites-** The untreated waste from the pharmaceutical industries releases large amounts of active antimicrobials into the environment.

9. **Inadequate sanitation facilities-** Poorly functioning sanitation systems like open defecation, poorly contained septic tanks have led to increase in AMR.

10. **Improper infection prevention in healthcare institutions-** AMR has also spread due to the lack of proper infection prevention mechanism in hospitals, clinics and laboratories. **For ex- Candida auris** acquired by hospital patients.

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11. **No new antimicrobial developments-** The exit of big pharma from antibiotic development and lack of investment from venture capitalists to support the commercial viability of antibacterial agents, has pushed AMR into a global health crisis.

What are The Challenges Posed by Spread of Antimicrobial Resistance?

1. **Threat to the health care system-** The Antimicrobials helped in significantly reducing the mortality rates low and middle-income countries (LMICs) of Asia and Africa. The ineffectiveness would impair the modern health system by failing to prevent infections post a routine surgery or cancer treatment.

2. **Loss of Human Lives-** AMR is responsible for up to 7 lakh deaths a year (GRAM project report). **For ex-** E.coli and MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) are among the drug-resistant bacteria that lead to most deaths.

3. **Economic Brunt-** As per an estimate by the Global Research on Antimicrobial resistance (GRAM) project, AMR can lead to an economic brunt on the world economy to the tune of US$ 1 trillion by 2050.

4. **Looming possibility of next pandemic-** There is a looming possibility that the next pandemic will be caused by a superbug. **For ex-** Concerns about the spread of C. Auris superbug.

What Steps Have Been Taken Towards Controlling AMR?

Domestic Steps and Actions

Ban of antimicrobial usage in Agriculture	The Government of India has passed an order banning the use of streptomycin and tetracycline in agriculture and the growth promotional use of colistin in poultry farming.
National programme on AMR containment	It was launched during 12th FYP in 2012-17. Under this programme, AMR Surveillance Network has been strengthened by establishing labs in State Medical Colleges.
Delhi Declaration on AMR	An inter-ministerial consensus was signed by the ministers of the concerned ministries pledging their support in AMR containment.
Chennai Declaration	New H1 rule was introduced which banned the use of only second and third-line antibiotics. (H1 rule was brought out to regulate over-the-counter use of antibiotics)
Red Line campaign	To prevent irrational use of prescription-only antibiotics and create awareness on the dangers of taking antibiotics without prescription.

Global Steps and Actions

Funding support through PPP model	Early stage funding from public-private partnerships like CARB-X (the Combating Antibiotic Resistance Bacteria Biopharmaceutical Accelerator) to small companies for antibacterial projects.
GAIN Act, 2012	The U.S. Congress has enacted the Generating Antibiotic Incentives Now Act (GAIN Act) of 2012. It provides benefits to manufacturers of Qualified Infectious Disease Products (QIDPs) including five years of additional non-patent exclusivity.
WHO's Global Action Plan (GAP) on AMR, 2015	WHO has launched this comprehensive global action plan to reduce the incidence of AMR by improving awareness and understanding about AMR, optimisation of antimicrobial usage and initiating effective sanitation and hygiene.

What Should Be The Way Ahead in Reducing AMR?

AMR is a complex socio-economic and political challenge and not just a scientific issue to be solved by doctors and researchers alone.

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1. **Improvement of Sanitation and Hygiene-** The sanitation in hospitals and basic access to personal hygiene must be improved to reduce the spread of AMR.

2. **Implementation of the Chennai Declaration on AMR-** The new H1 rule which banned the use of only second and third-line antibiotic must be implemented at the earliest to prevent the over-the-counter sales of antibiotics.

3. **Investment in Public Health infrastructure-** The investment in public health infrastructure like network of laboratories, hospitals, recruitment of trained medical professionals must be enhanced at the earliest. **For ex-** NCCD reports points out that states with good public health systems have lower AMR.

4. **Improving governance and monitoring framework-** Environmental governance, planning and regulatory frameworks must be enhanced to combat the menace of AMR. **For ex-** Involve the Ministry of environment to stop the contamination of antimicrobials.

5. **One Health Approach-** Any actions on AMR must be guided by the 'One Health Approach'- a holistic approach that links the health of humans with our shared environment. This will help in reducing the use of biopesticides and fungicides in agriculture.

6. **Robust investment in R&D of new antibiotics-** Funding support must be taken from the AMR Action Fund for the development of new and power antibiotics.

7. **Awareness Generation on AMR-** Peru's efforts on patient education to reduce unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions must be used as a learning point.

The development of resistance to antimicrobials is a major public health problem all over the world. It makes even minor infections tough to treat, causing severe illnesses and deaths. Hence, a clarion call to end this menace must be taken at local, national and global levels that would eventually help in attainment of SDG 3 (ensuring good health and well-being for all).

> **Read More-** The Hindu
> **UPSC Syllabus- GS 3-** Science and Technology (Health care and emerging concerns)

Police Reform In India In 2024- Explained Pointwise

PM Narendra Modi emphasised on the need of Police Reform at the recent DGP, IGP meet. PM emphasised on the need of modernisation of the police forces and exhorted them to 'work with data instead of danda'. With the changing nature of crime like threats of cyber crime, we need to act urgently on reforming the old and outdated policing system in India.

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Police Reforms In India

Issues in Police Force	Commissions Suggestions and SC Ruling in Prakash Singh Case
Overburdened Police Force- Police-public ratio in India is **152.80 per lakh person** against the UN's mandated ratio of **222 police per lakh persons** **Lack of Diversity in Police forces-** Women representation in the police force is just **11.7%**	**NITI Aayog- 33% reservation** to women in police force recruitment. Identify and outsource **non-core functions** like address verification for passport applications to private agencies. **Padmanabhiah Commission-** Standardisation of recruitment for police force.
Political Accountability and Loss of Public Trust- Politicisation of appointment including DGP Centre-state Tussle in CBI **'New Delhi conceived and managed' IPS**	**SC Direction in Prakash Singh Case- Police Establishment Board (PEB)** to decide transfers, postings and promotions. Security of tenure of min 2 years for DGPs, SP and SHOs.
Deteriorating Police-Public Relations- Corruption , **Misconduct against Public**	**SC Ruling- Police Complaints Authority (PCA)** to inquire into public complaints against police officers
Botched up Crime Investigation- Changing nature of crime like **cyber crimes, low rates of conviction** due to improper investigation, **Custodial deaths.**	**Second ARC- Separation** of Crime Investigation and law and order function. **Malimath Committee-** Revamp entire criminal procedure system. Set up fund for custodial deaths
Colonial legacy and lack of Infrastructure- Colonial Law of **Indian Police Act 1861**, Weaponry shortage, Surveillance vehicle shortage.	**Soli Sorabjee Committee-** A **new model police bill** to replace the colonial 1861 Police Act. **NITI Aayog-** Nudge states to adopt **'The Model Police Act of 2015'**, separate funds for police modernisation.

For detailed Reading- 7 PM Link

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What is Police Reform? What is The Constitutional and Legal Basis of Police System in India?

Police reforms aim to transform the values, culture, policies and practices of police organizations. It envisages police to perform their duties with respect for democratic values, human rights and the rule of law.

Constitutional and Legal Basis of Police System in India

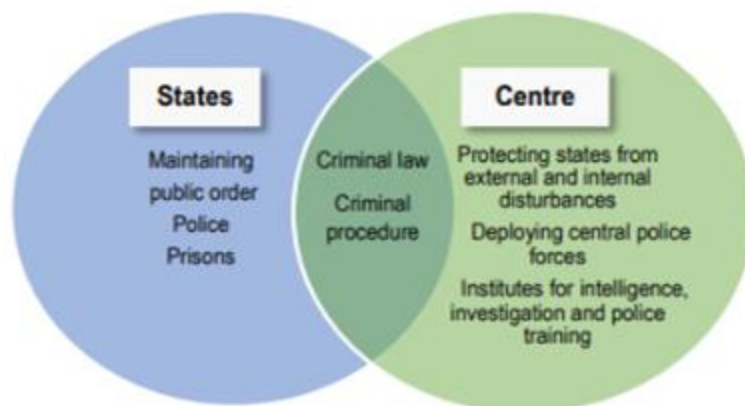| |
|---|
| Police is an exclusive subject under the State List (List II, Schedule 7 of the Constitution). However, the centre is also allowed to maintain its own police forces to assist the states with ensuring law and order. **For ex-** CRPF, CISF. |
| The present Indian police system is largely based on the Police act of 1861. State legislation on policing is based on this Act. **For Ex-** Bombay Police Act, 1951, Kerala police act 1960, Delhi police act 1978. |

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What is The Need For Police Reform in India?

1. **Overburdened Police Force-** Police-public ratio in India stands at 152.80 per lakh person, against the sanctioned public-police ratio of 196.23 per lakh person (as on 1st January 2022). This is way too low when compared with the UN's recommended standard of 222 police per lakh persons. This has led to a state of an overburdened police force and a huge backlog of cases.

2. **Constabulary Issues-** The constabulary constitutes ~86% of the state police forces. However, the constabulary suffers from issues such as limited promotion opportunities (only once in his lifetime) and harsh working conditions (Lack of housing facilities). This has weakened their incentive to perform well.

3. **Issues with IPS System-** The 'New Delhi- conceived and managed' IPS has emerged as 'a permanent irritant' between the centre and states. States look upon the IPS as unreliable intruders and prefer to have their own recruits. **For ex-** Tussle over the promotions of Police officers at important positions.

4. **Centre-state Tussle-** Even though police is a state subject, public prefers CBI investigations over state police interventions as they lack faith in their own police forces, leading to centre-state tussle. **For ex-** Tussle between WB Police and CBI, Withdrawal of general consent to CBI by WB, TN.

5. **Lack of Diversity in Police forces-** As per Status of Policing in India Report, 2022, Indian police lacks diversity on the basis of caste, class, religion and gender. Representation of women in the police force is just 11.7% (Jan 2022).

6. **Accountability to the Political Executives vs Operational Freedom-** The Second ARC (2007) has noted that political interference has interfered with professional decision-making by the police and resulted in a biased performance of duties. **For Ex-** Politicisation of DGP appointment.

7. **Police Infrastructure Issues-** The Police suffers from issues like
a. Weaponry shortage (Rajasthan-75% shortage and West Bengal- 71% shortage, according to CAG audit report 2015-16)
b. Surveillance vehicle shortage (30.5% deficiency according to BPRD)
c. Underutilisation of Funds for modernisation of state police forces (Just 6 % of the Rs 620 cr fund for modernisation of state police forces was used in FY23)
d. Non-functioning of POLNET (Police Communication Network)- a satellite-based network to facilitate faster communication between police and paramilitary forces (CAG report highlights the failure of states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh in setting up POLNET).

8. **Colonial Legacy-** The Indian Police is still governed by the Police Act of 1861, which is a colonial law aimed at creating a 'suppressor police force' rather than an 'enabler police force'.

9. **Police misconduct and Corruption-** In 2016, the vigilance department had conducted 55% more inquiries against its own men. India lacks institutional mechanism to complain against the erring police officials.

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10. **Deteriorating Police-Public Relations-** The Second ARC (2007) has noted that police-public relations is rapidly deteriorating as people view the police as corrupt, inefficient, politically partisan and unresponsive. According to a 2018 survey by CSDS, less than 25% of Indians expressed trust in the police.

11. **Changing nature of Crimes-** The nature of crimes is becoming more complex like the emergence of various kinds of organized crimes, economic fraud, deepfakes. Police lack modern technological capabilities necessary to perform quality investigations.

12. **Botched up Crime Investigation-** The 22nd Law Commission has pointed out that conviction rate for crimes recorded under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 is less than 50%. It has pointed out that the police lack training in essential skills like forensic laws, cybercrimes and legal knowledge of admissibility of evidence.

13. **Custodial Deaths-** As per Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) report, 144 custodial deaths took place from 2017 to 2018. The large number of custodial deaths point towards wide use of torture in police investigations.

What Will Be The Benefits Of Police Reforms in India?

1. **Shedding the colonial Legacy-** The reform of Indian Police Act will help in shedding the colonial legacy like it was done in the case of IPC, CrPC and Evidence Act being replaced by Bhartiya Nyaya, Surkasha and sakshya Samhitas.

2. **Help in tackling Modern day crimes-** The reform will help in tackling the modern day crimes like cyberespionage, deepfakes and online financial frauds.

3. **Increase in social sensitivity-** Diversified workforce like greater representation of women in police force will increase gender sensitivity towards women in the society. **For ex-** Help in decreasing cases of crimes against women.
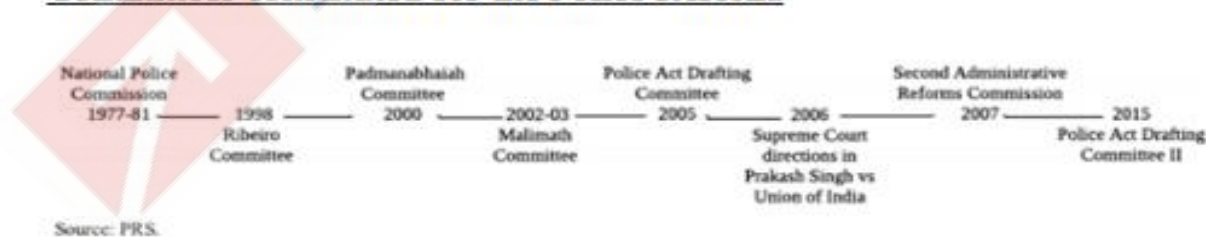
4. **Reduction in custodial Deaths and Violence-** It will help in reducing inhumane tortures in police custody especially of the downtrodden and the disadvantaged. **For ex-** Reduction in cases like Thoothukudi district custodial death.

5. **Bolster Internal security-** Modernised Police force will help in bolstering national security and containing crimes like naxalism and separatism.

Read More- Police Reform- UPSC

What are The Recommendations of Various Committees Regarding Police Reforms in India?

Committees constituted for the Police Reform:

| National Police Commission 1977-81 | 1998 Ribeiro Committee | Padmanabhaiah Committee 2000 | 2002-03 Malimath Committee | Police Act Drafting Committee 2005 | 2006 Supreme Court directions in Prakash Singh vs Union of India | Second Administrative Reforms Commission 2007 | 2015 Police Act Drafting Committee II |

Source: PRS.

Source- PRS

Various Committee recommendations

Gore committee 1971-1973	Enlarge the content of police training from law and order and crime prevention to a greater sensitivity and understanding of human behaviour

National Police Commission 1977	Insulate the police from illegitimate political and bureaucratic interference.
Padmanabhaiah Committee 2000	Standardisation of recruitment procedures for the police force & training. Bring changes in police officers' behaviour, police investigations and prosecution. Change the criterion for constabulary recruitment and improve pay & perk.
Soli Sorabjee Committee 2005	A new model police bill to replace the colonial 1861 Police Act.
Second ARC 2007	Separation of crime investigation from other police functions like maintenance of law and order. Establishment of State police boards for welfare and grievances redressal mechanisms for police personnel.
Malimath Committee 2003	A complete revamp of the entire criminal procedure system. Creation of fund to compensate victims turning hostile under pressure of culprits. Separate national level authority to deal with crimes threatening the country's security.

Seven Directives of The Supreme Court in Prakash Singh vs Union of India

In the Landmark Prakash Singh vs Union of India, for police reforms in India, SC has given the following observations-

a. **State Security Commission (SSC)**– Constitute a State Security Commission (SSC) so that the state government does not exercise unwarranted influence or pressure on the police.

b. **Merit based appointment of DGP**– Ensure that the DGP is appointed through the merit-based transparent process and secure a minimum tenure of two years of service.

c. **Security of tenure-** Police officers on operational duties (including SP and SHO) are also provided a minimum tenure of two year.

d. **Criminal Investigation and law and order separation**– Separate the investigation and law and order functions of the police.

e. **Police Establishment Board (PEB)**– Set up a Police Establishment Board (PEB) to decide transfers, postings, promotions and other service related matters of police.

f) **Police Complaints Authority (PCA)**– Set up a Police Complaints Authority (PCA) at state level to inquire into public complaints against police officers of above the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

g) **National Security Commission (NSC)-** Set up a National Security Commission (NSC) at the union level to prepare a panel for selection and placement of Chiefs of the Central Police Organizations (CPO) with a minimum tenure of two years.

NITI Aayog Suggestions on Police Modernisation

a. **State level legislative reforms-** States should be encouraged, with fiscal incentives, to introduce ' The Model Police Act of 2015' as it modernises the mandate of the police.

b. **Task force under MHA-** To identify non-core functions that can be outsourced to save on manpower and help in reducing the workload of the police. **For Ex-** Address verification for passport applications can be outsourced to private agents or government departments.

c. **Greater representation of women-** The states should be encouraged to ensure that the representation of women in the police force is increased. For ex- Bihar's 33% women in police force rule.

d. **Place police and public order in concurrent List-** Police as well as public order must be moved to the Concurrent List to tackle increasing inter-state crime and terrorism under a unified framework.

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What Should Be the Way Forward?

1. **Reform the 'Thana'-** The thana system is the most basic unit of police functioning.Through the thana, the police remains in contact with the common man. Thus, improving the working conditions of thana-level constables should be a priority.

2. **Enhance Police Budget and upgrade Police Infrastructure-** More than 90% of the police budget in the states are used for salary and establishment costs. Allocation for training, procurement and technology deployment should increase. States must fully use the funds for police modernisation.

3. **Reform the criminal justice system-** Focus must be on the effective implementation of the Malimath Committee recommendations to reform the criminal justice system.

5. **Training and Capacity Building of policemen-** Training the police forces should be a continuous process along with the evolving nature of the crime space. **For ex-** The cyber cell of the Delhi Police to deal with cyber criminals.

