

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



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Features :

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

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GS Paper 1

Subject: Geography

Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.

On the Impact of La Nina on Air Quality in India

News: The article discusses the impact of La Nina on Air Quality in India.

A detailed article on **El Nino** can be [read here](#).

Read more about **La Nina** [here](#).

Background:

Monsoon rainfall over India is known to be strongly influenced by El Nino and La Nina events (the alternating warming and cooling of the eastern Pacific Ocean that impacts weather across the world). A new study by Indian researchers has now suggested that even air quality could be influenced by the two weather events.

What does the study say?

It has argued that the unusual air quality in some Indian cities in the winter of 2022 could be attributed to the **record-breaking spell of La Nina** prevailing at that time.

This also links the air quality in Indian cities indirectly to **climate change**, which is making El Nino and La Nina more severe.

What are the reasons for bad air quality in Indian cities?

Various meteorological factors play a role in trapping pollutants in the lower atmosphere levels. These include:

- a. Temperature.
- b. Moisture.
- c. Heaviness in air.
- d. Wind speed and direction.

Situation in North Indian cities: During October to January, northern Indian cities, particularly Delhi, experience very high concentrations of PM2.5.

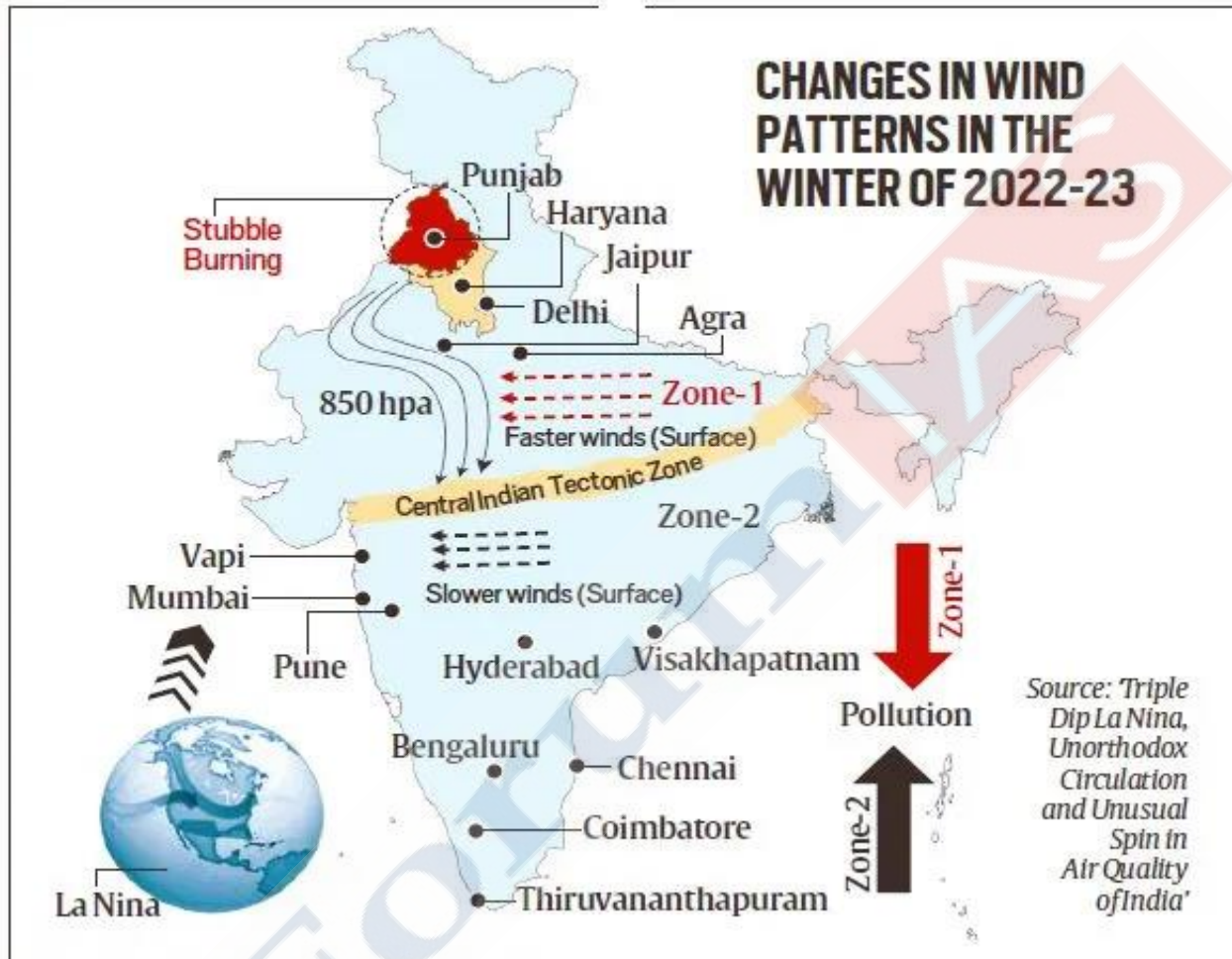
Situation in South Indian cities: The western and southern parts of the country usually have relatively lower levels of pollution, because of their proximity to oceans.

What was the change in the air pollution trend noticed in the winter of 2022?

Northern Indian cities, including Delhi, were cleaner than usual, while cities in the west and the south, like Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai, experienced worse-than-usual air quality. It was this unusual behavior that the researchers wanted to study.

What is the explanation given for this?

1) **Change in Wind Direction:** During winter, wind usually blows in the northwesterly direction: for example, from Punjab towards Delhi and further into the Gangetic plains. In the winter of 2022, however, the wind circulation was in the north-south direction. The pollutants being carried from Punjab and Haryana bypassed Delhi and surrounding areas and flew over Rajasthan and Gujarat to southern regions.



Source: Indian Express.

2) **Changed Behavior of Local Circulation near Mumbai:** The local circulation of wind currents near Mumbai alternate between blowing from the land to the sea every few days. In 2022, however, instead of changing direction every 4-5 days, the winds persisted in one direction for more than 7-10 days, leading to greater accumulation of pollutants in Mumbai.