6. **Upgrade technology and research in policing-** Reform the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) by making it a more inclusive institution. **For ex-** Expertise of social science experts for better research on criminology, NCRB's Automated Facial Recognition System(AFRS) to identify criminals.

7. **Improving public perception through community policing–** Community policing initiatives like 'Janamaithri Suraksha Project-Kerala', 'Meira Paibi-Assam' must be undertaken to improve ground level policing.

8. **Learning from international best practices-** Japan's separate police commission for recruitment, New York Polices specialisation of police model, must be used to reform our police and make it a global Police.

9. **Increase women representation-** 33% women reservation in police should be implemented in all the states. States like Bihar have taken a step in this direction.

All reforms must be enunciated in the direction of development of SMART Police– Sensitive, Mobile, Alert, Reliable and Techno-savvy.

> **Read More-** The Hindu
> **UPSC Syllabus- GS II-** Role of Civil Services in a Democracy

Significance and Challenges of International Court of Justice

The **International Court of Justice** (ICJ) recently held hearings in a case brought by South Africa, accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has heralded significant strides in addressing international legal disputes since its establishment in 1945. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of this esteemed institution have often been called into question.

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International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) recently held hearings in a case brought by South Africa, accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza. ICJ has heralded significant strides in addressing international legal disputes since 1945. However, ICJ's effectiveness and efficiency have often been called into question.

Brief Info About ICJ

» **ICJ-** Principal judicial organ of UN. Established in 1945 and is situated at Peace Palace in The Hague.

» **Composition-** 15 member judges having a term of office of 9 years. Elected by UNGA and UNSC separately and simultaneously.

» **Mandate of ICJ-** Settling Legal Disputes between member states in contentious cases & giving advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and agencies

» **Judgement of ICJ-** The judgement is final and binding on the parties to a case. UNSC empowered to ensure compliance of the judgement.

Challenges

» **Lack of robust enforcement mechanism-** Misuse of Veto powers by UNSC members like US in case of Israel

» **Non-participation-** Powerful member states do not participate in ICJ proceedings. For ex- Russia in Ukraine case

» **Political Bias of the member judges-** Russian and Chinese judges voting against ICJ order on Russian aggression in Ukraine

» **Lengthy and Bureaucratic Procedures-** Delays justice like the pending case of Gambia against Myanmar on genocide of Rohingyas filed in 2019

» **Limited Jurisdiction-** US refusal to accept the ICJ's jurisdiction in certain matters

Significance

» **Forum for peaceful dispute resolution-** Peaceful resolution of a territorial dispute between Burkina Faso and Mali

» **Clarification of complex legal issues-** ICJ's advisory opinion on the 'Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons' (1996)

» **Justice in Human Rights violations-** ICJ holding Serbia responsible for violating the Genocide Convention during the Bosnian War.

» **Reparations and Compensation-** ICJ ordering Uganda to pay reparations for human rights violations during Congo-Uganda conflict

» **Development of International Law-** New laws in maritime domain in ICJ ruling in Qatar v. Bahrain territorial and maritime dispute case (2001)

Way Forward

» **Strengthen ICJ Enforcement Mechanisms-** Reform UNSC like no veto in case of ICJ verdict enforcement.

» **Encourage Greater State Participation in ICJ-** Recent Romanian declaration of compulsory jurisdiction of ICJ

» **Review and Update the ICJ's Charter-** Remove all outdated provisions and adapt its structure to the evolving needs of the present times

» **Address Fragmentation of International Law-** Co-ordinate with ICC, PCA, WTO DSB and UNCLOS

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What Is The Structure and Mandate of The International Court of Justice (ICJ)?

ICJ- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.

Seat of the ICJ- ICJ is situated at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (United States of America).

Composition of the ICJ-

Total Number of Judges	The ICJ is composed of 15 judges. The 15 judges of the Court are distributed in following regions-3 (Africa), 2 (Latin America and Caribbean), 3 (Asia), 5 (Western Europe and other states), 2 (Eastern Europe)
Tenure of Judges	These judges are elected for terms of office of nine years. In order to ensure a measure of continuity, one third of the Court is elected every three years. Judges are eligible for re-election.

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Method of Election	The judges are elected by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. These organs vote simultaneously but separately. In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies.
Independence	ICJ is not composed of representatives of governments, unlike other organs of international organizations. Judges make solemn declaration in open court that they will exercise their powers impartially and conscientiously. No Member of the Court can be dismissed unless, in the unanimous opinion of the other Members, he/she no longer fulfils the required conditions. (No ICJ member judge has been dismissed till date)
Administrative Organ	ICJ is assisted by a Registry which is its administrative organ. Its official languages are English and French.

Role and Mandate of ICJ-

ICJ acts as a world court with two fold jurisdiction.

Settling Legal Disputes	To settle legal disputes submitted to it by States in contentious cases like settling disputes between countries and determining "state responsibility" for crimes committed in violation of international law. Only States which are members of the United Nations and which have become parties to the Statute of the Court or which have accepted its jurisdiction under certain conditions, are parties to contentious cases.
Giving Advisory Opinions	To give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

Judgement of ICJ- The judgment is final, binding on the parties to a case and without appeal (At the most it is subjected to interpretation or revision upon the discovery of a new fact).
If a state fails to perform the obligations incumbent upon it under a judgement, the other state can bring the matter before the Security Council. The UN Security Council is empowered to recommend or decide upon measures to be taken to give effect to the judgment.

Importance of the International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) holds significant importance in the realm of international law and global governance.

1. **Forum for peaceful dispute resolution-** Countries bring their legal grievances before the court, and its decisions are binding on the parties involved. **For Ex-** Nicaragua v. United States case (1986), ICJ held US responsible for violation of International law, for supporting armed activities against Nicaragua. Burkina Faso and Republic of Mali Frontier Dispute Case (1986), ICJ facilitated the peaceful resolution of a territorial dispute between Burkina Faso and Mali.

2. **Clarification of complex legal issues-** Even though ICJ's advisory opinions are non-binding, they carry significant weight in clarifying legal issues. **For Ex-** The ICJ's advisory opinion on the 'Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons' (1996) addressed the legality of nuclear weapons under international law.

3. **Advisory Role in Diplomacy-** The ICJ's advisory opinions also support diplomatic efforts and facilitate resolution of contentious issues between states. **For Ex-** South Africa's case against Israel (2023) for genocide in Gaza, could lead to an advisory opinion and influence diplomatic efforts in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

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4. **Increased adjiciation Human Rights violation and Genocide Cases-** ICJ has contributed to the development and enforcement of international human rights standards. For Ex- In Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro case (2007), the ICJ ruled that Serbia had violated the Genocide Convention during the Bosnian War.

5. **Reparations and Compensation-** The ICJ has the authority to order reparations and compensation for damages caused by one state to another. This has contributed to accountability for wrongful actions. Major rulings on reparations have also been adhered to by the concerned parties. **For Ex-** In Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda case (2005), ICJ ordered Uganda to pay $325 million reparations for human rights violations and damages during the Congo-Uganda conflict. This order was complied by Uganda.

6. **Development of International Law-** The ICJ's decisions and interpretations of international law have contributed to the development and clarification of legal principles and has set precedents for future cases. **For Ex-** In Qatar v. Bahrain territorial and maritime dispute case (2001), ICJ's decisions have influenced the understanding and development of international law in these domains.

7. **Enhanced participation of states under its framework-** ICJ has been successful in furthering the participation of states that have not accepted its compulsory jurisdiction, by invoking its authority through dispute settlement clauses or special agreements. **For Ex-** Recent Romanian advancement of a declaration in support of the court's jurisdiction has been supported by more than 30 Countries.

Challenges and Limitations To The ICJ

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) faces several challenges that impact its effectiveness and the implementation of its decisions.

1. **Lack of dedicated and robust enforcement mechanism-** The UN Charter authorises the UNSC to enforce the court's decisions. However, its compliance and enforcement is often at the mercy of the power politics of the permanent members of the Security Council. **For Ex-** The enforcement of any adverse ruling against Israel is likely to be vetoed by its strongest ally, the U.S.

2. **Non-participation of powerful member states in ICJ proceedings-** Big power players have often refused to participate in the ICJ proceedings itself. **For Ex-** Russia's refusal to participate in ICJ proceedings in the Ukraine vs Russia case (2022). U.S. refusal to submit to the ICJ jurisdiction in the famous Nicaragua vs the U.S. case (1986).

3. **Political Bias of the member judges-** The impartiality of ICJ judges have been compromised by political considerations. Member judges have sometimes aligned their decisions with the interests of their home countries. **For Ex-** Judges from Russia and China voting against the ICJ decision ordering Russia to halt military operations in Ukraine In 2022, revealing potential political influences.

4. **Lengthy and Bureaucratic Procedures-** The ICJ is marred by lengthy and bureaucratic process results in inordinate delays in delivery of Justice. **For Ex-** The 2019 case instituted by Gambia against Myanmar for its military crackdown on Rohingya refugees is still in trial. This is delaying the justice for Rohingya refugees.

5. **Limited Jurisdiction-** The ICJ's jurisdiction is limited to cases where states voluntarily submit to its authority. Some states may not accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the court, reducing its scope. **For Ex-** US refusal to accept the ICJ's jurisdiction in certain matters.

6. **Potential for Fragmentation of International Law-** The existence of multiple international courts and tribunals has raised concerns about potential contradictions in rulings. This can lead to uncertainty and fragmentation of international law. **For** Ex- The coexistence of the ICJ with other judicial bodies, such as the

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International Criminal Court (ICC) and Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) has resulted in varied interpretations of legal principles.

Read More- Three major Judicial organizations in the world

What Should Be The Way Forward To Reform The ICJ?

1. **Strengthen ICJ Judgement Enforcement Mechanisms-** It can be done by reforming the UN Security Council like increase in permanent membership, no veto in ICJ decisions. This will help in reducing the impact of political considerations on enforcement.

2. **Explore Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Methods-** The ICJ can explore the use of alternative dispute resolution methods, such as mediation or arbitration, in certain cases to expedite resolutions and promote amicable settlements.

3. **Promotion of Impartiality and Independence of Members-** ICJ must promote transparency in the selection process. It must also encourage the judges to adhere strictly to the principles of the court rather than aligning with the political interests of their home countries. **For Ex-** India's appointee to the ICJ, Justice Dalveer Bhandari's voted in favour of provisional measures against Russia which was in conflict with India's official stance at the UN (India had abstained from voting on all key resolutions pertaining to the Ukraine-Russia conflict)

4. **Address Fragmentation of International Law-** Efforts should be made to coordinate and harmonize the decisions of various international courts and tribunals like ICC, PCA, to avoid contradictions and inconsistencies in international law.

5. **Enhancement of Procedural Efficiency-** The ICJ must explore ways to streamline its procedures and reduce the time taken for cases to reach a final judgment.

6. **Encourage Greater State Participation in ICJ-** Diplomatic efforts could be made to encourage more states to accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ. **For Ex-** The recent Romanian declaration of acceptance of compulsory jurisdiction which was signed by 30 countries.

7. **Improve Accessibility of developing Countries in ICJ-** Capacity-building programs, legal assistance and financial support must be extended to developing countries to ensure their effective participation in the court's proceedings.

8. **Review and Update the ICJ's Charter-** A comprehensive review of the ICJ's founding charter must be undertaken to remove any outdated provisions and adapt its structure to the evolving needs of the international community.

ICJ must be strengthened so that countries can resort to a peaceful method instead of attacking each other to settle the dispute.

Read More- The Hindu
UPSC Syllabus- GS II- International Organisations, their structure and Mandate

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Significance and Challenges of Cooperative Banks in India- Explained Pointwise

Significance and Challenges of Cooperative Banks in India, The recent Karuvannur Cooperative Bank scam has again brought to the fore the governance issues in the functioning of Cooperative Banks in India. PMC Bank, Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank and Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank have also failed in recent times. In this article, we will delve deep into the governance issues plaguing the cooperative banks in India.

Cooperative Banks In India-Challenges

The recent Karuvannur Cooperative Bank scam has again brought to the fore the governance issues in the functioning of Cooperative Banks in India. PMC Bank, Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank and Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank have also failed in recent times.

Cooperative Banks

» **Cooperative Banks-** Financial institutions operating on a cooperative basis where customers are also the owners of the bank. Works on 'No profit, No loss' and 'One person, One vote' principle

» **Types of cooperative Banks-**
a. Urban cooperative Bank- Single state UCB and Multistate UCB.
b. Rural Cooperative Bank- Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) at Village level, District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) & State Cooperative Banks (StCBs)

» **Dual Control-** Banking functions– RBI and Management function- State/Central Registrar of cooperatives

Significance

» **Extension of Credit-** To Agriculture and Rural Sectors by PACS, DCCBs and StCBs.

» **Spurring local MSME and SHG growth-** Lijjat papad funding by cooperative banks.

» **Democratic Ownership and Control-** Greater Political empowerment in areas with strong cooperatives like Maharashtra, Kerala and Gujarat.

» **Customer-Centric Approach-** Personalized loan products like customized savings products and affordable housing loans.

» **Community Development-** Local infrastructure projects, educational initiatives, or healthcare programs. For ex- Sikkim Development due to UCBs

Challenges

» **Board members as borrowers-** Siphoning of funds by misuse of power like PMC bank failure

» **Political Connivance-** Leading to scams, corruption and money laundering.

» **Financial Vulnerabilities-** High levels of NPAs, low Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR).

» **Competition-** UCBs face competition from MFIs, NBFCs and FinTech companies.

» **Dual control-** RBI (Banking) & state registrars(Management)

» **Infrastructural Challenges-** Sub-standard softwares and booking keeping systems

Way Forward

» **Strict Regulatory Action by RBI-** Regular delicensing and amalgamation of loss making cooperative banks.

» **Cooperative Federation-** To conduct regular comprehensive audits of the cooperative banks.

» **Upgradation of infrastructure-** Common and standardized software & bookkeeping systems.

» **Implement N.S. Vishwanathan Committee Recommendtions-** Four tier classification, formation of board-level Committees, professional board of management & fixed tenure of board members.

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What are Cooperative Banks? What is The Structure of Cooperative Banks in India?
Cooperative Banks- Cooperative banks in India are financial institutions that operate on a cooperative basis, where the customers are also the owners of the bank. Cooperative banks operate on the principle of 'no profit, no loss' and 'one person, one vote'. According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), India had 1,502 urban co-operative banks as of March 2023.

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Structure of Cooperative Banks in India

Cooperative Banks In India			
Urban Cooperative Banks		**Rural Cooperative Banks**	
Scheduled	**Non-Scheduled**	**Short Term**	**Long Term**
1. UCBs Operating in a single state a. **Registered-** State Cooperative Societies Act. b. **Dual Control** **Banking functions**- RBI under Banking Regulation Act 1949 (BRA 1949). **Management functions**- State registrar of Cooperative societies **2. Multistate UCBs** a. **Registered-** Multi State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002. b. **Dual Control** **Banking functions**- RBI under Banking Regulation Act 1949. **Management functions-** Central Registrar of Cooperative societies.		**1. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)- Village level-** Not under RBI. No BRA 1949 applies. **2. Central Cooperative Banks (CCBs)- District level &** **State Cooperative Banks (StCBs)-State level** a. **Registered-** State Cooperative Societies Act b. **Dual Control** **Banking functions**- RBI under Banking Regulation Act 1949. Inspection function has been delegated to NABARD by RBI under BRA 1949. **Management function-** State registrar of Cooperative societies	1. Primary cooperative agriculture and Rural Development Banks (**PCARDBs**) 2. State Cooperative agriculture and Rural Development Banks (**SCARDBs**)

Importance of Cooperative Banks?

1. **Extension of Credit to Agriculture and Rural Sectors-** PACS, District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) and State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) play a vital role in providing credit to farmers and supporting agricultural activities. They contribute significantly to the development of the rural economy.

2. **Spurring local MSME and SHG growth-** Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) cater to the financial needs of small and medium-sized businesses and individuals in urban and semi-urban areas. **For Ex-** Lijjat papad funding by cooperative banks.

3. **Ownership and Control-** Members of a credit cooperative society collectively decide on policies and elect the board of directors. This results in democratic ownership and control. **For Ex-** Greater Political empowerment in areas with strong cooperatives like Maharashtra, Kerala and Gujarat.

4. **Customer-Centric Approach-** Cooperative banks prioritize the needs of their members rather than maximizing profits. **For ex-** Personalized loan products like customized savings products, affordable housing loans tailored to the specific needs of their members.

5. **Community Development-** Cooperative banks support local infrastructure projects, educational initiatives, or healthcare programs. This involvement strengthens the socio-economic fabric of the community. **For ex-** Role of Cooperative Banks in development of Sikkim.

6. **Risk Mitigation-** Cooperative banks are slightly more resilient to economic downturns as they are not exposed to high-risk and high-value assets in comparison to commercial banks. **For Ex-** Resilience shown by UCBs during Global Financial Crisis 2008.

What are The Challenges of Cooperative Banks in India?

1. **Financial Scams-** Large number of big Cooperative banks have failed due to financial scams. **For Ex-** PMC Bank, Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank and Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank have failed due to financial frauds.

2. **Board members as borrowers-** Cooperative bank board members can borrow from the banks, unlike the commercial bank board members. The board members in several cases have misused their borrowing powers to siphon off large sums of money, resulting in major cooperative bank failures. **For Ex-** PMC Bank Failure due to misuse of power by board.

3. **Political Connivance and corruption-** The board of the cooperative banks are dominated by the local politicians, who connive with local private financiers and real estate players to issue illegal loans and aid their black money transactions.

4. **Financial Vulnerabilities-** Cooperative Banks face financial vulnerabilities such as low capitalization, high levels of NPAs, low Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR).