The study says that the wind behavior in both cases was related to the **extended La Nina** which, by the winter of 2022, had been persisting for an unusually long 3 years.

Subject: Indian Society

Topic: Population and associated issues

On the Challenges of the Elderly – Caring for the elderly

News: The article discusses the projections of ageing of Indian population. It highlights the challenges faced by the elderly, and the steps that should be taken in this regard.

Countries such as Italy and China are dealing with the challenge of unfavorable demographics. In India too, an ageing population, coupled with a decreasing fertility rate and increased life expectancy, will replace the country's demographic dividend in the years to come.

What are the projections for India?

Currently, senior citizens (people aged 60 years and above), comprise nearly **10%** of the population (about 104 million).

By **2050**, the elderly population is projected to rise to 319 million, approximately **19.5%** of the total. In this context, **NITI Aayog** has released a paper on senior care reforms in India. It highlights the needs of the senior population, and identifies the deficiencies in regulatory provisions, accessibility, and poor implementation of services in senior care.

What will be the impact?

- a. Shifting disease burden.
- b. Rising dependency ratios.
- c. Evolving family structures.
- d. Altered consumption patterns.
- e. Structural changes in labour markets.

What are the challenges faced by the elderly?

- a) **Disease Burden:** 75% of the elderly suffer from one or more chronic diseases, while 1 in 3 have depressive symptoms and complain of low life satisfaction.
- b) **Lack of proper geriatric illness management.**
- c) **Increased medical expenditure.**
- d) **Inaccessible physical infrastructure.**
- e) **Deficient financial planning.**
- f) **Food insecurity.**
- g) **Loneliness:** This has increased due to a rise of nuclear family systems. For instance, 54% of the elderly women are widows, and 9% of them reside alone.
- h) **Fragmented Social Safety Nets:** 78% of the elderly live without a pension while only 18% are covered by health insurance.

What should be done?

1. **Healthcare Improvements:** Better wellness and therapeutic interventions to strengthen physical and mental health services and emergency response infrastructure.

2. **Use of Technology:** Integrating technology with health care through wearable devices, AI-based smart housing, and a well-developed telemedicine market have huge potential to transform senior lives.
3. **Social Security:** Increasing the coverage of pensions, geriatric health insurance plans, GST reforms on senior care products can bring the elderly within the ambit of a social safety net.
4. **Role of Private Sector:** Private-sector and non-profit voluntary organisations need to step in to fulfil the needs of the elderly. In most countries, the care economy is run by private agents.
5. **Changes in Employment Models:** Increased life expectancies also call for a transition to more flexible working models. Employers should rethink the retirement age to unlock the longevity dividend.

Topic: Secularism

Controversy with the Places of Worship Act-Places of worship and an unsettling judicial silence

News: The article discusses the Supreme Court of India's handling of cases involving religious sites, focusing on the Places of Worship Act, 1991. It mentions challenges to the Act, petitions against mosques, and concerns about secularism and the Act's future.

What is the background of the issue?

1. **Babri Masjid Verdict:** In November 2019, the Supreme Court of India gave a verdict in the Babri Masjid case, awarding the disputed land to the group that demolished the mosque.
2. **Places of Worship Act, 1991:** The Court praised this Act, which aims to preserve the religious character of worship places as of August 15, 1947.
3. **Post-Verdict Petitions:** After the verdict, petitions were filed against mosques in Kashi, Mathura, and others, claiming they were originally Hindu temples.

What is the controversy with the Places of Worship Act?

1. **Act's Objective:** The Places of Worship Act, 1991, aims to maintain the religious character of places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947.
2. **Challenges to the Act:** There are increasing petitions against mosques, claiming they were built on ancient temples. Examples include petitions against mosques in Kashi and Mathura.
3. **Supreme Court's Involvement:** The Court has allowed some petitions to be considered, challenging the Act's intent.
4. **Concern Over Cut-off Date:** A petitioner suggested changing the Act's cutoff date from 1947 to 1206, questioning the Act's scope.

What are the implications of such controversy?

1. **Threat to Secularism:** The challenges to the Places of Worship Act potentially undermine India's commitment to secularism, as the Act was designed to protect the religious character of places of worship.
2. **Political Implications:** These controversies are influencing political narratives, especially with the upcoming general election in 2024. The petitions and debates are becoming a tool in political agendas.
3. **Legal Precedent:** The Supreme Court's decisions on these matters could set significant precedents for how religious sites are treated legally.

4. **Public Trust and Harmony:** Challenges to the Act and the filing of numerous petitions against mosques risk breaching public trust and could lead to communal disharmony.
5. **Historical Reinterpretation:** The petitions, by questioning historical facts and attempting to change the religious status of sites, could lead to a reinterpretation of history, impacting the collective memory and cultural heritage of the nation.

Way forward

The way forward involves the Supreme Court upholding the integrity of the Places of Worship Act, ensuring secularism and historical preservation. It's crucial to maintain public trust and communal harmony, especially with the looming general election in 2024, where such issues could significantly influence political narratives.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

Topic: Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein

Financial challenges local government bodies in India- Having panchayats as self-governing institutions

News: The article discusses the financial challenges and potential solutions for local government bodies in India, known as panchayats. It highlights their struggle to generate their own revenue and dependence on state and central government funds, suggesting ways to improve their financial self-sufficiency.

What is the current financial status of Panchayats in India?

Panchayats in India generate only 1% of their revenue through local taxes.

The majority of their income, approximately 95%, comes from grants by the central and state governments.

80% of panchayat revenue is from the Centre and 15% from States.

Tax collection by panchayats decreased from ₹3,12,075 lakh in 2018-19 to ₹2,71,386 lakh in 2021-2022.

Non-tax revenue also saw a decline in the same period, from ₹2,33,863 lakh to ₹2,09,864 lakh.

The allocation for rural local bodies increased from the 10th to the 15th Central Finance Commission (CFC), with amounts of ₹4,380 crore and ₹2,80,733 crore, respectively.

What are the challenges faced by Panchayats in India?