5. **Challenges posed by other financial sector companies-** Changes in the financial sector and evolution of Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), FinTech companies, Payment gateways, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) have posed challenges to the Cooperative bank growth in terms of deposit and lending capabilities.

6. **Regulatory Challenges-** The dual control of cooperative banks- RBI in banking functions and the state government in management functions, has created regulatory ambiguities and uncertainties, in proper monitoring of cooperative banks.

7. **Improper audit mechanism-** Audits conducted by state department officials are irregular and lack comprehensiveness.

8. **Infrastructural Challenges-** The cooperative banks face logistical challenges like sub-standard softwares and sub-standard booking keeping systems, which has made these banks susceptible to frauds.

7. **Governance Challenges-** The small size, scattered nature and the lack of a unified brand and policy for cooperative banks makes it difficult for the watchdogs to effectively govern these banks.

| Read More- Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank crisis |

What should Be The Way forward?

1. **Strict Regulatory Action by RBI-** RBI must be stringent in its regulatory oversight by focussing on regular delicensing and the shrinkage or compulsory amalgamation of loss making cooperative banks.

2. **Cooperative Federation-** A cooperative federation must be formed to conduct regular comprehensive audits of the cooperative banks.

3. **Upgradation of infrastructure-** The provisions must be made for a common, standardized software, standardized bookkeeping systems. These must be linked to a central database for proper financial monitoring using artificial intelligence and pattern recognition.

4. **Remove political influence-** There is a need to bring in new people, young people and professionals in managerial roles, who will take cooperative banks forward.

5. **Implement the recommendations of N.S. Vishwanathan Committee-** Four tier classification (Tier 1 (having deposits up to Rs 100 crore), Tier 2 (deposits between Rs 100 crore and Rs 1,000 crore), Tier 3 (deposits between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 10,000 crore), Tier 4 (deposits more than Rs 10,000 crore)), formation

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of board-level Committees, constitution of professional board of management and fixed tenure of board members recommended by the committee must be implemented at the earliest.

6. **Implement recommendation of R Gandhi Committee-** Conversion of Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) with business size of 20,000 crore rupees or more into regular banks.

> **Read More-** Livemint
> **UPSC Syllabus- GS 3**- Banking sector (Indian Economy)

150 years of IMD- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

Recently, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) celebrated its 150th year of establishment and service to the nation. On this occasion IMD launched several initiatives such as Weather Analysis and Forecast Enabling System (WAFES), Panchayat Mausam Seva Portal for farmers, National Framework of Climate Services (NFCS). The Indian Meteorological Department has played a very substantial role over the years in terms of Weather forecasting and monsoon prediction. However, IMD also faces several challenges, especially in the wake of climate crisis that we face today.

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150 years of IMD- Significance and Challenges

Recently, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) celebrated its 150th year of establishment and service to the nation. IMD has played a very substantial role over the years in terms of Weather forecasting and monsoon prediction. However, IMD also faces several challenges, especially in the wake of climate crisis that we face today.

IMD

» India Meteorological Department(IMD) was established in 1875 with its headquarter located in New Delhi.

» It is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the GOI. It was formed in the backdrop of Kolkata and Andhra Cyclones 1864 which killed more than one lakh people.

» Objective and Functions of IMD-
Meteorological Observation and Statistics
Disaster Management
Seismological Work
Naming of Cyclones
Conduct Reasearch and Development

Challenges

» Accurate Monsoon Prediction- IMD has only 199 District Ago-Meteorological Units out of the targeted 660.

» Data Assimilation and Modelling- Failure of accuracy by IMD during the 2015 Chennai Floods.

» Outdated observational infrastructure- Failure of early warning systems in disseminating information about the 2013 Uttarakhand floods.

» Localized Weather and Climate Change Impacts- Urban heat island effect in cities like Delhi pose challenge to IMD's accurate temperature predictions

» Lack of human resource capacity- IMD's challenge in dealing with emerging technologies such as ensemble forecasting.

Significant Achievements

» Monsoon prediction- Meghdoot app designed by IMD to provide agro-meteorological services

» Weather Forecasting- Winter Fog Experiment (WIFEX) developed by IMD has helped in the dissemination of fog information

» Disaster Management- IMD's accurate prediction of 2020 Cyclone Amphan, 2013 Cyclone Phailin allowed for timely evacuations and protected several lives

» Air Quality Monitoring- IMD's SAFAR system to monitor air pollution level in Delhi

» Climate Change Research- Contributed to the understanding of El Niño and Indian Ocean Dipole events.

Way Forward

» Investment in cutting-edge Technologies- Advanced weather prediction models & remote sensing technologies to enhance forecasting capabilities.

» Capacity Building and Training- Enhanced recruitment of earth scientists and meteorologists

» Public Awareness and Communication- App for fog monitoring to disseminate realtime info to travellers

» Public-Private Partnerships- IMD must collaborate in the field of meteorology in the same way as ISRO's collaboration with private sector in Space domain

What are the objectives and functions of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)?

About Indian Meteorological Department- The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) is a government agency responsible for providing weather and climate-related services in India. India Meteorological Department(IMD) was established in 1875 with its headquarter located in New Delhi. It is an agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India.

IMD was formed in the backdrop of two monstrous cyclones in 1864 which struck the Kolkata and Andhra coast and killed more than one lakh people.

Objective and Functions of IMD- It is responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and

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1. Meteorological Observation and Statistics- IMD needs to undertake meteorological observations and statistical work for optimum operation of weather-sensitive activities like agriculture, irrigation, shipping, aviation, offshore oil explorations etc.

2. Disaster Management- IMD provides warning against severe weather phenomena which cause destruction of life and property like tropical cyclones, norwesters, duststorms, heavy rains and snow, cold and heat waves.

3. Seismological Work- IMD also undertakes seismological operations for earthquake disaster management.

4. Naming of Cyclones- The Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre (RSMC) of Tropical Cyclones in New Delhi is responsible for naming the cyclones in the northern Indian Ocean region.

5. Conduct Reasearch and Development- To conduct and promote research and development in meteorology and allied disciplines.

Read More- India Meteorological Department Marks 150 years of serving the nation

What have been the significant achievements of Indian Meteorological Department?

1. **Monsoon prediction-** Meghdoot app designed by IMD to provide agro-meteorological services to the farmers has played a vital role in the development of India's agriculture-dependent economy.

2. **Weather Forecasting-** Winter Fog Experiment (WIFEX) developed by IMD has helped in the dissemination of fog information, which is used by airlines and passengers to plan their travel.

3. **Disaster Management-** IMD's accurate prediction of the path and intensity of 2020 Cyclone Amphan, 2013 Cyclone Phailin allowed for timely evacuations and preparedness.

4. **Air Quality Monitoring-** IMD's SAFAR system is being used to monitor air pollution level in major cities such as Delhi.

5. **Climate Research-** IMD's Climate research has helped in determining India's NDCs and Panchamrit principles and also contributed to the understanding of El Niño and Indian Ocean Dipole events.

6. **Enhanced India's global reputation–** IMD has been recognised as one of the six Regional Specialized Meteorological Centres of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). IMD has contributed to the United Nations' 'Early Warning for All' programme regarding climate change.

What is the significance of the role of Indian Meteorological Department?

IMD plays a significant multidimensional role which are mentioned below-

1. **Conducting general Elections-** Dates of the general elections and other state elections, are invariably decided by the ECI after taking inputs from the IMD.

2. **Launch of ISRO missions-** IMD forecasts are taken into account while launching ISRO missions like Chandrayaan-3 and Aditya L-1.

3. **Growth of agricultural sector-** The improved monsoon prediction system of IMD has helped in the growth and development of agricultural and allied sectors like horticulture, fisheries.

4. **Infrastructural growth-** Regular forecast and advisory services of IMD are crucial for the operations of railways, airways, shipping and power plant sector.

5. **Protection of Socially vulnerable communities-** The coastal fishery community, urban poor etc. are all dependent on IMD for protection of their lives and livelihood in cases of extreme weather events like cyclone, urban flash floods.

What are the Challenges faced by the Indian Meteorological Department?

1. **Accurate Monsoon Prediction-** Accurate and precise prediction of the onset, duration and intensity of the monsoon is a major challenge that IMD faces on a year-to-year basis. **For Ex-** According to the recent parliamentary panel report, IMD has been able to establish only 199 District Ago-Meteorological Units (DAMUs) out of the targeted 660 DAMUs. DAMUs are crucial in monsoon prediction and information dissemination.

2. **Data Assimilation and Modelling-** Incorporation of diverse and accurate data into numerical weather prediction models is another major challenge that IMD faces. **For Ex-** IMD's challenge in assimilation of satellite data during the 2015 Chennai floods which impacted the accuracy of predictions.

3. **Outdated and insufficient observational infrastructure-** IMD also grapples with the challenge of outdated and insufficient observational infrastructure like the early warning systems. **For Ex-** Failure of early warning systems in disseminating information about the 2013 Uttarakhand floods.

4. **Urbanization, Localized Weather and Climate Change Impacts-** Adaptation of forecasting methods to account for urbanization effect and Climate change impact is another Achilles heel problem for IMD. **For Ex-** Urban heat island effect in cities like Delhi pose challenge to IMD's accurate temperature predictions and AQI monitoring.

5. **Lack of human resource capacity-** IMD also faces a dearth of specialized human resources like earth sciences scientists, software developers and scientists. **For Ex-** IMD's challenge in dealing with emerging technologies such as ensemble forecasting.

6. **Collaboration with neighbouring countries-** IMD also faces the challenge of enhanced collaboration in data sharing related to transboundary air pollution and shared water resources with the meteorological departments of China and Pakistan.

What should be the way forward for IMD?

1. **Enhanced Investment in cutting-edge Technologies-** Continued investment in cutting-edge technologies such as advanced weather prediction models, high-performance computing systems and remote sensing technologies to enhance forecasting capabilities.

2. **Enhanced Observational Infrastructure-** Upgradation and expansion of observational networks which like weather stations, radars and satellites.

3. **Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML)-** Incorporation of AI and ML algorithms to analyse vast amounts of meteorological data to improve prediction models and enhance the accuracy of weather forecasts.

4. **Capacity Building and Training-** Enhanced recruitment of earth scientists and training programs to equip meteorologists and staff with the latest knowledge and skills in the field of meteorology.

5. **Public Awareness and Communication-** IMD must also focus on strengthening of communication channels like mobile apps, social media for disseminating weather forecasts and warnings to the public. **For Ex-** App for Fog monitoring for the passengers to plan their travel.

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6. **Public-Private Partnerships in the field of meteorology-** Collaboration with private entities and startups will help IMD in fostering innovation and efficiency in meteorological services. **For Ex-** ISRO's collaboration with private sector.

Implementation of these strategies will help the Indian Meteorological Department evolve and meet the challenges posed by a changing climate, technological advancements, and the increasing demand for accurate and timely weather information.

> **Read More**– The Print
> **UPSC Syllabus**– Achievements of Indians in Science and Technology, Indigenisation of Technology

Jan Vishwas Act, 2023 – Explained Pointwise | Yojana Summary January 2024

The recently passed **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023** has marked a significant step towards creating a more business-friendly environment. It will lay the foundation for improving the Ease of Doing Business in India. It seeks to reduce compliance and remove the fear of imprisonment for minor offences, to give an impetus to businesses and improve ease of doing business and living, thus bolstering 'trust-based governance'.

The Act amends **42 Acts** such as the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Patents Act, 1970, etc.

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What are the features of the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

1) **Decriminalization of Offences:** It decriminalizes minor offences (that do not involve any harm to the public interest or national security) and replaces them with civil penalties or administrative actions. **183 provisions are being decriminalized in 42 Central Acts.**

For example, under the IT Act, 2000, disclosing personal information in breach of a lawful contract is now punishable with a penalty of up to Rs 25 lakh instead of imprisonment of up to three years.

2) **Removal of offences:** The Bill fully removes certain offences. These include all offences under the Indian Post Office Act, 1898.

3) **Periodic Revision of Penalties:** The fines and penalties will be increased by 10% of the minimum amount every 3 years.

4) **Adjudicating Officers:** The Government may appoint one or more Adjudicating Officers to determine penalties.

Note: An adjudication mechanism is one whereby an administrative or quasi-judicial authority imposes a monetary penalty.

5) **Appellate Mechanisms:** An appellate mechanism is introduced for grievance redressal regarding the decision of the adjudicating officer.

What was the need of the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

1) **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** The legislation, rules and regulations enacted by the Union and State governments have created barriers to the smooth flow of ideas, money, and entrepreneurship. For instance, according to **ORF**, a manufacturing sector enterprise with more than 150 employees deals with 500–900 compliances a year that cost nearly Rs 12–18 lakh. It also found that **37.8%** of compliances carry imprisonment clauses.

2) **Barrier to Investments:** A Parliamentary committee noted that regulatory burden poses substantial deterrents   for   investors.
For instance, lengthy processing times for the needed approvals can escalate costs and dampen investments

3) **Pressure on the Justice System:** As per the **National Judicial Data Grid**, 3.3 crore cases out of the 4.4 crore pending cases are criminal proceedings.

4) **Presence of Outdated Laws:** The bureaucratic system still consists of the baggage of archaic and obsolete laws. These lead to a trust deficit between the people and government institutions.

5) **MSMEs:** There are excessive business regulations in place that lead to unnecessary red tape. For instance, currently, there are 1,536 laws which translate into around **70,000 compliances** that govern doing business in India. These excessive compliances have proved a burden on MSMEs.

What are the benefits of the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

The benefits of the Act are outlined as under:

1) **Rationalises Criminal Provisions:** Rationalizing criminal provisions will ensure that people are not dragged to court for minor, technical or procedural defaults, or unintended violations.

2) **Maintains Proportionality:** It establishes a balance between the severity of the offence/violation committed and the prescribed punishment.

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3) **Economic Growth:** The elimination of bureaucratic barriers will help in bolstering growth of businesses. The amendments in various laws will save time and cost for both Government and Businesses alike.

4) **Reduces Pressure on the Justice System:** The criminal proceedings for minor crimes clog the justice delivery system, leading to delays in the proceedings of serious offences as well. Provisions such as decriminalisation would go a long way in reducing undue pressure on the justice system.

5) **Improve the Health of MSMEs:** The Act lightens the regulatory frameworks and lessens the burden on MSMEs. This would provide them with a more level playing field in comparison to their global counterparts.

6) **Trust-Based Governance:** It will foster trust-based governance by ensuring that citizens, businesses, and government departments operate without fear of imprisonment.

What are the concerns regarding the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

1) **Not Real Decriminalization:** It replaces imprisonment with fines or penalties, which is not enough for decriminalization. It undertakes what can be called as **'quasi-decriminalisation.'**

2) **Expertise of Adjudicating officers:** Concerns have been raised about the appointment of adjudicating officers under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act and the Environment (Protection) Act, questioning their technical competence for such legal proceedings.

3) **Only a Fraction of Laws Touched:** The number of offences deregulated under the Act are only a small fraction of India's regulatory framework. As per the **ORF**, of the 42 Acts of Parliament mentioned, only 23 Acts impact the ease of doing business, which is a tiny fraction.

4) **Issues with respect to Environment Protection:** According to the **Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy**, the blanket removal of imprisonment provision might also remove the deterrence effect of the environmental legislation, especially for large corporations.

5) **Issues with respect to Privacy:** The Act punishes officers of post offices for the illegal opening of postal articles with imprisonment of up to two years, a fine, or both. Deleting these offences removes the safeguards against invasions of privacy.

6) **Independence of Adjudicating Officers:** At times, government agencies violate the Air Act and the EP Act. This raises the question, whether government officers would be sufficiently independent as adjudicating authorities in such cases.

Way Forward:

1) **Reassess and Strengthen Decriminalization Efforts:** Conduct a thorough review to ensure genuine decriminalization by replacing imprisonment with more **rehabilitative measures, community service, or other alternatives** that address the core issues without resorting to punitive measures.

2) **Ensure Expertise of Adjudicating Officers:** Institute a **transparent and merit-based appointment process for adjudicating officers** under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act and the Environment (Protection) Act.

3) **Ensuring Independence of Adjudicating Officers:** Implement safeguards, such as an independent oversight body, to monitor and address potential conflicts of interest, ensuring **fair and impartial adjudication**.

4) **Public Consultation and Feedback Mechanism:** Foster a transparent and inclusive legislative process by involving the **public, environmental experts, and stakeholders** in discussions related to legislative changes.

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By adopting these measures, it is possible to address the concerns raised and create a legal framework that not only promotes ease of doing business but also upholds environmental protection, privacy rights, and the integrity of legal proceedings.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 – Explained Pointwise

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 titled 'Beyond Basics' has been released by the Pratham Foundation. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023, focuses on 14-18 year olds in rural areas. This age group that is critical to India's unlocking its demographic dividend.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023

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ASER 2023

» The ASER report examines the schooling status and foundational learning of children across districts and states of rural India.

» The ASER 2023 is based on a survey conducted in 28 districts across 26 states, reaching out to 34,745 youths in the 14-18 age group.

Highlights of Report

» More students transiting to secondary education- ASER 2023 notes that 'today more children in India have more years of schooling than ever before'.

» High enrolment rate- Overall, 86.8% of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution.

» Foundational skill gaps- About, 25% cannot read Grade 2 text, and over 50% face difficulties with arithmetic skills expected by Grade 5

» Underutilisation of Digital technology- Despite high availability of smartphones in rural households (95%), their use for educational purposes is limited

» Balancing Academics and Family Responsibilities- Youths face compounded challenges such as working in family farms

» Gender Disparity in Digital Skills- 43.7% of males own smartphones as compared to 19.8% of females.

» Vocational training- The survey shows a low enrolment in vocational training, with only 5.6% of young people participating.

Reasons for low skills

» Inadequate Teacher-student ratio and teacher's Training- Almost 8% of India's schools have only one teacher. Teachers lack training in modern pedagogical methods

» Insufficient Learning Resources- Lack of reading materials affects students' language development.

» Socioeconomic Disparities- Lower-income families inadequate infrastructure, lack of educational support at home.

» Language Barriers- Students from tribal regions, face English reading barriers

» Assessment Practices- Assessments have primarily focussed on memorization rather than critical thinking

Way Forward

» Devolution of central and state grants to local bodies– The Central and State grants should be disaggregated gram panchayat-wise and urban local body-wise

» Community management of schools- The Mid-Day Meal responsibility should be handed over to the village-level self-help group (SHG) of women

» Regular school-level interactions with parents- The Nipun Bharat Mission to ensure oral and written literacy and numeracy should become a people's movement like the Total Literacy Campaign.

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What is the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)? What is the methodology used?

ASER- The ASER report is facilitated by Pratham Education Foundation since 2005. The ASER report examines the schooling status and foundational learning of children across districts and states of rural India. Originally it was an annual publication but after 2016, it has become a biennial report. ASER reports are usually referred to by the government while formulating policies.

ASER 2023 Methodology- The ASER 2023 is based on a survey conducted in 28 districts across 26 states, reaching out to 34,745 youths in the 14-18 age group. One rural district was surveyed in each major state, except for Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where two such districts were surveyed.

The youths were surveyed on 4 points-
a. Basic reading, maths and English abilities
b. Application of basic skills to everyday calculations
c. Reading and understanding written instructions
d. Financial calculations that need to be done in real life

What are the positive and negative findings of Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023?

Positive findings in terms of enrolment ratios

1. **More students transiting to secondary education-** ASER 2023 notes that 'today more children in India have more years of schooling than ever before'. Apprehensions that the pandemic-induced economic distress would result in older children dropping out of school have been belied.

2. **High enrolment rate-** Overall, 86.8% of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution. The percentage of youth not enrolled is 3.9% for 14-year-old youth and 32.6% for 18-year-olds. Most of the people in this age group were enrolled in the Arts/Humanities streams.

Challenges and failings of the Education system

1. **Foundational skill gaps in reading and arithmetic abilities-** About 25% cannot read Grade 2 text, and over 50% face difficulties with arithmetic skills expected by Grade 5, highlighting a deficit in foundational learning.

2. **Poor Quality Labour force-** This deficit in foundational numeracy and foundational skill gap significantly impacts the quality of the country's labour force.

3. **Underutilisation of Digital technology-** Despite the high availability of smartphones in rural households (95%), their use for educational purposes is limited.

4. **Balancing Academics and Family Responsibilities-** Most of the youths face compounded challenges as they need to balance academic requirements with responsibilities, such as working in family farms. These responsibilities impact the aspirations of youth.

5. **Gender Disparity in Reading and Arithmetic Skills-** Males performed better than females in arithmetic and English reading across most of the tasks that test the ability to apply basic numeracy and reading skills. **For Ex-** Only 41.1% females were able to tell the time compared to 51% males. Fewer females (28.1%) are in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics stream (STEM) stream as compared to males (36.3%).

6. **Gender Disparity in Digital Skills-** 43.7% of males own smartphones as compared to 19.8% of females. Across all phone-related tasks assigned to respondents, boys outperformed girls.

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7. **Vocational training-** The survey shows a low enrolment in vocational training, with only 5.6% of young people participating.

Read More- ASER 2023

What are the reasons behind the low foundational skill gaps as highlighted by the ASER 2023?

1. **Inadequate Teacher-student ratio and teacher's Training-** Almost 8% of India's schools have only one teacher (2023 data). Teachers lack training in modern pedagogical methods, and struggle to employ interactive and engaging teaching techniques. This has impacted students' understanding of basic concepts of arithmetic and reading ability.

2. **Insufficient Learning Resources-** Limited access to textbooks and learning materials have hindered students' ability to practice and reinforce foundational skills outside the classroom. **For ex-** Lack of reading materials affects students' language development.

3. **Socioeconomic Disparities-** Students from lower-income families face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of educational support at home and limited access to extracurricular activities that enhance their foundational skills.

4. **Language Barriers-** Students in regions where the language of instruction is not their native language face challenges in understanding and expressing themselves. **For ex-** Students from tribal regions, face English reading barriers.

5. **Outdated Curriculum-** School Curriculum doesn't incorporate digital literacy and have left students unprepared with digital skills to be a part of the modern workforce.

6. **Assessment Practices-** Assessments have primarily focussed on memorization rather than critical thinking, which has led to students prioritizing rote learning over understanding foundational concepts.

What are the different government initiatives taken for the improvement of school education?

Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA)	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of Government of India to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE), covering the entire country in a mission mode.
NIPUN Bharat	To achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025.
PM-POSHAN Scheme/Mid-Day Meal Scheme	The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is a school meal programme in India designed to better the nutritional standing of school-age children nationwide. The scheme has been renamed as PM-POSHAN Scheme.
SWAYAM Programme	SWAYAM is a programme initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy that is access, equity and quality.
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Abhiyan	School Management Committees which achieve 100% transition of girls at different levels of education to be awarded under part of the scheme.

What are the recommendations of ASER 2023 to improve foundational skills?

1. **Devolution of central and state grants to local bodies –** The Central and State grants should be disaggregated gram panchayat-wise and urban local body-wise. This will ensure direct transfer of untied funds to schools.

2. **Community management of schools-** Schools must be community-managed, and the State government should primarily act as the financing agent. The private sector should be encouraged to adopt schools to

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improve their quality. **For ex-** The Mid-Day Meal responsibility should be handed over to the village-level self-help group (SHG) of women.

3. **Regular school-level interactions with parents-** Teachers must build a relationship with every household to ensure children's care and learning. Parental involvement can greatly improve learning outcomes. **For ex-** The Nipun Bharat Mission to ensure oral and written literacy and numeracy should become a people's movement like the Total Literacy Campaign.

4. **Leveraging smartphones to improve learning outcomes-** Smartphones can be used to deliver online modules to students to supplement classroom teaching. **For ex-** Interactive online tests should be designed in the form of games for the students.

5. **Innovative learning methods-** Indoor and outdoor sports, cultural activities, play-way learning items, video films, and sound boxes must be used to supplant learning.

6. **Development of Public libraries-** Public libraries should be developed to address the scarcity of learning resources. **For ex-** The Karnataka government has done commendable work on strengthening its public libraries, which has also positively impacted school learning outcomes.

> **Read More**– The Hindu
> **UPSC Syllabus- GS 2**– Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Indo-African Relationship amid South-South Cooperation

India-Africa relationship has strengthened in recent times, with the African Union's induction into the G-20 group as the 21st member under India's presidency. Africa has been a central focal point in India's engagement with the Global South. India has positioned itself as a legitimate voice for the welfare of the countries of Africa, as the founding father of NAM and an active participant in the G-77 deliberations.

Source- The Diplomatist

What is the history of India-Africa Relationship?

Historical Cultural and Trade Relationship- Trade relationship existed between the Indus Valley and the contemporary African civilisations. There was a development of 'monsoon culture' through the trade culture, with the close association of people from both continents. The colonial phase saw the forceful migration of indentured labourers or girimitiyas to British colonies in Africa.

Historical Political Relationship- Gandhiji's tools of civil disobedience and non-cooperation were tested on the soil of Africa. India and Africa used this ideological and historical ties in a decolonised world to oppose neo-colonialism. India and Africa also collaborated in the Bandung conference to advance the agenda of the Global South, which ultimately led to the formation of NAM.

What are the areas of Cooperation between India-Africa amid South-South Cooperation?

1. **Political cooperation-**
a. Regionalisation and reorientation of global governance norms on the 21st century have produced many strong political institutions amid the south-south Cooperation. **For ex-** Asia Africa Growth corridor (AAGC), Build Back Better (B3W), Blue Dot Network, ADB.
b. India and Africa have converged on the UNSC membership expansion, and India has supported the Ezulwini Consensus.
c. India has also stepped its engagement in regional organisations like ECOWAS, African continental Free trade Agreement, BRICS, OIC, NDB etc.

2. **Economic cooperation-**
a. India has increased its investments in Africa to boost Africa's economic growth and reduce the poverty levels in the global south. **For ex-** EXIM Bank's Focus Africa Programme, India-Africa Partnership project, India-Southern African Customs Union Preferential Trade Agreement.
b. Overall trade between India-Africa has touched $100 bn in 2022-23.
c. 22.5% India's FDI outwards flow is towards Africa. India's current investment in Africa is around $32 bn with companies like ONGC Videsh making investments in India.

3. **Security cooperation-** India-Africa share security cooperation synergies on issues like curbing piracy, humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) and maritime security.

4. **Climate change and Technology cooperation-** India and Africa have been cooperating in the climate change domain through organisations like ISA and CDRI. These organisations have also helped India extend its soft power influence in the region of Africa.

5. **P2P cooperation-** India has provided Africa with India's skilled workforce like engineers, trained nurses, digital public infrastructure and health care equity.

What is the significance of India-Africa Relationship?

1. Huge Economic Potential: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a wide scope to create the largest free trade area in the world by geography and an opportunity to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty. It can help promote India-Africa bilateral trade and investment under AfCFTA.

2. Potential for Indian Businesses- There are opportunities in services trade with Africa in the fields of Information Technology (IT), Mobile payment solutions, banking, and financial services.

3. Infrastructure Development in the African Continent- India has the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem. Thus, it could count on its strengths to fortify the digital infrastructure in Africa. It can contribute to the achievement of the continent's Agenda 2063.

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4. **Achievement of Common Agendas-** Most African nations are developing in nature just like India, which creates a common understanding on multiple issues. India and Africa share common grounds on reformation of the UNSC, Climate change agreements, Trade Issues and WTO negotiations.

5. **Soft Power-** Successful transformation of Africa into a 'continent of growth' from the 'continent of darkness' would enhance India's soft power and leadership position in the global south.

What are the Challenges in India-Africa Relationship?

1. **Africa as ground of Geopolitical contest-** There is sharpening of competition among at least half a dozen external partners such as China, Russia, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates. The competition is mainly for strengthening their relations with parts of Africa to ensure market access, gain energy and mineral security, and increase political and economic influence.

2. **Increasing Chinese assertiveness-** China has emerged as 'the infrastructure developer', 'the resource provider', and 'the financier.' It has invested enormously in Africa in terms of money, materials and diplomatic push. Since 2007, Chinese leaders have visited the continent 123 times, while 251 African leaders have visited China. This has limited India's room in the region's geopolitical arena.

3. **Lack of clear strategy on the part of India-** India's model of development cooperation in Africa lacks a clear strategy in comparison with the Chinese Model. India also lacks the deep pockets as Chinese to invest deeply into the African economy.

4. **Lack of Focus-** Geopolitical tensions in Asia and the imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region have compelled India to deviate from greater focus on the India-Africa relationship. Instead, India concentrated on its ties with the United Kingdom, the EU, and the Quad powers.

5. **Racial Attacks-** Incidents of racial attacks on African nationals have severely dented India's image in the region.

Read More- India-Africa Relation

What Should be The Way Ahead to Strengthen India-Africa Relations?

1. **Strengthen Political and Diplomatic Cooperation-** India must restore periodic leaders' summits through the India-Africa Forum Summit. India must establish a dedicated secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for African affairs.

2. **Enhance Defence and Security Cooperation-** India must increase the number of defence attachés in Africa and expand dialogue on defence issues. India must also strengthen maritime collaboration and extend Lines of Credit to facilitate defence exports.

3. **Deepen Economic and Development Cooperation-** India must promote India-Africa trade through the creation of an Africa Growth Fund (AGF) to enhance access to finance. India must also implement measures to improve project exports and enhance cooperation in the shipping domain.

4. **Increase Socio-Cultural Cooperation-** There must be facilitation of greater interaction between Indian and African universities, think tanks, civil society, and media organisations. India must establish a National Centre for African Studies and rename Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships after famous African figures.

5. **Implementation of the 'Roadmap 2030' and PM's 10 guiding principles-** India must establish a special mechanism for implementing the 'Roadmap 2030' through collaboration between the MEA and the National Security Council Secretariat.

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By following this roadmap and implementing the recommended measures, India can further strengthen its partnership with Africa, contribute to its growing global stature and leadership among the countries of global south.

Read More- The Hindu
UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- International Relations- India Africa Relations

India-Bangladesh Relations- Explained Pointwise

The close India-Bangladesh relations was again illustrated when PM Narendra Modi congratulated Ms. Hasina on her return to power in Bangladesh for a historic fourth straight term. Ms. Hasina's party, the Awami League, secured two-thirds of the seats in the January 7, 2024 national elections. The win is significant for India, as Ms. Hasina is seen as one of India's closest friends and allies & has fostered a friendly and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries. However, concerns were raised about the lack of participation of the principal opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party-Jamaat-e-Islami coalition.

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India-Bangladesh Relations

The close India-Bangladesh relations was again illustrated when PM Narendra Modi congratulated Ms. Sheikh Hasina on her return to power in Bangladesh for a historic fourth straight term.

India-Bangladesh Relations

» The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh was laid in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. India provided critical military support in its independence.

» India-Bangladesh relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. There was anti-Indian sentiment.

» After the return of Parliamentary democracy in 1991 and Sheikh Hasina coming to power in 1996, there has been deepening of India-Bangaldesh relations.

Areas of Cooperation

» Political Cooperation- Indian PM's visit to take part in their golden Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh Independence, Gandhi Peace Price 2020 to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

» Land Boundary Agreement (2015)- Swapping of the disputed enclaves.

» Economic cooperation- India is the second-biggest trade partner of Bangladesh, bilateral trade between India-Bangladesh has reached $18 billion in 2021-2022, duty-free quota access to Bangladesh under SAFTA & joint feasibility study on Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

» Infrastructure Cooperation-India as a 'major development partner' of Bangladesh, extended Lines of Credits worth over $7 billion, Ahaura-Agartala rail link, Maitri Setu

» Energy cooperation-Bangladesh importing 2,000 MWs of electricity from India, India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline for high speed diesel supply.

Significance

» Geo-strategic- Bangladesh provides India with access to the Bay of Bengal and an important route for trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia

» Geo-political- Cooperation on issues such as counter-terrorism and border security and India's bid for UNSC permanent membership

» Economic- Critical for India becoming a $5 trillion economy and achievement of goals of new FTP.

» Cultural and civilisational- Large Hindu Bengali population in Bangladesh and religious sites like Ranir Bunglow Temple, Bhoj Vihara

Challenges

» Sharing of Transboundary River Waters- Teesta river water dispute.

» Deportation of Rohingyas- India seeks to give primacy to deportation from its mainland first and then later facilitate deportation from Bangladesh

» Cross-Border terrorism, infiltration & Drug Smuggling & Trafficking- Raised additional threats to internal security.

» Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh

» Attacks on minorities across both the borders

Way Forward

» Early resolution of Transboundary river water Disputes

» Early conclusion of India-Bangladesh FTA

» Establishment of Joint Task Forces, Smart Border Management.

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What is the history of India-Bangladesh Relations?

India-Bangladesh relationship are civilisational, cultural, social and economic. The relationship is deep-rooted in history. However, the relationship also had its share of highs and lows.

During Bangladesh Independence (Phase of High)	The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh was laid in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. India provided critical military and material support to assist Bangladesh in its fight for independence from Pakistan. The very first Independent government of Bangladesh, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was formed and administered from Theatre Road in Kolkata.

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During the Military rule in Bangladesh (Phase of low)	India-Bangladesh relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. There was a rise in anti-India sentiment, during the military rules of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1991), over issues ranging from boundary disputes, insurgency and water-sharing.
After the return of Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh in 1991 (Phase of repair and towards high)	After the return of Parliamentary democracy in 1991 and Sheikh Hasina coming to power in 1996, India and Bangladesh scripted a new chapter of cooperation in bilateral ties with a treaty on the sharing of Ganga waters. Since then, India and Bangladesh have built cooperation in trade, energy, infrastructure, connectivity and defence.

What is the significance of India-Bangladesh Relations?

1. **Geo-strategic-** Bangladesh holds significant geostrategic importance for India as India's eastern neighbour. Bangladesh provides India with access to the Bay of Bengal and an important route for trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia.

2. **Geo-political-** A stable and friendly Bangladesh is crucial for India's security. Geo-political cooperation on issues such as counter-terrorism and border security is vital for maintaining peace in the South Asian region. Support of Bangladesh is crucial in India's bid for UNSC permanent membership.

3. **Economic-** Bangladesh is a critical economy for India's exports and bilateral trade. Deepening of India-Bangladesh economic relationship is crucial for India achieving its goal under the new foreign trade policy and of becoming a $5 trillion economy.

4. **Cultural and civilisational-** Bangladesh has large number of Hindu Bengali population and has large number of religious-cultural sites associated with India such as Ranir Bunglow Temple, Bhoj Vihara.

5. **International cooperation-** Active cooperation between India and Bangladesh is crucial to success of regional forums such as the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and COPs to UNFCCC.

What are the areas of Cooperation between India and Bangladesh?

1. **Political Cooperation-** India and Bangladesh have maintained close political relationship among them, with frequent bilateral visits and close bonhomie between the heads of the government. **For Ex-**
a. Indian PM's visit to Bangladesh to take part in their golden Jubilee celebrations of Independence.
b. India has awarded Gandhi Peace Price 2020 to Bangladesh's founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
c. Bangladesh's PM Sheikh Hasina visit to India to take part in the G-20 summit.

2. **Land Boundary Agreement (2015)-** India and Bangladesh swapped the disputed islands and allowed the inhabitants to choose their country of residence. This solved a major long-standing dispute between India and Bangladesh.