1. **Lack of Tax Collection Authority:** In several states, gram panchayats lack the authority to collect taxes, while intermediate and district panchayats often don't have this responsibility either.
2. **'Freebie Culture' and Public Resistance:** The reluctance to pay taxes due to a prevalent 'freebie culture' in society poses a significant challenge.
3. **Elected Representatives' Hesitance:** Imposing taxes might affect the popularity of elected representatives negatively, leading to hesitation in enforcing tax laws.
4. **Increased Central Finance Commission Grants:** With substantial increases in allocations from the Central Finance Commission, panchayats show less interest in collecting local revenue.

What should be done?

1. **Educate on Revenue Importance:** Raise awareness among elected representatives and the public about the significance of local revenue generation for panchayat development.
2. **Effective Tax Implementation:** Panchayats should enforce appropriate financial regulations for taxation, including determining tax rates and enforcing collection.
3. **Encourage OSR Activities:** Promote activities that generate **Own Source Revenue** (OSR) like rural business hubs, renewable energy projects, and commercial ventures.
4. **Incentivize Local Revenue Collection:** Implement policies to provide matching grants or incentives to panchayats that successfully raise their own funds.
5. **Transparent Financial Management:** Ensure accountability and transparency in financial matters to build community trust and support for local revenue initiatives.

Topic: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States

Decline in India's parliamentary practices - The real threat to the 'India as we know it'

News: The article discusses the decline in India's parliamentary practices and growing political division. It highlights concerns over democracy's future, polarized politics, challenges to federalism, questionable defections in politics, and issues with Centre-State relations, emphasizing the need to uphold the Constitution.

What is the current status of India's external or internal dynamics?

External Dynamics:

1. **Global Political Environment:** India remains relatively unaffected by global turmoil, including the ongoing war in Ukraine and tensions in West Asia.
2. **China as a Vigilance Concern:** China is noted as a matter of concern, requiring extreme vigilance, but not posing an immediate threat.
3. **Pakistan's Limited Threat:** Due to its internal problems, Pakistan is not currently seen as a significant threat to India.

Internal Dynamics:

1. **Terror Attacks:** India has fortunately avoided major terror attacks recently.
2. **Internal Security Issues:** Challenges like farmer agitations in Punjab and Haryana, and unrest in the northeast, especially Manipur, are present but manageable.
3. **Communal Violence:** While under control, communal tensions could increase during election years.
4. **Left-Wing Extremist Violence:** Currently low but with potential for revival during election periods.

What are the issues with India's parliamentary democracy?

1. **Decline in Parliamentary Practices:** Recent parliamentary sessions in India have been marked by significant conflicts and a departure from traditional practices, as seen in the divisive final session of the 17th Lok Sabha.
2. **Political Polarization:** The country is experiencing heightened political division, with the Prime Minister accusing the opposition of creating a North-South divide.

3. **Strained Federalism:** There are concerns about the central government overstepping its bounds, impacting state autonomy and federal principles. Opposition-ruled states allege that the central government uses governors to interfere in state affairs, leading to strained relations.
4. **Political Defections:** The trend of engineered defections, notably the Bihar Chief Minister's switch to the BJP, is undermining the democratic process.

What factors are responsible for this situation?

1. **Intense Party Rivalries:** The increasing hostility between the ruling party and the opposition, evidenced by mutual accusations and derogatory language, exacerbates the divide.
2. **Electoral Strategies:** The use of divisive issues like the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as an election tool fuels polarization.
3. **Manipulation of Democratic Processes:** High-profile defections, such as the Bihar Chief Minister's shift to the BJP, indicate a trend of manipulating political loyalty, eroding democratic norms.
4. **Misuse of Constitutional Powers:** The central government's alleged misuse of governors in opposition-ruled states disrupts the balance of Centre-State relations.
5. **Lack of Adherence to Constitutional Principles:** The deviation from constitutionally mandated practices in government and parliamentary conduct contributes to the current situation.

Way forward

To move forward, India must focus on reinforcing parliamentary practices, fostering political tolerance, and strictly adhering to constitutional principles. Strengthening Centre-State relations and ensuring electoral integrity, particularly regarding political defections, are also crucial steps towards preserving the democratic framework and stability of the nation.

Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein

Decentralization in India-Federalism for development

News: The article discusses how giving more power to local governments in India, similar to what China did, can improve economic growth and political harmony. It emphasizes the need for local control over development strategies and better financial resources for states and local bodies.

Why does decentralization matter?

Decentralization is important because it allows local governments to create development plans that suit their specific needs. This approach can lead to more effective economic development compared to centralized planning, especially in diverse countries like India and China.

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

What are the challenges of decentralization in India?

1. **Political Discrimination:** Different political parties ruling at the state and central levels can lead to unfair treatment of states. For instance, allegations of favoritism in Mumbai's municipal corporation towards ruling party MLAs.

2. **Risk of Inter-State Rivalry:** As India moves towards a national market economy, decentralization should not result in trade barriers between states.
3. **Fiscal Constraints:** States accounted for about 55% of government expenditure but only 38% of tax revenue in 2022-23. Central tax collection practices limit states' share, affecting their financial autonomy.
4. **Centralized Development Schemes:** Centrally-sponsored schemes often dictate state development strategies, reducing local autonomy. In the 2022-23 budget, these grants were about half as large as tax devolution to states.
5. **Inadequate Local Governance Resources:** Municipalities and panchayats lack sufficient access to fiscal resources, hindering their ability to effectively manage local development.

How can Indian states benefit from decentralization?

1. **Tailored Development Strategies:** States can develop strategies based on their unique resources, climate, and demographics, leading to more effective economic growth.
2. **Reduced Economic Disparities:** By focusing on local strengths, like specific crops or industries, states can bridge the economic gap. Decentralization allows for diverse approaches, potentially reducing disparities.
3. **Greater Financial Autonomy:** With more control over financial resources, states can better fund their development projects. Currently, states generate 38% of tax revenues but are responsible for 55% of government expenditure.
4. **Local Political Harmony:** Decentralization can reduce political conflicts by allowing states more freedom from central government's influence, leading to more harmonious state-central relations.
5. **Empowerment of Local Bodies:** Municipalities and panchayats can have more control over local development, addressing specific community needs and attracting employment opportunities.

What can India learn from China's growth?