3. **Economic cooperation-** Bangladesh has emerged as India's largest trade partner in South Asia. India is the second-biggest trade partner of Bangladesh.
a. The bilateral trade between India-Bangladesh has reached $18 billion in 2021-2022 from $10.8 billion in 2020-21.
b. India and Bangladesh have also concluded a joint feasibility study on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022 to reduce or eliminate custom duties on traded goods.

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c. India has provided duty-free quota access to Bangladesh on all tariff lines, except tobacco and alcohol, under South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) since 2011.

4. **Infrastructure Cooperation-** India is a 'major development partner' of Bangladesh, as India is funding several infrastructure and connectivity projects in Bangladesh.
a. India has extended Lines of Credits worth over $7 billion to Bangladesh since 2010.
b. Ahaura-Agartala rail link has been inaugurated that connects Bangladesh and the northeast through Tripura. The link has given India access to Chattogram and Mongla ports in Bangladesh for the movement of cargo. It is likely to boost small-scale industries and develop Assam and Tripura.
c. 'Maitri Setu' bridge which is a 1.9 km long bridge connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh has been inaugurated.
d. Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service launched in 2015 has reduced the distance between Kolkata and Agartala from 1,650 km (through chicken's neck or Siliguri corridor) to just 500 km.

5. **Energy cooperation-** Bangladesh imports nearly 2,000 megawatts of electricity from India. The India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline, connecting Siliguri in West Bengal and Parbatipur in Bangladesh, will transport one million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMTPA) of High-Speed Diesel to Bangladesh.

6. **Defence Cooperation-** India- Bangladesh border of 4096.7 km is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours. India and Bangladesh conduct Joint Exercises like Exercise Sampriti (Army) and Exercise Bongosagar (Navy).

7. **Tourism sector-** Bangladeshis make up a large portion of tourists in India. In 2017, the number of tourists from Bangladesh outnumbered all the tourists arriving from Western Europe.

8. **Medical Cooperation-** Bangladesh accounts for more than 35% of India's international medical patients and contributes to more than 50% of India's revenue from medical tourism.

What are the areas of Tension in India-Bangladesh Relations?

1. **Sharing of Transboundary River Waters-** India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers, but only two transboundary river water sharing treaties have been signed, so far- Ganga Waters Treaty and The Kushiyara River Treaty. **For Ex-** Major point of contention is the Teesta river water dispute. Bangladesh seeks equitable distribution of Teesta waters, which has not been agreed by India and its state of West Bengal.

2. **Deportation of Rohingyas-** India and Bangladesh have mutual but conflicting interests in deportation of Rohingyas to mainland Myanmar. India seeks to give primacy to deportation from its mainland first and then later facilitate deportation from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

3. **Cross-Border terrorism and infiltration-** Cross-border terrorism and infiltration through the Bangladesh border have raised additional threats to internal security of India. Armed Dacoity in border districts, fake money transfer, cattle smuggling and prostitution have also raised internal security concerns in India.

4. **Drug Smuggling & Trafficking-** According to 2007 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) report, the drugs trafficking through India from Bangladesh, remains a prime transit point of trafficking heroin from South Asia to Europe.

5. **Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh**– Bangladesh is an active partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China has made substantial investments in Bangladeshi infrastructure by building 12 highways, 21 bridges and 27 power and energy projects. China's increasing involvement with Bangladesh potentially undermines India's regional standing and impede its strategic aspirations.

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6. **Attacks on minorities across both the borders-** The ethnic attacks on Bangla-speaking Hindus in Bangladesh and the attacks on Bangladeshi's in India have strained the India-Bangladesh P2P and cultural relation.

Read More- Emerging Challenges for India after the Bangladesh Elections

What Should be the way forward for India-Bangladesh Relationship?

1. **Early resolution of Transboundary river water Disputes-** The early resolution of Teesta is the better way to boost India-Bangladesh relations by the formation of tripartite committee of India,Bangladesh and West Bengal.

2. **Early conclusion of India-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement (FTA)-** Bangladesh is set to lose its Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026, thereby losing its duty-free and quota-free market access in India. Hence India finalise a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh at the earliest. India must also ensure that the FTA is not misuded by China to dump goods in India through RCEP agreement (Bangladesh is also a member of RCEP agreement).

3. **Establishment of Joint Task Forces and Smart Border Management-** There is a need to establish joint task forces comprising law enforcement agencies from both countries to effectively combat cross-border drug smuggling, human trafficking and Illegal immigration.

4. **Establishment Digital Connectivity Corridor-** There is a need to establish a digital connectivity corridor between the two countries, focusing on high-speed internet connectivity, digital services, and e-commerce. This can create new avenues for trade, collaboration, and technological exchange.

5. **Restoration of Global image of Bangladesh-** India must help in restoring the global image of Bangladesh which has been facing U.S. Sanctions on account of 'democratic backsliding' and 'human rights violations'. India must work closely with the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh to reduce the ethnic attacks on Bangla speaking Hindus.

One of the prime interest is developing North-East India, better connectivity to South-East Asian Countries and exploring the Indo-Pacific region. To achieve that, deepening of India-Bangladesh relations is a significant step.

Read More- The Hindu
UPSC Syllabus- India and its neighbourhood Relations- India-Bangladesh

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Indian Post Office Act 2023- Explained Pointwise

Indian Post Office Act 2023

Recently, the **Indian Post Office Act 2023** enacted by the Parliament replaced the colonial Indian Post Office Act of 1898. According to the government, the newly passed Post Office Act 2023 is an attempt to ensure the effective functioning of the Postal Department as a messenger service and as a provider of banking facilities. However, the new Act is being criticised on the grounds of violation of the right to privacy and encouraging state surveillance.

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Indian Post Office Act 2023

Recently, Post Office Act 2023 was enacted by the Parliament which replaced the colonial Indian Post Office Act of 1898

Indian Post Office Act 2023	Indian Post Office Act 1898
Removes the exclusive privilege of the central government of conveying letters by post.	Section 4 provided for exclusive privilege of central government in conveying letters by post.
Services offered by India Post to be specified by Central Govt	Services to be offered by India Post were mentioned in the Act itself
Appointment of a Director General of Postal Services to fix charges for the services offered	Need for parliamentary approval to fix the charges of the services offered by the postal department
Expansion of grounds under which the postal articles can be intercepted like state security, friendly state relations	Interception on grounds of Public emergency which disturbs public safety, tranquillity.
Exemption from liability in case of loss, theft of parcel	Liability in case of theft, loss of parcel

Significance
» Sheds the colonial legacy of the Indian Post Act of 1898 like IPC,CrPC
» Addresses the evolving role of Post Offices in India like Banking services, service deliveries
» Increased autonomy and Independence- Can fix own rate for services , no parliamentary approval needed
» Regulation of private courier services- Private courier services were not regulated under the old act.

Concerns
» Lack of Procedural Safeguards- Unlike the safeguards under Telegraph Rules 2007 and IT Rules 2009
» Vague Definition of 'Emergency'- Will lead to potential arbitrary use of power
» Exemption from Liability for Lapses in Services- In contrast with other commercial govt departments like railways which fix liability by Railway Claims Tribunal Act, 1987
» Removal of all Offenses and Penalties- Impact on privacy of individual and lead to inefficient functioning
» Against the SC rulings in Puttaswamy case and 38th Law Commission recommendations

Way Forward
» Incorporate Robust Procedural Safeguards like oversight mechanisms, judicial warrants
» Define the Grounds for Interception like 'emergency'
» Balanced Liability Framework like clear liability rules
» Incorporation of the provisions for penalties

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What are The Key Provisions of The Newly Passed Indian Post Office Act 2023? How is It Different From The Indian Post Office Act 1898?

Aim of the Act- The Post Office Act 2023 aims to consolidate and amend the law relating to Post Office in India. Post Office today provides many services beyond simply mail delivery.

Key Provisions	Indian Post Office Act 2023	Indian Post Office Act 1898
Exclusive Privileges of the Central Government	It removes the exclusive privilege of the central government of conveying letters by post.	Section 4 of the act made the conveyance of letters by post an exclusive privilege of the Central government

Services to be provided by the India Post	India Post to provide services as may be prescribed by the central government.	The Act specified the services to be provided by India Post which included delivery of postal articles, including letters, postcards, parcels, and money orders.
Director General of Postal Services	Appointment of a Director General of Postal Services to regulate postal activities and fix charges for the services offered	Parliamentary approval needed while revising the set charges for any services provided by post offices
Powers to intercept postal articles	**Grounds-**Expansion of grounds under which the postal articles can be intercepted- the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency, public safety. **Interception-**Central Govt can empower any officer to carry out the interception.	**Grounds-**Interception of the articles on the grounds of – occurrence of any public emergency, in the interest of public safety, tranquillity. **Interception-** Can be carried out by the central government, state governments, or any officer specially authorized by them.
Examination of postal articles prohibited under law or liable for duty	The act removes the power of examination of prohibited parcels of the Indian post official. The Indian Post official has to deliver the parcel to custom authority or any other specified authority for examination.	Under the Indian Post Office Act 1898, an officer in charge could examine a postal article if he suspected that it contained prohibited goods and items
Exemption from liability, penalties and offences	Under the new Act, post office or post officials have been exempted from liability for loss, misdelivery, delay or damage of postal articles.	Under the previous Act, the post office and post officials had liability for loss, misdelivery, delay and damage of postal articles. **For ex-** Theft of postal articles carried upto 7 years jail.
Recovery of Unpaid postal charges	Under the new Act, the unpaid postal charges could be recovered as land revenue.	There was no provision for the recovery of unpaid postal charges
Regulation of Private Courier Services	The new act has brought the private courier services under its ambit.	There was no provision of regulation of private courier services

What is The Significance of The New Indian Post Office Act 2023?

1. **Sheds the colonial legacy-** The newly passed Act sheds the Colonial legacy of the Indian Post Office Act of 1898. This is in line with the decolonisation of various laws like the IPC and CrPC.

2. **Addresses the evolving role of Post Offices in India-** The role of Post Offices have been evolving in India like the banking roles (creation of India Post Payment Bank). The new Act incorporates provisions to address these evolving roles. **For Ex-** Creation of Director General of Postal Services to identify the new services which can be offered by post Offices like service delivery.

3. **Increased autonomy and Independence-** The Indian Post can determine its own rates of services. This provides greater autonomy to the Indian Post, unlike the previous act of 1898 where parliamentary approval was needed for even fixing the rates of postal services.

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4. **Regulation of private courier services-** This will help in effectively regulating the growing private courier service industry to prevent practices like the supply of contra bands like drugs through private couriers.

5. **Addresses the changing demands of Digital era-** The new Act aims to attenuate the role and functions of the Indian posts to the demands of the digital era.

Want To Know More-
- **Economics of Animal Rearing- Explained Pointwise**
- **Significance and Challenges Between India and France Relations**

What are The Concerns with The Indian Post Office Act 2023?

1. **Lack of Procedural Safeguards-** The Bill does not specify any procedural safeguards against the interception of postal articles. This may violate the right to privacy, and the freedom of speech and expression. **For Ex-** Previous acts like the Telegraph Act and the IT Act have rules of interception to prevent violation of right to privacy like Telegraph Rules, 2007 and IT Rules, 2009.

2. **Vague Definition of 'Emergency'-** The Act allows interception in 'emergencies' but doesn't define emergency. This will lead to potential arbitrary use of power.

3. **Exemption from Liability for Lapses in Services-** The new Act removes liabilities of the postal department officials with respect to postal delivery. This is in contrast with the rules of liability of other commercial service providers of the government, like the Indian railways. **For ex-** Railway Claims Tribunal Act, 1987 provides for tribunals to hear cases of liabilities and lapses against railway officials.

4. **Removal of all Offenses and Penalties-** The earlier offences and penalities against the postal officials in cases of theft, illegal opening of postal articles etc. have been removed in the new act. This may have adverse implications for the right to privacy of individuals.

5. **Against India's International obligations-** Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that no one should face arbitrary interference with their privacy. As India is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the new act contradicts with India's international obligations.

6. **Against the SC rulings and Law Commission recommendations-** SC in K.S. Puttaswamy case (2017) held the right to communication as a part of the right to privacy to be protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. Further, the 38th Report of Law Commission on Indian Post Office Act, 1898 recommended the incorporation of an explicit definition of 'public emergency' in the act. The new Indian Post Office Act fails to incorporate both the directives of both, as it permits arbitrary interception and does not incorporate a detailed definition of emergency.

7. **Regulatory Disparities-** The Post Office Act 2023 retains the disparities in the regulation of couriers and postal departments. **For Ex-** The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 is applicable to private courier services, but it does not apply to services by India Post.

Read More- Concerns related to India's Post Office and Telecommunications laws

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Incorporate Robust Procedural Safeguards-** Clear and comprehensive procedural safeguards like oversight mechanisms, judicial warrants must be introduced for the interception of articles transmitted through India Post.

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2. **Define the Grounds for Interception-** The grounds for interception like 'emergency' must be clearly defined as recommended by the 38th Law Commission Report.

3. **Balanced Liability Framework-** The Post Office's accountability must be ensured by setting clear rules for liability without jeopardizing its independence and efficiency.

4. **Incorporation of the provisions for penalties-** A legal framework that holds individuals accountable for misconduct, fraud, theft must be established to safeguard the privacy of individuals.

Read More- The Hindu
UPSC Syllabus- GS paper2- polity- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Kurukshetra Rural Startups in 2024

In recent times, there has been a surge in rural startups catering to rural needs. The rural startups range from agritech and e-commerce platforms to healthcare and education services which are specifically tailored for rural communities. There has been an unprecedented growth in rural startups with a big government push since 2014.

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Rural Startups-Significance and Challenges

In recent times, there has been a surge in rural startups catering to rural needs. The rural startups range from agritech and e-commerce platforms to healthcare and education services which are specifically tailored for rural communities

Rural Startups

» A rural startup is a company or an entrepreneurial venture whose products and services cater to the demands of rural India.

» Examples of Rural Startups
a. Agritech- Fasal and BigHaat use artificial intelligence and data analytics for providing valuable information to the farmers.
b. E-commerce- Meesho has partnered with M/o Rural Development to sell products of SHGs under NRLM on its platform.
c. Edtech- Learning Delight, Paathshala Learning have been addressing rural-urban education divide
d. FinTech- Aye Finance, BankSathi and BharatPe have been revolutionising access to financial services

Significance

» Employment Generation- Employment opportunities to rural youth who are under disguised unemployment in agricultural sector

» Education and Skill Development- Rural-urban divide in accessing education has been abridged

» Promotion of Financial Inclusion- Rural fintech startups like Bank Saathi, Bharatpe have revolutionised the fintech sector by providing digital payment solutions.

» Women empowerment- The SHG led startups like Lijjat Papad, AMUL have led to the socio-political and economic empowerment of rural women.

» Environmental Sustainability- Contributing to the vision of clean and green India by focussing on renewable energy like Biogas, solar and Wind Energy.

Challenges

» Connectivity gap with Suppliers in Urban Areas- Results in delays, increased costs, and logistical complexities for rural startups

» Financial accessibility- Face issues such as reluctance of lending by financial institutions, limited availability of banking services in rural areas.

» Lack of Support System- The absence/lack of mentorship, networking opportunities, and incubation centres have impeded the growth of rural startups.

» Difficulty in Finding Early Adopters in Rural Areas- Due to lower income and lower digital penetration

» Limited Funding Mechanism in Rural Areas- 92% of startup funding taken up by urban startups

Way Forward

» Policy Support- To address infrastructure gaps, access to finance, and skill development

» Community Engagement- The startups led by SHGs must be promoted

» Mechanism for measuring Impact- Measure social and economic impact of rural startups.

» Sustainability instead of Scalability- The rural startups must not mimic the trajectory of urban startups to become unicorns. They must aim to evolve into sustainable employment generating enterprises

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What are Different Types Of Rural Startups Working in India?

A rural startup is a company or an entrepreneurial venture whose products and services cater to the demands of rural India.

Different types of rural startups in India

a. **Founders based in urban areas, with solutions catering to rural areas-** These entrepreneurs leverage their urban upbringing, access to resources and exposure to technology to create innovative solutions tailored to rural needs. **For ex-** Online platforms connecting farmers with markets, telemedicine services, and digital learning solutions for rural students.

b. **Founders belonging to rural areas with solutions catering to rural areas-** These entrepreneurs leverage their first-hand knowledge of local challenges, cultural nuances and community dynamics to develop solutions

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to rural needs. **For ex-** Ventures focussed on agricultural innovations, rural craft preservation and community centric initiatives.

c. **Self Help Groups (SHGs)-** Self-help groups (SHGs) represent a unique form of rural entrepreneurship, where individuals within a community come together to create a collective entity. **For Ex-** Anand Milk Union Ltd. (AMUL) is one of the most successful enterprise built on this model.

d. **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)-** In India, more than 50% of the total 6.3 crore MSMEs are in rural areas. MSMEs in rural areas encompass a diverse range of enterprises, including manufacturing, services and trading.

Examples of Rural Startups In India

Agritech	Fasal and BigHaat– Use artificial intelligence and data analytics for providing valuable information to the farmers. Ninjacart, DeHaat and Cropin– SaaS based agritech startups which connect farmers directly with buyers/retailers/storage facilities, reducing dependence on intermediaries and ensuring fair prices.
Food Processing	Intello Labs– Add value to raw agricultural produce, create marketable products and reduce post-harvest losses. Millet Magic, Slurrp Farm and Millet Amma– Encourage farmers to shift from traditional cereals to millets.
E-commerce	Meesho– This has partnered with M/o Rural Development to sell products of SHGs under NRLM on its platform.
Edtech & Skill Development	Learning Delight, Paathshala Learning Solutions and Classle– These Ed-tech startups have been addressing rural-urban education divide by bring education in local languages to remote areas through digital platforms
Health-tech	Medyseva, Gramin Health Care and Blackfrog Technologies– Offer remote consultations and overcome the lack of healthcare infrastructure in rural areas.
Renewable Energy	AgriVijay– Provide renewable energy products for farmers and rural households like solar, biogas, electric, hydro and wind energy. Agringenium Innovations Pvt. Ltd– Harness agricultural waste for clean energy production, thereby reducing dependence on traditional energy sources.
Handicrafts and Traditional Arts	Peetal, Shilpkaari and ThinkGudd– Provide training to rural artisans and help them in expanding their customer base and increasing income.
FinTech	Aye Finance, BankSathi and BharatPe– Revolutionising access to financial services offering a range of services such as investment platforms, Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS), digital ledger apps, and digital payment solutions.

What is The Significance of These Startups?

1. **Employment Generation-** Rural startups provide employment opportunities to rural youth who are under disguised unemployment in agricultural sector (India's agricultural sector productivity is abysmally low as it employs 50% of workforce but contribute to just 16% of GDP)

2. **Education and Skill Development–** Rural-urban divide in accessing education has been abridged by the emergence of rural ed-tech startups like Paathshaala.

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3. **Promotion of Financial Inclusion-** Rural India has bore the brunt of financial exclusion, which has led to low levels of development. Rural fintech startups like Bank Saathi, Bharatpe have revolutionised the fintech sector by providing digital payment solutions.

4. **Women empowerment-** The SHG led startups like Lijjat Papad, AMUL have led to the socio-political and economic empowerment of rural women.

5. **Environmental Sustainability-** Rural startups have been contributing to the vision of clean and green India by focussing on harnessing renewable energy like Biogas, solar and Wind Energy.

What are The Challenges Faced by The Rural Startups in India?

1. **Connectivity gap with Suppliers in Urban Areas-** This connectivity gap results in delays, increased costs, and logistical complexities for rural startups and impacts their overall operational efficiency.

2. **Financial accessibility-** Rural startups face financial accessibility issues such as reluctance of lending by financial institutions, limited availability of banking services in rural areas.

3. **Lack of Support System-** The absence/lack of mentorship, networking opportunities, and incubation centres have impeded the growth of rural startups.

4. **Difficulty in Finding Early Adopters in Rural Areas-** The rural startups have faced issues of limited communication channels, lower income, and lower digital penetration to find early adopters in rural areas.

5. **Limited Funding Mechanism in Rural Areas-** Urban startups in Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai have collectively accounted for 92% of startup funding over the past nine years. Rural startups often face ignorance on the part of the venture capitalists and angel investors.

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- **India-Bangladesh Relations- Explained Pointwise**

What are The Government Schemes ?

Atal Community Innovation Centres (under Atal Innovation Mission)	AIM's ACIC initiative was launched in 2020. The objective is to create community innovation centres for rural entrepreneurs. Till now, AIM has established 14 ACICs across the country that have cumulatively supported more than 200 community-based startups.
Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme	Ministry of Rural Development is implementing Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) as a sub-scheme under the DAY-NRLM with the objective of helping the rural poor to set up enterprises at the village level in non-agricultural sectors. A total of 1,97,168 enterprises across 23 States/UTs have been supported so far.
Skill India Mission	Under this mission, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has been delivering skills to rural youths across the country for helping them setup rural enterprises.
ASPIRE	This scheme is being implemented by Ministry of MSME aims to provide training and incubation support to prospective entrepreneurs in agro-rural sector through Livelihood Business Incubators (LBIs).

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What Should be The Way Forward?

1. **Policy Support-** Focus must be on framing policies that address the unique challenges faced by rural startups such as infrastructure gaps, access to finance, and skill development.

2. **Community Engagement-** The startups led by SHGs must be promoted through adequate policy support, as these lead to the development of local community.

3. **Government and NGO Collaboration-** There must be a collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders to align efforts and resources for rural startup development.

4. **Mechanism for measuring Impact-** Proper mechanisms must be established for measuring the social and economic impact of rural startups.

5. **Sustainability instead of Scalability-** The rural startups must not mimic the trajectory of urban startups to become unicorns. They must aim to evolve into sustainable employment generating enterprises, aligning with the broader vision of Vikshit Bharat.

Fostering an environment that supports and nurtures the growth of startups, particularly in rural areas, becomes imperative for realising the USD 10 Trillion milestone by the year 2030.

Read More- The Economic Times
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Indian Economy

Significance and Challenges Between India and France Relations

Significance and Challenges Between India and France Relations, is a time tested relationship. India-France relations has attracted attention in all major capitals, from Washington to Berlin to Moscow to Beijing. The visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India as the chief guest for the Republic Day exemplifies the natural bonds of friendship between the two countries. Earlier this year, PM Narendra Modi was the chief guest at the Bastille Day parade in France. However, the relationship also faces challenges amidst the rising geopolitical uncertainties.

Agreements Signed During the Recent Visit
1. **Defence Industrial Roadmap-** To enable the joint development and production of vital military hardware and platforms.
2. **Helicopters-** Tata and Airbus helicopters will partner to produce H125 helicopters in India.
3. **Fighter Jets-** French engine Maker Safran to transfer 100% technology to build fighter jet engines in the country.
4. **Satellites-** India's space PSU New Space India Limited and French Company Arianespace cooperation in satellite launches.
5. **Schengen Visa for Indian Students-** Agreement on the activation of five year validity of Schengen visas for Indian Students pursuing their master's degree in France.

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India-France Relations

India-France share a time tested relationship. The visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India as the chief guest for the Republic Day and PM Modi's visit as the chief guest at the Bastille Day parade in France, exemplify the natural bonds of friendship between the two countries

India-France Relations

» India and France have traditionally close and friendly relations.

» Post India's Independence- Diplomatic relations were established. French aircraft like Ouragan, Mystere, Jaguar have been part of the Indian air fleet since 1960's. France stepped in to supply nuclear fuel for Tarapur Plant after US backout.

» Post Cold War Era- India and France entered into Strategic Partnership in 1998 with defence, security and space being major areas of cooperation.

Areas of Cooperation

» Geo-Political Cooperation- France was the first P-5 country to support Indian membership in the UNSC. France's support was vital in India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime, Wassenaar Arrangement and Australia Group

» Geo-Strategic cooperation- Indian Air Force planes have been deployed to Reunion Island. France is part of India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue that supports free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. France with India's stand on Pak supported cross border terrorism.

» Defence and Security- France is India's second-largest defence supplier in 2017-2021 with Rafale, scorpene submarines. Joint exercises like Varuna (Naval), Garuda (Air Force) and Shakti (Army).

» Economic cooperation- India-France trade $ 13.4 bn in 2022-23. France is 11th largest foreign investor in India.

» Energy, Climate and S&T- France supports India's entry into NSG, jointly set up ISA with India, CNES and ISRO space collaboration on TRISHNA satellite, and construction of world's largest nuclear park in Jaitapur.

Significance

» Securing the Indo-Pacific- Counter the growing Chinese aggression. For ex- India-France Joint Strategic Vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region in 2018.

» Strategic Autonomy- Relations not constrained either by the Anglo-Saxon views (in France) nor the anti-western thoughts (In India). For ex- France support of India after 1998 Pokhran Nuclear Test.

» Global Stability- Checking Russia's assertiveness in Europe and China's assertiveness in Asia

» Horizon 2047 Agreement- Future roadmap of India-France collaboration for the next 25 years in AI, super computing and cloud computing.

Challenges

» Absence of Free Trade Agreement- Stalled progress on the India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment agreement (BTIA)

» Trade Imbalances and IPR issues- France exports more to India and inadequate IPR protection of French firms in India.

» Stalled Projects like the Jaitapur nuclear project

» Differences in geopolitical approaches- Ukraine war stand and French stand on BRI contrarian to India's.

» Emerging geopolitical scenario- Middle east crisis

Way Forward

» Early Conclusion of FTA- India- EU BTIA
» Implementation of Agreement on Migration & Mobility
» Increased Trade and Investment via Joint Ventures
» Expedition on stalled projects like Jaitapur Plant

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What is The History of India-France Relations?

India and France have traditionally close and friendly relations.

Post India's Independence	Diplomatic relations were established after India's Independence. a. French aircraft and helicopters like Ouragan, Mystere, Alize, Alouette, Jaguar have been part of the Indian air fleet since 1960's. b. In 1984, France stepped in to supply nuclear fuel to Tarapur power plant after the US backed out citing domestic constraints. c. France supported India's space programme since its inception, like setting up Sriharikota launch site and Centaure and Viking rocket technologies in the 1970s.

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	However, the Cold War Constraints, did not let the development of a fully developed relationship.
Post Cold War Era	India and France entered into Strategic Partnership in 1998. The areas of defence & security cooperation, space cooperation and civil nuclear cooperation constitute the principal pillars of our Strategic Partnership

What are The Areas of Co-Operation Between India and France?

1. **Geo-Political-** India and France have close geopolitical relations which has only strengthened in due course of time
a. France was the first P-5 country to support Indian membership in the UNSC and the reforms of the United Nations.
b. France's support was vital in India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and Australia Group (AG).
c. France has got the unique honour of being the country that has been invited the highest number of times as chief guest for the Republic Day.

2. **Geo-Strategic-** France has been appreciative of the geostrategic concerns of India and has taken the following measures to bolster the geo-strategic cooperation.
a. France has offered its biggest strategic asset in the Indo-Pacific territory to India. **For Ex-** Indian Air Force planes have been deployed to Reunion Island.
b. France has also given equities in organisations such as the Indian Ocean Commission to India. France is also part of India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue that supports free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific
c. France has supported India on Jammu and Kashmir and has stood with India to counter Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, and has bolstered India's capabilities against China.

3. **Defence and Security-** India and France's Relationship in the defence and security domain has increased many folds, which are mentioned below-
a. France has emerged as a key defence partner for India. It has become the second-largest defence supplier in 2017-2021. Major Military equipments imported from France include Rafale and Mirage 2000 Fighter Aircraft and Scorpene Submarines.
b. India and France have been regularly conduct joint exercises- Varuna (Naval), Garuda (Air Force) and Shakti (Army).
c. India and France have been undertaking 'joint patrolling' in the Indian Ocean Region and are striving towards maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean region.

4. **Economic cooperation-** India and France have a robust economic partnership.
a. Bilateral trade between India and France has reached a new peak at USD 13.4 billion in 2022-23. The exports from India have crossed USD 7 billion.
b. France is the 11th largest foreign investor in India. The cumulative investment of France in India is USD 10.49 billion from April 2000 to December 2022.
c. More than 1,000 French establishments are present in India. Their total turnover is around US$ 20 billion and they employ around 300,000 persons.

5. **Energy and Climate-** India-France relationship is distinctly defined by the close cooperation in the fields of renewable energy to protect the Climate change.
a. French support played an important role in India getting an exemption from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2008 to resume international cooperation in civil nuclear energy.
b. France actively supports India's entry in to the NSG.
c. India and France played a pivotal role in the establishment of International Solar Alliance.

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6. **Science and Technology-** India and France share close partnership in the field of Science and Technology.

a. France's CNES and India's ISRO partnership has been strengthened with the Joint Vision for Space Cooperation in 2018.

b. India and France are collaborating on Joint Earth Observation Mission- TRISHNA, Joint Mars Mission and removal of space debris.

c. India and France are jointly constructing the world's largest nuclear park in Jaitapur, Maharashtra.

d. France is the first European country to accept the UPI payments system.

7. **Diaspora-** Around 109,000 of Indians, largely originating from French enclaves of Puducherry, Karaikal, Yanam, Mahe and Chandernagore live in France.

Also, a sizable number of Indian-origin population lives in the French Overseas Territories of Reunion Island (280,000), Guadeloupe (60,000), Martinique (6,000) and Saint Martin (300).

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- **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 – Explained Pointwise**

What is The Significance of India-France Relations?

1. **Securing the Indo-Pacific-** India requires French support for maintaining the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region and to counter the growing Chinese aggression. **For ex-** India-France Joint Strategic Vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region in 2018.

2. **Strategic Autonomy-** The India-France relation is strategically autonomous in its truest sense, as it is not constrained either by the Anglo-Saxon views (in France) nor the anti-western thoughts (In India). **For ex-** France support of India after 1998 Pokhran Nuclear Test.

3. **Entry to Key Organisations-** France's support is crucial to India's entry into important organisations like the UNSC and the NSG.

4. **Global Stability-** India- France relations is crucial for checking Russia's assertiveness in Europe and China's assertiveness in Asia. This will ensure, global stability and power parity in the emerging world order.

5. **Horizon 2047 Agreement-** Horizon 2047 agreement between India and France lays down the future roadmap of India-France collaboration for the next 25 years. The collaboration between India and France in emerging domains such as supercomputing, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies holds significant importance for India's future.

What are The Challenges in India-France Relationship?

1. **Absence of Free Trade Agreement-** The absence of Free Trade Agreement has impacted the deepening of India-France economic relations (Bilateral trade between India and France is less than half of India's trade with Germany). Stalled progress on the India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment agreement (BTIA) has prevented further deepening of India-France relation.

2. **Trade Imbalances and IPR issues-** India- France economic relation is a concern for India as it suffers from trade imbalances (France exports more to India). Also, India has been criticized by France for inadequate protection of intellectual property rights (IPRs) of French businesses operating in India.

3. **Stalled Projects-** The India-France relations also face the challenge of non-operationalisation of the negotiated projects. **For ex-** Stalled Jaitapur nuclear project.

4. **Differences in geopolitical approaches-** While France has openly criticized the Russian Invasion in Ukraine, India has taken a nuanced approach. Also, France's stand on China's BRI contrasts with that of India.

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5. **Emerging geopolitical scenario-** The Middle East disturbances like Hamas-Israel War, Chinese aggressiveness in Indian Ocean region and the chances of return of Donald Trump in the USA are the emerging geopolitical tensions in India-France relations.

Read More- On India-French Bilateral Relations

What Should be The Way Forward?

1. **Early Conclusion of FTA-** India must leverage its good relations with France and convert the idea of India-EU BTIA into reality at the earliest.

2. **Implementation of Agreement on Migration and Mobility-** India and France must work jointly to increase the mobility of students, graduates, professionals and skilled workers while strengthening their efforts to combat irregular migration.

3. **Increased Trade and Investment-** The two countries must work towards increasing bilateral trade and investment with measures like setting up joint ventures, expanding trade agreements and promoting cross-border investment.

4. **Expedition on stalled projects-** A joint working group must be created to expedite the completion of the stalled projects like Jaitpur Nuclear Power Plant.

Read More- The Indian Express
UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- India's relations with major global powers

Economics of Animal Rearing- Explained Pointwise

The **economics of animal rearing** has assumed importance in India in recent times. Recently, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has taken the decision to import 40,000 doses of Gir bull semen from Brazil for domestic insemination to raise milk volumes. Also, the Uttarakhand Government has initiated the genetic enhancement of Badri Cow through sex-sorted semen and embryo transfer technology with the aim to increase its productivity. All steps point to the enhanced importance of economics of animal rearing in India.

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Economics of Animal Rearing

The economics of animal rearing has assumed importance in India in recent times. Recently, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has taken the decision to import 40,000 doses of Gir bull semen from Brazil for domestic insemination to raise milk volumes.

Animal Rearing and Components

» **Animal Rearing-** Animal rearing is the process of raising animals for meat, dairy products, eggs, fibre and leather, transport, fertilizer manure and fuel.

Dairy industry	India ranks first. 23% of global supplies of Milk in FY 21
Poultry Industry	India ranks third. 130 bn eggs produced in FY 21.
Fisheries	India ranks second. Exports more than 40000 cr.
Meat Industry	India ranks Fifth. 6.3 million tonnes of meat

Challenges

» **Productivity-** Average annual productivity of Indian is 1777 kg per animal per year against the world average of 2699 kg per animal per year (FY 19)

» **Diseases-** Outbreak of Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Black Quarter infection have affected livestock productivity.

» **Feed and fodder scarcity-** Deficit of 12% green fodder, 23% dry fodder, and 30% grains-based concentrated animal feeds

» **Inadequate policy support-** $4 trillion allocated to food and fertilizer subsidies and only ~4000 cr for animal husbandry. (Budget 2023-24)

» **Greenhouse gas contribution-** The animal rearing sector is a major contributor to the greenhouse gases like Methane, which have a very high global warming potential (GWP)

» **Lack of marketing support-** Absence of MSP and FCI Procurement

Significance

» **Enhanced Economic contribution to India's GDP-** Livestock sector CAGR is 7.9% during FY-15 to FY-21.

» **Additional source of Income and Employment-** Provides employment to about 8.8% of the population in India.

» **Food and Nutritional Security-** Important for improving India's rank in the Global Hunger Index

» **Socio-economic development-** Women make up 31% of total members of the 190,000 in dairy producer cooperatives

» **Weed control-** Biological control of bush, plants, and weeds as cattle graze off the weeds

Govt Initiatives

» **Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)-** Development and conservation of indigenous bovine breeds for enhanced milk production.

» **National Livestock Mission (NLM)-** Breeds improvement in poultry, sheep, goat and piggery, including feed and fodder development

» **National Artificial Insemination Programme-** Novel methods of impregnation in female breeds

» **National Animal Disease Control Programme-** Control of FMD and Brucellosis

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What is animal rearing? What are the different components of economics of animal rearing in India?

Animal Rearing- Animal rearing is the process of raising animals for meat, dairy products, eggs, fibre and leather, transport, fertilizer manure and fuel. Animal rearing involves the care and management of animals to ensure their enhanced productivity, health and well-being.