1. **Regional Competition as a Growth Catalyst:** Post-1992, Chinese provinces, municipalities, and towns independently pursued development, fostering a market economy through regional competition.
2. **Balancing National Market with Local Autonomy:** China's success also involved reform measures to create a common national market. This approach demonstrates how regional competition can benefit national development.
3. **Importance of Localized Economic Experiments:** China's varied economic experiments at regional levels were instrumental in its transformation, suggesting that India could benefit from allowing states to innovate and experiment with development models.
4. **Learning from China's Unified Political System:** Despite China being a totalitarian state, India can adopt its economic decentralization model while respecting its democratic and diverse political framework.

Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

Issues with RBI's decision in the PayTM case - Banking laws and regulatory shake-ups

News: The article discusses the issues with RBI's decision in the PayTM case. It also highlights the principles that should be followed by regulatory bodies in such cases.

Background:

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently directed the Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to stop onboarding customers with immediate effect, thereby essentially stopping the operations of the PPBL.

What are the issues with RBI's decision in the PayTM case?

- a. There was no formal legal order from the RBI setting out the failures and the justification for the action.
- b. There is no information on whether a hearing took place, PPBL's side of the story and RBI's rebuttal of PPBL's defence is not known.
- c. It is unclear whether due process and rule of law principles were followed by public authorities before imposing punitive actions.

According to the author, a possible reason for lack of transparency in this case can be that it could cause a bank run.

What principles should be followed by regulatory bodies in such cases?

- 1. **Rule of law:** The term "rule of law" is about equal treatment of everyone, with the same set of laws and fair procedures in the legal process.
- 2. **Natural justice:** It has two basic elements:
 - a. No person should be judged without a fair hearing, providing the person the opportunity to respond to the evidence against her.
 - b. No one should be a judge in her own cause.

A modern market economy requires these concepts to be operational, because arbitrary exercise of state power is unfair and deters private investment.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Revisiting Old Laws:** For instance, in this case, Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act effectively instructs the RBI to do the things that were done. These old laws need to be revisited.
- 2) **Modern Law Required:** India needs a modern Banking Regulation Act, one that would ensure that the rule of law and natural justice apply fully in regulatory enforcement matters, whenever authorities engage with financial firms.

Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures - Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues

Issues related to opening speeches in the Indian Parliament and State Assemblies - Rescuing grace from disgrace

News: This article discusses how in India, the President and Governors read speeches written by the government at legislative openings. These speeches are long and follow British tradition.

What is the current practice for opening speeches in the Indian Parliament and State Assemblies?

Speeches Written by Government: The speeches for the opening sessions of Parliament and State Assemblies are drafted by the government, not by the President or Governors.
Late Receipt of Drafts: The President and Governors receive the drafts close to the event, making it hard to suggest changes.

Constitutional Provisions:

Article 87 of the Constitution: It mandates the President to address both Houses of Parliament at the beginning of the first session after each general election and the first session of each year.

Article 176 (1) of the Constitution: At the commencement of the first session after each general election to the Legislative Assembly and at the commencement of the first session of each year, the Governor shall address the Legislative Assembly or, in the case of a State having a Legislative Council, both Houses assembled together and inform the Legislature of the causes of its summons.

What issues arise from the current practice?

1. **Lengthy and Tedious Speeches:** The speeches are long and can be tiring for the audience, as noted by President R. Venkataraman.
2. **Limited Personal Input:** Presidents and Governors often receive speech drafts too late for meaningful review or personalization.
3. **Writer-Reader Dichotomy:** There's a disconnect between the government (writer) and the President or Governors (readers) of the speech.
4. **Resistance to Change:** Attempts to reform the practice, like President Venkataraman's suggestion to shorten speeches, have met resistance.
5. **Potential for Interruptions and Controversies:** The lengthy nature of the speeches can lead to interruptions and controversies in the legislative assemblies.

What should be done?

1. **Adopt Shorter Speeches:** Following President Venkataraman's suggestion, inspired by the UK's practice, speeches should be concise, outlining only key policies and legislative agendas.
2. **Timely Draft Reviews:** Allow Presidents and Governors enough time to review and suggest changes to the speeches, avoiding last-minute rushes.
3. **Streamline Writer-Reader Collaboration:** Foster earlier collaboration between the government (writers) and the President or Governors (readers) for better-aligned speeches.
4. **Focus on Legislative Efficiency:** By shortening the speeches, legislative sessions can become more efficient, reducing tedium and potential for interruptions.
5. **Respect Political Civility:** Encourage respect for the speech process to maintain decorum and reduce controversies in legislative assemblies.
6. **Emphasize Clear and Accessible Language:** The positive response to the Governor's speech in Hindi in Bihar, which was well-received and uninterrupted, underscores the importance of delivering speeches in a language that is accessible and resonates with the audience. This ensures effective communication and dignified proceedings in legislative assemblies.

Subject: Governance

Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability

On Electoral Bonds Scheme Verdict – Supreme Court’s electoral bonds verdict turns back the clock

News: The article discusses the recent Supreme Court verdict on electoral bonds.

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

Background:

The Supreme Court (SC) struck down the **Electoral Bonds (EB) Scheme (2018)**, by holding all the amendments made in the Representation of People Act (RPA), the Companies Act (CA) and the Income Tax Act (ITA) violative of the **fundamental right to information under Article 19(1)(a)** and the **right to equality (Article 14) of the Constitution**.

What were the provisions?

- 1) **Exclusion from Reporting to ECI:** The amendment in RPA excluded the EBs from the requirement of mandatory reporting by political parties to the Elections Commission of India (ECI).
- 2) **Tax Exemption:** ITA was amended to make cash donations of only Rs 2,000, received other than by way of cheque, bank draft, electronic clearing system or electoral bonds, eligible for tax exemption from income tax.
- 3) **Ceiling on Contribution Removed:** The amendment of the CA had the effect of making every company, loss-making or profit-making, eligible to make unlimited corporate funding to political parties. The earlier ceiling of 7.5% of profits was removed.

All the above amendments were held unconstitutional.

What are the other provisions in the SC judgment?