Animal Rearing contribution to India's economy- The contribution of animal rearing Gross Value Added (GVA at constant prices) was 30.19% of Agricultural and Allied Sector GVA and 5.73% of Total GVA in FY 2021-22. Animal rearing provides employment to about 20.5 million people in India.

Livestock population in the country- As per 20th Livestock Census in the country, there are 303.76 million bovines (cattle, buffalo, mithun and yak), 74.26 million sheep, 148.88 million goats, 9.06 million pigs and about 851.81 million poultry.

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Important components of animal rearing and their success stories

Dairy industry	India ranks first in milk production in the world. Its milk output of 221 million tonnes in 2021-22 accounted for nearly 23 per cent of global milk supplies. Milk is the country's largest agricultural commodity, surpassing rice and wheat in terms of both volumes and value of production
Poultry Industry	India ranks third in egg production. The output of eggs in 2020-21 is around 130 billion. This amounts to a per capita availability of around 95 eggs per year.
Meat Industry	India ranks 5th in terms of meat production, producing around 6.3 million tonnes of meat. Buffalo meat alone accounted for nearly two-thirds of meat products exports.
Sericulture Industry	India's Silk Industry is world's second largest after China. The total raw silk production in India was 33,739 MT in 2020-21.
Fishing Industry	India is the world's second-largest fish producer, with exports worth more than Rs 47,000 crore. Fisheries are the country's single-largest agriculture export, with a growth rate of 6 to 10 per cent in the past five years.

What is the significance of animal rearing in India?

1. **Enhanced Economic contribution to India's GDP-** According to the ES 2022-23, the livestock sector has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.9% during 2014-15 to 2020-21 (at constant prices). The animal rearing sector's contribution to total agriculture Gross value added (GVA) (at constant prices) has increased from 24.3% in 2014-15 to 30.1% in 2020-21.

2. **Additional source of Income to Farmers-** The animal rearing sector provides an additional source of income and employment to farmers. It provides employment to about 8.8% of the population in India.

3. **Food and Nutritional Security-** The enhanced production of milk, meat, egg and fish have ensured the food and nutritional security in the daily diets of the people. **For ex-** It is important for improving India's rank in the Global Hunger Index.

4. **Socio-economic development-** Animal rearing sector is a major avenue for women employment. **For ex-** Women made up 31% of total members of the 190,000 in dairy producer cooperatives in 2020–21.

5. **Fibres-** Wool, hair, hides, and pellets are all components of fibre and hides (skins) made from livestock. Leather is the most major product with a significant export potential and is used for a variety of uses both domestically and internationally.

6. **Weed control-** Livestock is also used for biological control of brush, plants, and weeds as cattle graze off the weeds.

7. **Cultural-** Livestocks add to the cultural self-esteem when they own prized animals such as pedigreed bulls, dogs and high yielding cows/ buffaloes. People also use the animals like cocks, rams, bulls for competition and sports like cock fights, ram fights and bull fights (jallikattu).

Read More- Gir and Kankrej cows

What are the challenges with animal rearing?

1. **Productivity-** Animal rearing sector suffers from the challenge of animal rearing. As per Integrated Sample Survey, average annual productivity of cattle in India during 2019-20 is 1777 kg per animal per year as against the world average of 2699 kg per animal per year during 2019.

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2. **Diseases-** There has been a surge in the prevalence of contagious diseases among animals which have detrimental effects on livestock health. **For ex-** Outbreak of Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Black Quarter infection.

3. **Feed and fodder scarcity-** The shortage and high cost of feed and fodder is a significant challenge to animal rearing. The Jhansi-based Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute has estimated that there is a deficit of 12% green fodder, 23% dry fodder, and 30% grains-based concentrated animal feeds.

4. **Inadequate policy support-** The bulk of the agricultural subsidies by the central and state governments goes to the crops sector. **For ex-** In the 2023-24 Union Budget, the allocation for the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying is merely Rs 4,328 crore while well over Rs 4 trillion has been allocated to food, fertiliser, and other agricultural subsidies.

5. **Lack of marketing support-** Animal products lack price and marketing support that are enjoyed by the crop-based commodities in the form of MSP and official state procurement by FCI.

6. **Lack of Institutional finance-** The share of livestock in the total agricultural credit (short-term, medium-term and long-term) is only around 4%.

7. **Greenhouse gas contribution-** The animal rearing sector is a major contributor to the greenhouse gases like Methane, which have a very high global warming potential (GWP).

8. **Lack of advancements in technology-** Fewer artificial inseminations, lower-quality germplasm and insufficient technical staff have inhibited the development of animal rearing.

What are the government schemes for the development of animal rearing?

Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)	It is being implemented for development and conservation of indigenous bovine breeds since December 2014. Its aim is to enhance milk production and to make it more remunerative to the farmers.
National Livestock Mission (NLM)	National Livestock Mission (NLM) scheme has been restructured for 2021-22 to 2025-26. The scheme focuses on entrepreneurship development and breeds improvement in poultry, sheep, goat and piggery, including feed and fodder development.
National Artificial Insemination Programme	To suggest novel methods of bringing about impregnation in female breeds and prevent the spread of certain diseases which are genital in nature.
National Cattle and Buffalo Breeding Project	To genetically upgrade important indigenous breeds on a priority basis with a focus on development and conservation.
National Animal Disease Control Programme	Implemented to control FMD and Brucellosis by completely vaccinating cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat and pig populations against Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) and bovine female calves of 4-8 months of age against Brucellosis.
Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge	To appreciate innovations coming from the villages to expand the dairy sector in India.

Want To know More Topics-

- **[Kurukshetra January 2024] Rural Startups – Explained Pointwise**
- **Indian Post Office Act 2023- Explained Pointwise**

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What should be the way forward?

1. **Providing sufficient feed and fodder resources-** Providing sufficient feed & fodder and drinking water is the need of the hour to increase productivity of livestock rearing in India, in the rain-shadow region.

2. **Marketing-** Trade Policies like marketing have to be more effective for promotion of various livestock products like egg, fish, milk etc. and provide sufficient price to farmers by reducing influence of middlemen.

3. **Promoting indigenous breeds-** Our indigenous breed of cattle must be promoted, like the genetic enhancement of Badri Cow.

4. **Training-** Necessary training and subsidies should be provided to farmers to adopt livestock rearing as an alternate source of income.

5. **Research and development-** Government should focus on Research & Development in livestock sector to increase per livestock productivity to provide more benefits to small & marginal farmers.

Read More- Live Mint
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Economics of animal rearing

[Kurukshetra January 2024 Summary] Drone Revolution Changing the Face of Rural India- Explained Pointwise

India is on the brink of a Drone revolution that not only stands to change the face of the rural India but also has the potential to profoundly impact and improve countless lives in rural India. PM Narendra Modi while inaugurating India's biggest drone expo in May 2022, highlighted the importance of drones and said, "I want to see a drone in every farm and a phone in every hand."

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Drone Revolution In Rural India

PM Narendra Modi while inaugurating India's biggest drone expo in May 2022, highlighted the importance of drones in rural India and said, "I want to see a drone in every farm and a phone in every hand." India is on the brink of a Drone revolution that stands to change the face of the rural India.

Drone Revolution and Examples

» **Drone Revolution-** Increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles to address various challenges facing the country like low agricultural productivity and lapses of internal security.

» **International Examples-**
a. **Africa-** Drones are being used to support small-scale farmers in Mozambique and agribusiness in Morocco.
b. **Japan-** Use of insect-sized drones capable of pollinating flowers by mimicking the role of bees.
c. **Europe-** Drones are being increasingly used in agricultural activities ranging from crop monitoring to precision farming.

Significance

» **Increase in Agricultural Productivity-** Kisan Drones have been helping in crop and soil yield assessment, application of fertilisers and pesticides and employing the techniques of precision farming.

» **Digitisation of Land Records-** The SVAMITVA employs drone technology to survey village land areas to provide the villagers a "record of land rights" for its use as an asset and fighting off property disputes.

» **Rural Job Creation-** Initiatives like the NAMO Drone Didi scheme aim to train women in rural areas to become drone pilots.

» **Fighting off water scarcity-** Use of ultra-low volume (ULV) spraying technology in agricultural drones leads to significant water savings

» **Propelling India's economic growth-** The drone industry in India is expected to experience significant growth, reaching a turnover of Rs. 12,000-15,000 crore by 2026

Challenges

» **Connectivity Issues-** Rural India faces the challenge of rural-urban internet divide.

» **Weather Dependence-** Rural areas often encounter rainy and windy conditions, which considerably reduce the operational efficiency of drones

» **Lack of Drone operation Skills-** The low knowledge and skill required for daily usage of drone technology of an average Indian farmer

» **High cost of Specialised Drones-** The higher cost of specialised drones for agricultural use in rural areas is a major challenge

» **Low Adoption rates in rural areas-** The adoption of drones in rural areas is very low as compared to the developed nations like the United States, where a staggering 84 per cent of farmers utilise drones on a daily or weekly basis.

Govt Initiatives

» **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme-** There has been a substantial growth in the annual sales turnover of the drone manufacturing industry, from Rs. 60 crore in 2020-21 to over Rs. 900 crore in FY 2023-24.

» **Drone Shakti Scheme for Startups-** This scheme targets startups within the drone industry, offering financial assistance for research and development

» **The Drone Rules, 2021-** Comprehensive regulatory framework for drone operations within the country

» **SMAM-** Financial assistance (subsidies to the tune of 50-80%) for the purchase of drones under the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization

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What is Drone Revolution? What are the international examples of use in rural areas?

Drone Revolution- Drone Revolution refers to the increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles to address various challenges facing the country like low agricultural productivity and lapses of internal security.

International Examples of drone technology revolutionising agricultural practices and boost rural economies-
a. **Africa-** Drones are being used to support small-scale farmers in Mozambique and agribusiness in Morocco.
b. **Japan-** Use of insect-sized drones capable of pollinating flowers by mimicking the role of bees.
c. **Europe-** Drones are being increasingly used in agricultural activities ranging from crop monitoring to precision farming.

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What are the advantages of Drone Revolution In Rural India?

1. **Increase in Agricultural Productivity-** Use of Kisan Drones– a rural drone revolution- has led to an increase in agricultural productivity by helping in crop and soil yield assessment, application of fertilisers and pesticides and employing the techniques of precision farming.

2. **Digitisation of Land Records-** The SVAMITVA scheme of the government aims to employ drone technology to survey village land areas to provide the villagers a "record of land rights" for its use as an asset and fighting off property disputes.

3. **Rural Job Creation-** Initiatives like the NAMO Drone Didi scheme aim to train women in rural areas to become drone pilots. This positions them at the core of economic activity and contributes to rural prosperity.

4. **Fighting off water scarcity-** Use of ultra-low volume (ULV) spraying technology in agricultural drones leads to significant water savings compared to traditional spraying methods.

5. **Propelling India's economic growth-** As per projections from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the drone industry in India is expected to experience significant growth, reaching a turnover of Rs. 12,000-15,000 crore by 2026. Also, the startups related to drones have been witnessing a tremendous growth which aid to India's vision of becoming $5 trillion economy.

> Read More- SVAMITVA scheme

What are the Challenges with the Drones in Rural India?

1. **Connectivity Issues-** Rural India faces the challenge of rural-urban internet divide. Limited online coverage poses a significant challenge to the drone revolution in India.

2. **Weather Dependence-** The weather dependence of drones for their enhanced operational efficiency also poses a significant challenge. As the rural areas often encounter rainy and windy conditions, the operational efficiency of drones is considerably reduced.

3. **Lack of Drone operation Skills-** The low knowledge and skill required for daily usage of drone technology is another prominent hurdle for an average Indian farmer.

4. **High cost of Specialised Drones-** The higher cost of specialised drones for agricultural use in rural areas is another major challenge for the increased use of Drones in rural India.

5. **Low Adoption rates in rural areas-** The adoption of drones in rural areas is very low as compared to the developed nations like the United States, where a staggering 84 per cent of farmers utilise drones on a daily or weekly basis.

What are the Government Schemes for ushering in the Drone Revolution in Rural India?

Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme	The PLI scheme for drones and drone components offers incentives to manufacturers in this domain. There has been a substantial growth in the annual sales turnover of the drone manufacturing industry, from Rs. 60 crore in 2020-21 to over Rs. 900 crore in FY 2023-24.
Scheme for Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	This scheme focuses on providing drones to women self-help groups (SHGs) engaged in agriculture. There has been an allocated outlay of Rs. 1,261 crore for the period from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

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Drone Shakti Scheme for Startups	This scheme targets startups within the drone industry, offering financial assistance for research and development, product development, and marketing.
The Drone Rules, 2021	These rules establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for drone operations within the country. Digital Sky Platform serves as an online registration platform for drones and drone operators.
Drones in Agricultural Research	International Crops Research Institute (ICRISAT) was granted the permission by the Indian Government to utilise drones in agri-research.
Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)	The Indian Government is also providing financial assistance (subsidies to the tune of 50-80%) for the purchase of drones under the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Training and Skill Development-** Focus must be on training the farmers for using the drone technology by themselves in their fields.

2. **Internet Connectivity-** The Internet connectivity in rural areas must be improved by the early implementation of Schemes like Bharat Net and 5G connectivity.

3. **Lower the cost of Specialised Drones-** An adequate policy must be formulated to lower the cost of specialised drones for agricultural usage. This will increase their adoption rates.

4. **Design Weather Sturdy Drones-** Weather sturdy drones for rural areas unaffected by strong winds and inclement weather conditions must be designed at the earliest.

Given the strong government focus, regulatory backing, liberal incentives, and appropriate training programmes, Drones have the potential to revolutionise Indian agriculture, playing a pivotal role in uplifting the rural economy.

Read More- The Times of India
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- E-technology in aid of farmers

Challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies In India- Explained Pointwise

Presently, the functioning of all of Maharashtra's 27 municipal corporations without the control of an elected body, is reflective of the challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies in India. Urban Local bodies have been hamstrung by the 4F challenge of – Funds, Functions, Functionaries and Functionality.

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Challenges Faced by Urban Local Bodies in India

Presently, the functioning of all of Maharashtra's 27 municipal corporations without the control of an elected body, is reflective of the challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies in India. Urban Local bodies have been hamstrung by the 4F challenge of – Funds, Functions, Functionaries and Functionality.

Urban Local Bodies

» **74th Amendment Act,1992** forms the basis of Urban Local Bodies in India. 74th Amendment Act added Part IX -A to the constitution, which consists of provisions from Articles 243-P to 243-ZG

» **Significance of Urban Local Bodies**

Urban Planning and Development- Municipal Corporations prepare master plans to guide the development of cities.

Service Delivery- Water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, street lighting & public health services

Disaster and Pandemic Management- BMC at the frontline during COVID-19 outbreak management and Mumbai Floods.

Empowerment of Women and Marginalized Group- Reservations for Women and marginalised

Community Participation- Ward committees and public consultations help in citizen engagement.

Way Forward

» **Constitution of Metropolitan Planning Committee-** To prepare development plan, review and coordinate the plans of various local bodies.

» **Mechanism for Effective Financial Decentralisation-** Increase tax base, Central grants by FC & timely constitution of SFC.

» **Conduct regular elections and Devolution of maximum functions**

» **Strengthen citizen participation by enhancing NGO and civil society cooperation**

» **Capacity Building exercises for ULB functionaries**

Challenges

» **Funding Challenges**

Dependence on Central and State Transfers- ULBs dependent on state and central transfers for around 35% of their revenue

Reduced Revenue raising avenues in Post-GST mechanism- Subsumption of major sources of ULBs revenue like sales tax, octroi and local entertainment taxes in the GST

Incapacity in raising direct finances from the assigned taxes- ES 2018 pointed to the failure of ULBs in realising the full potential of property tax

Narrow taxation powers as compared to other countries- Like Denmark (Local personal Income Tax)

Lack of timely Constitution of State Finance Commission- Further a shortfall of 15% to ULB grants in 15th FC recommendations.

» **Functional Challenges**

Parastatal agencies- Creation of Urban development authorities (for building infrastructure), public corporations (water, electricity)

Improper Devolution of Functions- Most States haven't devolved adequate functions to ULBs

Lack of constitution of District Planning Committee- DPCs are non-functional in 9 states

» **Functionaries Challenges**

Delays in conduction of Elections to ULBs

Criminalisation of the ULBs and corporator Pati

Bureaucratic control and Shortage of Staff

» **Functionality Challenges**

Ensuring Planned Urbanisation

Corruption and lack of coordination

What is the constitutional mandate and structure of Urban Local Bodies in India?

74th Amendment Act,1992 forms the basis of Urban Local Bodies in India. 74th Amendment Act added Part IX -A to the constitution, which consists of provisions from Articles 243-P to 243-ZG. It also added 12th Schedule to the Constitution. It contains 18 functional items of Municipalities.

Structure of Urban Local Bodies in India- The Urban Local Government in India consists of eight types of Urban local bodies.

Municipal Corporation	Mahanagar Palikas/Municipal Corporation for areas with a population of more than one million. Municipal corporations are usually found in big cities such as Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, etc.