- 1) **No Fresh Issue of Electoral Bonds:** It stops the State Bank of India (SBI) from issuing any more EBs.
- 2) **Details of Purchase of EBs to be submitted to ECI:** SBI has been directed to submit the details of EBs purchased to the ECI. The details shall include the date of purchase, the name of the purchaser and the denomination of the electoral bond.

SBI has also been directed to submit the details of the political parties, which received and deposited the contributions through EBs.

- 3) **Publishing of these Details:** ECI has been directed to publish the information received from the SBI on its website by March 13.

What are the principles used by the SC to base its judgment on?

1. **Ensure Transparency in Governance:** The SC laid stress on the virtues of “open governance” and the idea that “information about funding of political parties is essential for the effective exercise of the choice of voting”.
2. **Prevent Undue Influence over Policymaking:** The SC wanted to discourage/stop corporate funding for political favours, since political contributions enhance access to legislators and influence over policymaking.
3. **Violates Right to Information:** SC accepted that the purpose of curbing black money could be a legitimate objective of EBs. However, it viewed EBs as infringing on the right to information.

What are the challenges which still remain in the case of electoral funding?

- 1) Corporates may resort to making completely unaccounted political donations.
- 2) Only profitable corporates would be able to make political donations within the limit of a maximum of 7.5% of profits. According to the authors, though this route was always available, it was seldom used and is unlikely to be used in the future as well.

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

On Fixing the Issues with India's Electoral Funding

News: The article discusses the concerns raised over corporate donations. It also suggests reforms with respect to electoral funding in order to ensure the integrity of India's elections.

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

Background:

The Supreme Court recently struck down the electoral bonds scheme. This has brought to attention the framework regulating corporate contributions to political parties.

What are electoral bonds?

Electoral bonds are interest free "bearer instrument". (Bearer instruments are similar to promissory notes. These are payable to the bearer on demand.

What was the rationale behind electoral funding by corporates?

Rising Expenditure for Fighting Elections: The rising electoral expenditure could not be met through individual contributions. Hence, the government proposed Companies Act be amended to provide the mechanism and a limit (Rs. 25,000) for companies to donate.

After a brief ban, corporate donations were again allowed in 1985.

What were the concerns raised over corporate donations?

Corporate donations for electoral funding could lead to:

1. **Control over Corporates:** The government could force a business house into donating to a party.
2. **Unethical Favours and Corruption:** Businesses may seek advantages for themselves by donating to the ruling party in the hope of compensation in the future. This will corrupt political life and negatively affect India's democracy.

What should be the way forward?

Regulating electoral finance requires rethinking on the following issues:

- 1) **Repeal Expenditure Limits:** India has a limit on how much a candidate can spend on poll campaigns. However, there is a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms for ensuring adherence. **ECI and National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)** have held that these expenditure limits are hardly followed and should be repealed.
- 2) **Build a Donor Database:** A living database of political contributions should be developed. This will bring

transparency regarding a party's support and lead to better-informed electorate.

3) **Information in User-Friendly Format:** Currently, parties do not share information about donations they receive in a machine-readable format, but in the form of scanned PDF files. This makes it difficult to analyse.

4) **Empowering Election Commission (ECI):**

a. **Infusion of Resources:** ECI's institutional budget is roughly only Rs. 300 crore, with which it has to conduct free and fair elections for the world's largest democracy.

b. **Independent Secretariat:** For officers to be insulated from political pressure and state interference, ECI should have an independent secretariat. It would allow it to control its personnel's recruitment and service conditions better.

c. **Expenditure of ECI to be 'Charged':** A way to strengthen ECI's independence is to ensure its expenditure is "charged". It would give it parity with Supreme Court, CAG and UPSC.

Note: Charged expenditure are those on which no voting takes place for the amount involved in these expenditures for their withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund of India.

According to the author, transparency of political donations and an independent election commission are key to ensure integrity of India's elections.

Subject: Social Justice

Topic: Issues relating to Education

Primary schoolteacher qualification in India - A ruling that gives primary school teaching a new slate

News: The article discusses the Supreme Court of India's ruling that for primary school teaching, specific degrees like DEd, DEEd, or BEEd are necessary, not just a BEd degree. It highlights the need for better training programs and government support for primary school teacher education.

What is the current status of primary schoolteacher qualification in India?

According to the State of Teachers, Teaching and Teacher Education Report 2023, 90% of teachers have professional qualifications. However, only 46% teaching primary grades have the appropriate DEd/DEEd qualifications.

30% of primary teachers hold a B.Ed degree, and 10% have no professional qualifications. In private unaided schools, only 22% have DEd or equivalent; 43% hold B.Ed degrees.

What are the issues with primary schoolteacher qualification in India?

1. **Mismatch in Qualifications:** 30% of primary teachers have a B.Ed degree, which isn't considered appropriate for primary education as per the Supreme Court ruling.
2. **Private Sector Discrepancies:** In private unaided schools, 43% of primary school teachers hold B.Ed degrees, and 17% do not have any professional qualification.
3. **Training Quality Concerns:** Students from government-funded DIETs perform better, with 59% qualifying in TET with an average score of 86/150, compared to 31% from self-financed institutions with an average score of 77/150.

4. **Low Achievement in Key Areas:** Overall, only 14% of TET candidates scored above 60%, with particularly low mean scores in mathematics (46%).
5. **Insufficient Government Support:** Despite the need, there's a lack of focus on primary school teacher education and innovation, with emphasis mainly on higher education faculty development.

What initiatives have been taken for the improvement of primary schoolteacher qualification in India?

1. **Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP):** Announced to bring primary school teacher preparation into university/higher education, focusing on specialized training.
2. **Strengthening DIETs:** Ministry of Education initiative to improve District Institutes of Education and Training for better teacher education quality.
3. **Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya National Mission:** Continued commitment in the Union Budget 2023 to enhance teacher education, although mainly focused on higher education faculty development.
4. **Innovative Programmes:** Proposals to create pathways for B.Ed holders to receive certification for primary school teaching, such as professional development courses or specialized B.Ed programs.

What should be done?