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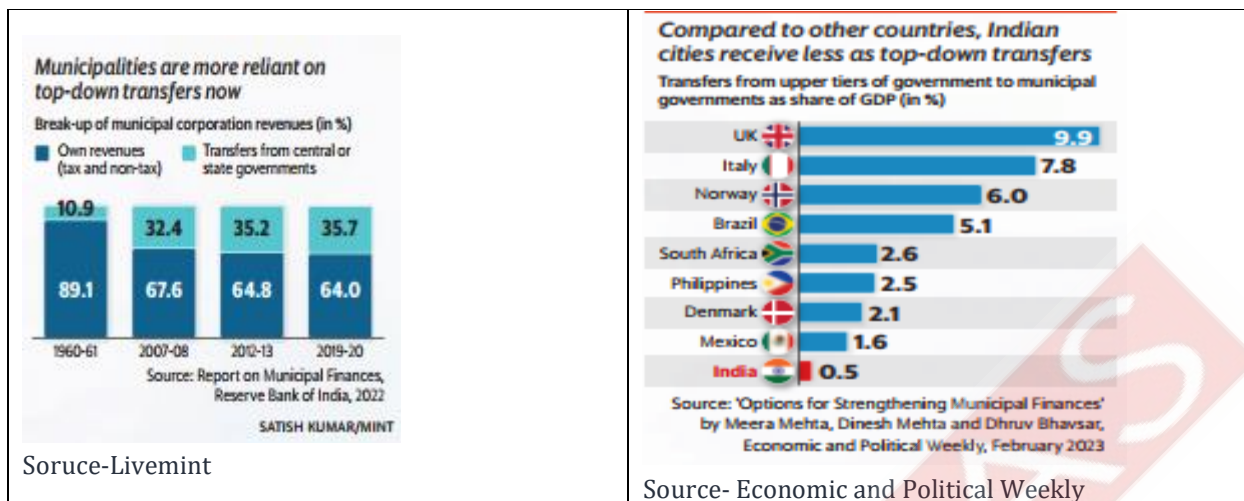| Municipality	Nagar Palikas/Municipal council/Municipal committee/Municipal board for areas with less than a million people. The smaller cities tend to have the provision of municipalities.
Notified Area Committee	Notified area committees are set up for the fast-developing towns and the towns lacking the basic amenities. All the members of the notified area committee are nominated by the state government.
Town Area Committee	The town area committee is found in the small towns. It has minimal authority such as street lighting, drainage roads, and conservancy.
Cantonment Board	It is usually set up for a civilian population living in the cantonment area. It is created and run by the central government.
Township	Township is another form of urban government to provide basic facilities to the staff and workers living in the colonies established near the plant. It has no elected members and is merely an extension of the bureaucratic structure.
Port Trust	Port trusts are established in the port areas such as Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, etc. It manages and takes care of the port. It also provides basic civic amenities to the people living in that area.
Special Purpose Agency	These agencies undertake the designated activities or specific functions belonging to the municipal corporations or municipalities.

What is the significance of Urban Local Bodies in India?

1. **Urban Planning and Development-** Urban local bodies play a crucial role in land-use planning, infrastructure development, and implementing policies that promote sustainable urban growth. **For ex-** Municipal Corporations prepare master plans to guide the development of cities.

2. **Service Delivery-** ULBs are responsible for providing essential services to urban residents like water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, street lighting, and public health services.

3. **Disaster and Pandemic Management-** ULBs are involved in developing and implementing plans to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and other emergencies at the local Level. **For Ex-** BMC at the frontline during COVID-19 outbreak management and Mumbai Floods.

4. **Empowerment of Women and Marginalized Groups-** Reservations for women and marginalized groups in local bodies, as mandated by the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, have led to their increased participation in the decision-making processes.

5. **Community Participation-** The urban local bodies is reflective of Gandhiji's dream of 'Poorna Swaraj' through 'Oceanic circle of power' and 'democratic decentralisation'. **For ex-** Mechanisms such as ward committees and public consultations help the residents to actively engage in local governance.

What are the Challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies In India?

Funding Challenges

1. **Dependence on Central and State Transfers-** According to the RBI Report on Municipal Finances 2022, Urban Local Bodies are dependent on state and central transfers for around 35% of their revenue. Further, the top-down transfers to the ULBs from the state and central Govt. as a percentage of GDP is extremely less in comparison with other countries.

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Soruce-Livemint

Source- Economic and Political Weekly

2. **Reduced Revenue raising avenues in Post-GST mechanism-** ULBs have bore the burnt in the Post-GST era with the subsumption of major sources of its revenue like sales tax, octroi (in states like Maharashtra) and local entertainment taxes in the GST structure. **For Ex-** Loss of around ₹7,000 crore, or 35% of its total revenue to Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) with the subsumption of Octroi taxes in GST regime. Also, the increase in cess and surcharges by the Central Govt, which need not be devolved, has impacted the ULBs finances.

3. **Incapacity in raising direct finances from the assigned taxes-** The ES 2018 has pointed out the failure of Urban Local Bodies in realising the full potential of property tax, which is the exclusive domain of Urban local bodies. **For Ex-** A/c to Peterson Institute of International Economics, China's ULBs raise 20-22% of finance from property taxes while Indian ULBs raise only 10-11% from property taxes.

4. **Narrow taxation powers-** ULBs in India do not have wide taxation powers as compared to other developed nations. **For ex-** China (ULBs major component comes from selling land use rights), Denmark (Local personal Income Tax), US (City governments can impose wide-ranging taxes).

5. **Lack of timely Constitution of State Finance Commission-** States in India have failed in timely constitution of the state finance commissions. Further, according to RBI report, there has been a shortfall of 15% in the 15th FC recommended grants to ULBs due to attached conditionalities.

Functional Challenges

1. **Parastatal agencies-** Various parastatal agencies created by the State government deny the local bodies their functional autonomy. **For Ex-** Creation of Urban development authorities (for building infrastructure), public corporations (water, electricity, transportation services etc).

2. **Improper Devolution of Functions-** The power to devolve functions to local governments rests with the State Government. Most States have not devolved adequate functions to local government bodies.

3. **Lack of constitution of District Planning Committee-** The 74th amendment requires a District Planning Committee to be set up in each district, for the consolidation and integration of development plans prepared by the panchayats and urban local bodies. According to a study by the India Development Review, District Planning Committees are non-functional in 9 states. Further, in states where DPCs have been created, DPCs have failed to prepare integrated plans in 15 states.

Functionaries Challenges

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1. **Delays in conduction of Elections to ULBs-** There have been delays in conduction of elections to the urban local bodies by the state Govt, as no constitutional provisions for ensuring elections to ULBs. **For Ex-** BBMP, the municipal corporation of Bangalore, has been without an elected body since late 2020. There have been regular delays in conduction of MCD, Chennai and Mumbai Municipal Corporations.

2. **Criminalisation of the ULBs-** There has been increasing criminalisation of ULBs as large number of corporators having criminal and corrupt backgrounds getting selected to the corporations and councils.

3. **Corporator Pati-** The real aim of political empowerment of women in urban areas has been thwarted by the emergence of Corporator pati/Mayor Pati syndrome.

4. **Bureaucratic control-** Many cash rich corporations are controlled by the municipal commissioners appointed by the state governments and with the Mayor just being a ceremonial head.

5. **Lack of Staff-** There is huge shortage of skilled staff in the Urban local bodies to carry out the designated functions entrusted to them. About 35% of posts in India's municipal corporations are vacant (as of 2022).

Functionality Challenge

1. **Ensuring Planned Urbanisation-** The municipal corporations have failed in comprehensively planning the holistic urban development. These have resulted in growth of unchecked slums, traffic congestion and colonies without proper facilities such as schools, parks and hospitals.

2. **Corruption-** The Corruption scandals, like MCD corruption in contract award, have severely hampered the effective functionality of these bodies. Only 11 of the 35 States/Union Territories have enacted the Public Disclosure Law that mandates publishing of key civic data.

3. **Lack of coordination-** Poor coordination among centre, state, and various departments at local level lead to poor implementation of urban policies.

> Read More- On issues faced by urban local bodies

What should be the way forward to improve the ULB functioning in India?

The following recommendations of the 6th ARC on Urban Governance and NITI aayog's recommendations must be implemented to ensure that the ULBs function as true instruments of local self-government in India.

6th ARC recommendations on Urban Governance
1. **Constitution of Metropolitan Planning Committee-** The metropolitan Planning committee must be constituted to prepare development plan, review and coordinate the plans of various local bodies in India.

2. **Establishment of Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA)-** To integrate and manage public transportation services and improve traffic management in the region.

3. **Strengthening of ULBs-** Conduct regular elections, devolve maximum functions and supplement the urban local bodies with adequate resources.

4. **Creation of National Urban Development and Housing Fund (NUDHF)-** NUDHF must be created to provide financial assistance to ULBs for urban development and housing projects.

5. **Implementation of PPP model and e-Governance-** PPP model and e-Governance like citizen grievance redressal mechanism must be adopted by the ULBs to enhance their transparency and accountability of functioning.

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NITI Aayog's Recommendations

1. **Improving Financial Management of ULBs-** ULBs must be provided adequate sources to raise their revenues. Also, there must be an increase in the central devolution of funds by the Finance Commission. State Finance Commissions should be regularly constituted with clearly defined Terms of Reference (ToR).

2. **Capacity Building-** Capacity building programs must be developed for local government officials, urban planners and other stakeholders in urban governance.

3. **Strenghthening citizen participation-** Ward committees and other mechanisms like NGOs and civil society organizations must be used for strengthening citizen's participation in the ULBs functioning.

> **Read More-** Livemint
> **UPSC Syllabus- GS-2-** Issues and Challenges with the functioning of local Self Government in India

Brain-Computer Interface- Explained Pointwise

Brain-computer Interfaces have become the talk of the town. Recently, Elon Musk's firm Neuralink, a company working to develop brain-computer interfaces, placed its first device in a patient. The Brain-computer interfaces are being touted as the next step of Human evolution.

> Read More- Elon Musk's Neuralink implants brain chip in human

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Brain-Computer Interfaces

Recently, Elon Musk's firm Neuralink, a company working to develop brain-computer interfaces, placed its first device in a patient. The Brain-computer interfaces are being touted as the next step of Human evolution.

Brain Computer Interfaces

» **Brian Computer Interfaces-** Devices that create a direct communication pathway between a brain's electrical activity and an external output like a computer or a robotic limb

» **Working of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)-**
a. **Picking up Synapses-** BCIs place electrodes/sensors in the synaptic regions of brain to pick up synaptic responses. Synapses are the electrical signals generated by neurons while taking any decision.
b. **Neural Decoding and resultant action-** The complex synaptic data is converted into programmable understanding of the brain's intentions by use of external devices. This lets a person turn their thoughts into actions

» **Types of BCIs**
a. **Invasive BCI-** Inserted in the brain
b. **Non-Invasive BCI-** Wearable Devices

Challenges

» **Risk to Patient's life-** Implantation in the brain may lead to precipitation of seizures, infection, bleeding.

» **Risks of breakdown of normal neural transmission-** Chances of breakdown of Brain-Computer implants leading to neural damages.

» **Ethical Concerns-** Data Privacy, threats to human identity, creation of superhumans with enhanced cranial capacity

» **Accessibility and Affordability-** High costs leading to economic marginalisation like cardiac pacemakers

» **Regulatory Challenges-** Involvement of multiple regulatory agencies ranging from health to IT regulators

Advantages

» **Restoration of Mobility and Motor Functions-** Restoration of limb function like Neuralink Implant for Paralysis Treatment

» **Treatment of Neurological Disorders-** Treatment of Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy

» **Monitoring and treatment of Mental Health Disorders-** Treatment of psychiatric conditions, like bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety.

» **Mindwriting' for Non-Verbal Individuals-** Individuals suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, speech paralysis

» **Enhanced Cognitive Abilities-** Train their brains in memory, executive function and processing speed

» **Ease of Living-** Information searches, e-mail administration, social media management.

» **Avenue of Economic Growth and Future startups-** Industry expected to grow upto $6.2 billion by 2030

» **Internal Security Management-** Developing hands-free drones for military use

Way Forward

» **Evolving a standard regulatory guideline-** Collaborative work of different regulators like the health and IT regulators

» **Funding support for Medical Interfaces-** Philanthropic funding support to BCIs for ALS, Parkinson's and paralysis

» **Collaborative Effort to remove the ethical challenges-** Collaboration between the scientists, ethicists, policymakers and public

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What are brain-computer interface? What are its different types?

Brain-Computer Interfaces- Brain-computer interfaces (BCI) are devices that create a direct communication pathway between a brain's electrical activity and an external output like a computer or a robotic limb. BCI is a neuro-technological intervention with its origin in 1970 at UCLA.

Working of Brain-Computer Interfaces- Brain-Computer Interfaces are all modelled after the electrophysiology of a brain's neural network.

Picking up Synapses	Synapses are the electrical chemical signals that spark in the gap between neurons in our nervous system when we make or think about making a decision. In order to capture these synapses, Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) place electrodes/sensors in proximity to these synaptic regions. BCIs work like a

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	microphone, which picks up the electrical chatter of the brain's neurons communicating with each other.
Neural Decoding and resultant action	The picked up synaptic information is fed through local computer softwares where a variety of machine learning algorithms and AI agents are employed. These convert the complex synaptic data into a programmable understanding of the brain's intentions. This is known as neural decoding. This essentially lets a person turn their thoughts into actions.

For Ex– In case of a person suffering from paralysis, the sensors of the BCIs pick up the synaptic information for movement of limb. This information is then transferred to the external device like computers or external limbs. This information is decoded by the external devices using neural-decoding method. The decoded information is then converted into programmable action like movement of limbs.

Types of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)

Invasive Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)	Directly connected to a patient's brain tissue and are implemented through surgical procedures. Since there are major risks that come with surgery, Invasive BCIs are more appropriate for patients looking to recover from severe conditions like paralysis, injuries and neuromuscular disorders.
Non-invasive Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)	Not Directly connected to person's brain but involves a wearing device with electrical sensors that serve as two-way communication channels between a patient's brain and a machine. These Interfaces produce weaker signals as they are not directly connected to the brain, hence these are better suited for purposes like virtual gaming, augmented reality.

What are the Advantages of these interface?

1. **Restoration of Mobility and Motor Functions-** This will enable them to perform basic functions like controlling their movements with their thoughts using mobile devices. This BCI Technology can be expanded to restore limb function or memory functions. **For Ex**– Neuralink Implant for Paralysis Treatment.

2. **Treatment of Neurological Disorders-** BCIs have the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for individuals suffering from neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy ALS, cerebral palsy, brainstem stroke.

3. **Curing Blindness-** BCIs hold significant importance in curing blindness cases where the visual cortex of the brain is intact.

4. **Monitoring and treatment of Mental Health Disorders-** Brain-computer interfaces can help in treatment of psychiatric conditions, like bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety. They can also be helpful in preventing pedestrian conditions like burnout and fatigue by delivering targeted electrical stimulation to specific areas of the brain using neurofeedback techniques.

5. **'Mindwriting' for Non-Verbal Individuals-** The Brain-computer Interfaces can be used by individuals who suffer from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, speech paralysis to communicate their thoughts.

6. **Enhanced Cognitive Abilities-** Users can train their brains in memory, executive function and processing speed to the biofeedback they receive from a neural implant in real time. This will allow users to monitor their stats and self-regulate, similar to wearable tech apps available today.

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7. **Ease of Living-** BCIs can be integrated into our daily lives like the smartphones or laptops today to carry out searches for Information and perform complex calculations. Also, BCIs have been used as a smartphone and smart-home device interface like dimming lights, e-mail administration, virtual assistants.

8. **Avenue of Economic Growth and Future startups-** Brain-Computer Device Industry is a $1.74 billion market that is expected to grow to $6.2 billion by 2030. This also opens up avenues for startup revolution in healthcare using BCIs.

9. **Internal Security Management-** Brain-Computer Interface technology can be used to develop hands-free drones for military use.

What are the Challenges Associated with Brain-Computer Interface?

1. **Risk to Patient's life-** Since the invasive Brain-Computer Interfaces require surgical implantation in the brain, they carry risks to human lives like precipitation of seizures, infection, bleeding, haemorrhage and damage to brain tissue.

2. **Risks of breakdown of normal neural transmission –** The neural transmission between our brain and body parts functions like a fully coordinated, well oiled machine. However, there are risks of breakdown of this well coordinated neural transmission network on account of malfunctioning of the Brain-Computer Interface technology.

3. **Ethical Concerns-** The BCI technology suffers from ethical challenges like privacy of data related to mental health, threat to human identity by the blurring lines between humans and machines and creation of superhumans with enhanced cranial capacity.

4. **Accessibility and Affordability-** The technology carries the risk of becoming a privilege of those who are up in the socio-economic ladder, like in the case of use of cardiac pacemakers or artificial knees.

5. **Concerns with the trials-** There are legitimate concerns with the safety of humans and animals on whom the implant trial is being performed. **For ex-** Animal rights groups have raised concerns about tests on primates by Neuralink.

6. **Regulatory Challenges-** The Brain-computer Interface brings together a range of fields like implantable medical materials, safety of critical software, the Internet of Things and wearable medical devices. Hence, this would create regulatory challenges with the involvement of multiple regulatory agencies ranging from health to IT regulators.

7. **Monopolisation of Technology-** There are concerns of this technology being monopolised by firms like Neuralink. This will make the technology in accessible to many patients who cannot afford the high costs. **For ex-** Oxford Astra-Zeneca Covid vaccine which was developed by public funds reached far more number of people than their private counterparts.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Evolving a standard regulatory guideline-** A common and standard regulatory guideline must be drafted by the collaborative work of different regulators like the health and IT regulators.

2. **Funding support for Medical Interfaces-** Philanthropic funding support must be extended to the Brain-computer Interface Startups working to ease the lives of people suffering from ALS, Parkinson's and paralysis.

3. **Collaborative Effort to remove the ethical challenges-** There must be collaboration between the scientists, ethicists, policymakers and public to use this technology for common good and remove the ethical challenges like creation of superhumans, human identity threats.

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4. **Address the concerns with the trials-** All the safety concerns associated with the trials like the safe health of primates and patients must be addressed transparently by the BCI firms like Neuralink.

Read More- The Times of India
UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Awareness in the fields of IT

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