1. **Quality Enhancement in Self-Financed Institutions:** Improve the training quality in self-financed sectors, ensuring they match the standards of government-funded institutions.
2. **Implement Innovative Training Models:** Consider models like the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) for primary teacher education, integrating it more into the university/higher education space.
3. **Create Certification Pathways for B.Ed Holders:** Offer specialized training or certification programs for B.Ed graduates to qualify them for primary education teaching.
4. **Strengthen Government Support:** Increase government involvement and funding in primary teacher education, focusing on both innovation and quality enhancement.
5. **Ensure Rigorous Testing Standards:** Adopt stricter testing standards, like section-wise qualifying marks in TET, to ensure teachers' competence, especially in foundational subjects like mathematics.

Topic: Issues relating to Health

Diversity important in health policy making-The diversity blindspot in health policy

News: This article discusses the lack of diversity in India's health committees. It highlights the underrepresentation of women, non-medical professionals, and people from diverse regions, and suggests that this affects the quality of health policies and decisions.

What is the gender distribution in health sector roles?

Gender Distribution in Health Sector Roles in India:

1. Women make up nearly half of all health workers in India.
2. However, only 18% of them reach leadership positions in health panels, committees, and hospitals.
3. In the 23 National Health Committees analyzed, women representation is just 11%.
4. Remarkably, 36% of these committees do not have any women members at all.
5. Women constitute 29% of doctors and 80% of the nursing staff.

6. Nearly 100% of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) in India are women.
7. Women's roles are often in frontline, lower-paid positions.

Global Gender Distribution in Health Sector Roles:

1. Women account for 70% of the global health workforce.
2. They occupy only 25% of senior positions in healthcare worldwide.
3. Just 5% of women are in leadership roles in the global healthcare sector.

What are the issues with health committees in India?

1. **Underrepresentation of Women:** Only 11% of members in India's National Health Committees are women, and 36% of these committees have no female members.
2. **Lack of Diversity:** The committees predominantly consist of men, particularly doctors and bureaucrats, mainly from urban and privileged backgrounds. This limits diverse perspectives in policymaking.
3. **Centralization of Power:** Most committee members are from the Delhi-NCR region, indicating a geographical imbalance in representation.
4. **Dominance of Medical Professionals:** There's an over-concentration of doctors in these committees, which may lead to a narrow clinical view in health policy, overlooking preventive and community health aspects.
5. **Limited Inclusivity in Policy Making:** The lack of varied backgrounds among committee members affects the inclusivity and relevance of health policies for diverse populations.

Why is diversity important in health policy making?

1. **Reflects Varied Needs:** Diverse committees can better address the different health needs of various populations. For example, policies might fail to consider affordability and household dynamics without diverse perspectives.
2. **Enhanced Understanding of Women's Health Needs:** Including women in health policy making brings essential insights into maternal care, reproductive health, and gender-specific diseases. This diversity in perspectives ensures that the health policies developed are more comprehensive and sensitive to the needs of women.
3. **Regional Representation:** Over-concentration of individuals from metropolitan areas, particularly Delhi-NCR, overlooks regional health issues. Diverse regional representation is essential for policies that cater to the unique health challenges of different areas.
4. **Professional Diversity:** The dominance of doctors in committees can lead to a narrow clinical focus. Including non-medical professionals and NGOs can broaden the scope to include preventive care and social health aspects.

Way forward

To improve health policy making, India needs more inclusive health committees with reserved seats for women and marginalized groups. This approach can ensure diverse perspectives in decision-making, leading to more equitable and effective health policies that address the needs of all population segments.

Subject: International Relations

Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations

China's 'Xiaokang' border defence villages

News: The article discusses how China is building and now occupying "Xiaokang" villages along the India-China border for both civilian and potential military use, prompting concerns.

What are Xiaokang border defence villages?

1. **Construction and Location:** China has built 628 Xiaokang villages along the India-China border, including sensitive areas like Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.
2. **Dual Purpose:** These villages are designed for dual-use, serving both civilian and potential military functions.
3. **Infrastructure:** The villages feature substantial buildings, mostly double-storey and spacious, indicating a significant investment.
4. **Strategic Intent:** The placement of these villages along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) is seen as a method for China to assert territorial claims.
5. **Legal Framework:** China introduced a law in 2021, effective from January 1, 2022, focusing on the protection and exploitation of its land border areas, which encompasses these border defence villages.

How is India responding?

1. **Vibrant Villages Programme:** India launched this initiative in 2022, focusing on developing border villages to counter China's village program.
2. **Development Goals:** The program aims to modernize 663 Indian border villages, making them not only habitable but also attractive as tourist destinations.
3. **Pilot Project:** In the first phase, 17 villages along the China border, including in strategic locations like Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, are being developed.
4. **Specific Focus Areas:** In Arunachal Pradesh, villages such as Zemithang, Taksing, Chayang Tajo, Tuting, and Kibithu are identified for development.
5. **Infrastructure Enhancement:** Alongside the village development, India is improving border infrastructure with new roads, bridges, and helipads to strengthen connectivity and response capabilities.

Way forward

To ensure regional stability, India and China need to maintain open communication and diplomatic efforts. Balancing infrastructure developments, like India's Vibrant Villages Programme and China's Xiaokang villages, with peaceful negotiations, is crucial to resolving border disputes and reducing tensions along the Line of Actual Control.

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

Factors are responsible for strengthening the relationship between Greece and India

News: The article discusses the strengthening relationship between Greece and India. Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis is visiting India to deepen ties in various areas. Both countries see each other as important strategic partners, with cooperation in business, military, and culture. This partnership is becoming increasingly important globally.

What factors are responsible for strengthening the relationship between Greece and India?

1. **Strategic Geographic Positions:** Both India and Greece are situated in key geopolitical locations, making each country an important strategic partner for the other in their respective regions.
2. **Military Cooperation:** Joint military exercises between the Indian Navy and Air Force and the Greek armed forces demonstrate growing strategic and defense collaboration.
3. **Economic and Infrastructure Development:** Economic reforms in Greece, combined with the potential India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), open new avenues for business collaborations. For information on IMEC [read here](#).
4. **Advocacy for Broader Relations:** Greece's support for the EU-India Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement and its role as a reliable partner in the EU and NATO, strengthen its relationship with India.
5. **Interconnected Regional Stability:** The security of the East Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean regions are interlinked, emphasizing the importance of the Greece-India partnership in global stability.
6. **Cultural and Educational Exchanges:** Efforts to enhance people-to-people ties through student exchange programs, cultural events, and media cooperation play a vital role in deepening mutual understanding and respect.

What business opportunities are emerging?

1. **Infrastructure Projects:** An Indian construction company is collaborating with a Greek firm to build a new airport on the island of Crete, showcasing cross-border infrastructure cooperation.
2. **Banking and Finance:** A major systemic bank in Greece has partnered with a prominent Indian financial institution to sell mutual fund products globally, indicating a growing financial relationship.
3. **Investment by Business Leaders:** Notable investments include those by an Indian business family in the Greek food industry, demonstrating the potential for cross-industry investment.
4. **Shipping Industry Expansion:** An Indian shipping company has opened a brokerage firm in Athens, aiming to become a key player in the trans-Atlantic shipping market, highlighting opportunities in maritime trade.
5. **Support from Influential Investors:** Indian-Canadian billionaire Prem Watsa, a major foreign investor in Greece, endorses the potential of Greek-Indian business cooperation, emphasizing the investment appeal of both countries.

Way forward

Moving forward, Greece and India should focus on expanding their strategic partnership, emphasizing business collaborations like infrastructure projects and financial sector ties. It's crucial to boost people-to-people connections through more student exchanges, cultural events, and media collaboration. Think tanks should

collaborate for deeper understanding. This approach aligns with the urgency shown by both countries' leaders, marking 2024 as a pivotal year for their strategic relationship.

Challenges of India and Europe FTA - Brave new world

News: The article discusses the challenges in the free trade agreement between India and EFTA, focusing on intellectual property rights and data exclusivity in the pharmaceutical industry.

What is the main issue in the India- European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA)?

1. **Intellectual Property Rights:** In the India-EFTA Free Trade Agreement, a major issue is the management of intellectual property rights in the pharmaceutical sector. This has been a persistent challenge since the discussions began in 2008, with both sides striving to find a middle ground.
2. **Patenting:** The agreement grapples with the concept of patenting, where drug originators are granted exclusive rights for a certain period. This practice is counterbalanced by the ability of governments to enforce 'compulsory licensing', which allows them to override these monopolies in the interest of public health.
3. **Data Exclusivity:** A critical point of debate is data exclusivity, which protects the clinical trial data of drugs for a minimum of six years. This provision, if included, could greatly affect India's pharmaceutical industry, renowned for its export of affordable drugs. India has shown resistance to incorporating data exclusivity into the agreement.
4. **High Cost of Drug Discovery:** The negotiations are underscored by the high cost of drug discovery, a factor that drives the divide between original drug inventors and generic drug manufacturers. The expense of developing new drugs contrasts sharply with the lower costs of producing generic versions, highlighting a fundamental tension in the global pharmaceutical industry.

For information on India- European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) read [Article1](#) and [Article2](#)

What is India's position in the negotiations?

1. India's position in the negotiations focuses on rejecting the concept of data exclusivity. This stance is rooted in protecting its significant pharmaceutical industry, especially its role as a major exporter of affordable drugs.
2. The country recognizes the need for balance between protecting drug patents and ensuring access to affordable medication.
3. India's experience with COVID-19 vaccine development highlights its capability in drug innovation, reinforcing its push for a more flexible intellectual property regime in the Free Trade Agreement.

Way forward

To secure its pharmaceutical future, India must invest more in fundamental research and ethical drug trials. This will enable the development of new drugs and therapeutics domestically. The successful creation of COVID-19 vaccines in India serves as a model for this approach.

Defence exports: A strategic imperative

News: The article discusses India's defence exports industry – its growth, reasons behind growth and positive future prospects.

Background:

What are the benefits of defence exports?

1) **Economic Gains due to Expanding Market:** Experts predict a rapid expansion of the global defence and aerospace industry, from \$750 billion in 2022, to **\$1.38 trillion by 2030**.

2) **Strategic advantages:**

- a. **Dependencies:** Defence equipment from a specific nation establishes technological dependencies, influencing maintenance, repair, spare parts, etc.
- b. **Military Interoperability:** It also enhances military interoperability, expanding options for joint operations.

These significantly impact the diplomatic and strategic geopolitical stance of partner nations.

What is the status of India's defence exports?

India's defence exports surged to a record **Rs. 16,000 crore in 2022-23**, a huge 800% growth in 5 years and reaching 85 countries across continents. This propelled India into the top 25 defence exporters globally. Nearly **80% of this growth is attributable to private industry**.

India's expanding defence exports encompass missiles, rockets, torpedoes, artillery-guns, and drones, among others.

What has led to a surge in India's defence exports?

- a. Enabling participation of **private sector and startups** in defence industry ecosystem.
- b. Streamlining export permissions via a **web-enabled system**, which has reduced delays.
- c. **Online system to share enquires and leads** with defence industry.
- d. Instituting open general export licence.
- e. Including defence exports as a key area for **evaluating performance of defence attaches** posted in Indian embassies abroad.
- f. Availability of **defence lines of credit (LOC)**.
- g. Repositioning **DefExpo and Aero India** as world-class exhibitions showcasing India's defence innovation ecosystem.

What are the reasons behind positive future growth prospects?

- 1) **Integration of MSMEs:** Hundreds of Indian MSMEs will be integrated into global defence original equipment manufacturer (OEM) supply chains.
- 2) **China's declining arms exports:** This is due to poor quality and unreliable performance of Chinese equipment. For instance, Nigeria returning Chengdu F-7 fighters.
- 3) **Other Exporters Pre-Occupied:** Russia-Ukraine conflict-related disruptions, Israel's preoccupation with Hamas, and USA being tied up on multiple fronts has led to India emerging as a reliable partner for countries looking to diversify their sourcing.
- 4) **India's Expertise:** For instance, India is skilled at servicing Russian platforms, thus making it attractive to countries possessing Russian inventory.
- 5) **India's Strengths in the IT Space:** The rising importance of software and AI in defence platforms aligns

with India's strengths.

6) **Defence Startups:** Government's **Innovation for Defence Excellence (IDEX) programme** has created hundreds of startups, which are poised for global licensing of their technologies.

7) **India's Positive Perception:** Transformation of the global perception of India as a rapidly reforming and growing innovation economy lends credibility to its defence industry.

What more needs to be done?

1. **G2G Sales:** Rules should be developed for **government-to-government sales** to make it easier for foreign governments to procure from Indian firms.

2. **Defence LOCs:** Allowing empanelled defence firms to include defence LOC as part of their proposals could be considered. Interest rates for defence LOC need to be reduced.

3. **Licensing of Indian Technologies:** Establishing a licensing template safeguarding national and startup interests is essential.

India "non-West" but not "anti-West" alignment -Express View on India's foreign policy

News: The article discusses how India is redefining its relationship with Western countries. India is not against the West, but has a distinct, non-Western identity. The US supports this approach, indicating strong India-US relations. India's domestic politics are shifting away from anti-Western sentiments.

What is India's new approach to international relations?

1. **Non-Western Identity:** India, led by External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, is positioning itself as non-Western, not anti-Western. This contrasts with other BRICS nations like Russia and China, which often appear more opposed to Western perspectives.
2. **Flexible Alliances:** India advocates for flexible international relationships, avoiding alignment against the West despite being a part of BRICS.
3. **Stronger Ties with the West:** India is strengthening its relationships with Western nations, particularly the US. Secretary of State Antony Blinken recognizes and supports this growing bond.

What is the US's perspective on India's position?

1. **Support for Flexibility:** The US, through Secretary of State Antony Blinken, endorses India's flexible approach to international relations, valuing diverse collaborations over rigid blocs.
2. **Recognition of Strong Bilateral Ties:** US acknowledges the strength of the US-India relationship, stating it is the strongest it has ever been, despite India's leading role in BRICS.
3. **No Conflict with BRICS Membership:** The US does not see India's membership in BRICS as a hindrance to their bilateral relationship.
4. **Encouragement for Variable Geometry:** US emphasizes the importance of "variable geometry" in current global contexts, supporting India's stance of maintaining multiple partnerships.

How is India's domestic politics influencing its foreign policy?

1. **Shift in Political Perspective:** The present government in India has transcended the traditional anti-Western paradigm. This marks a significant shift from previous governments' approach.
2. **Strategic Engagement with the US:** The present government's administration is actively engaging with the United States, building a strategic partnership that is described as deeper and broader than ever before.

3. **Decline of Traditional Resistance:** With the weakening of the Congress party and the decline of the left in India, resistance to engaging with Western countries, particularly the US and Europe, has diminished.
4. **Balancing Domestic Sentiments:** The government's characterization of India as “non-West” but not “anti-West” aligns with the rising conservative nationalist sentiments. This stance facilitates India's foreign policy in balancing domestic and international interests.
5. **Expanding Foreign Policy Horizons:** This approach allows the government to maintain support from various domestic political factions while expanding India's foreign policy horizons, especially in its relations with Western nations.

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

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

On the Progress in Achieving SDG Targets - More effort needed

News: The article discusses the progress in achieving SDGs in the Asia and the Pacific region, especially India.

Read in detail about **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** [here](#).

What is the status of achieving SDGs in the Asia and the Pacific region?

According to the UNESCAP's recent “**SDG Progress Report**” for the Asia and the Pacific region:

1. **Behind the Deadline:** There is a **32-year delay** in attaining the goals, given the current rate of progress. Of the 116 measurable targets, only 11% are set to be achieved by 2030.
2. **Differences in implementation:** There are differences in implementation **across various segments of population**, based on gender, region, education level, and other demographic factors.
3. **Maximum progress:** It has been made on **goals 1 and 9**, i.e. “no poverty” and “sustainable industry, innovation and infrastructure”, respectively.
4. **Negative progress:** Climate action (**goal 13**) has continued to regress in the region.
5. **Positive progress:** The report has commended the efforts of certain countries. For instance, **Vietnam's** efforts to prioritise technical and vocational education and digitally empower its migrant workers. Also, **Bangladesh** has improved maternal and perinatal-death surveillance and response systems.

What is India's situation with respect to achieving SDGs?

As per the report, India's track record is better than that of many of its peers in the region.

Reverse Progress	No Progress	Progress
India saw deterioration on 36 indicators.	India stagnated on 27 indicators. India made no real progress for “life below water” (goal 14).	India performed well on 85 indicators. Improvements were seen in

<p>India endured maximum reversal in progress in zero hunger (goal 2), decent work and economic growth (goal 8), and life on land (goal 15).</p> <p>These include investment in agriculture; suicide rates; treatment of waste-water; international agreements on hazardous waste; fiscal, wage, and social-protection policies; expenditure on research and development; expenditure on biodiversity and ecosystems; land degradation; and employment in manufacturing.</p>	<p>There was either stagnation or reversal in targets under this goal.</p>	<p>access to affordable and clean energy (goal 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (goal 9), and good health and wellbeing (goal 3).</p> <p>For goal 4, i.e. provision of quality education, the country saw tremendous positive strides.</p>
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Overall, India's performance remains mixed.

What should be the way forward?

Focusing on Data Availability: Data unavailability is a major hindrance in accurately measuring countries' advancement on various SDGs.

Subject: Agriculture

Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope' and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management

On the Scope of the Horticulture Sector in India – Next step for farmers

News: The article discusses the growing opportunities in the horticultural sector, especially F&V sector in India. It also highlights the steps that should be taken to improve it.

Read more about the **Horticulture Sector in India** [here](#).

According to the author, India has the potential to transform itself into one of the top fruit and vegetable (F&V) sources for the world.

What are the growing opportunities in the horticultural sector, especially F&V?

- 1) **Scope of Agri Exports:** There is a huge opportunity in horticultural exports.
- 2) **Changes in Dietary Habits:** The focus of the Indian diet is shifting from mere calorie security to a nutrition-secure mindset, leading to an increase in per capita consumption of F&V.

- 3) **Technological Advancements:** Digital and technology advancements and increased focus on bio-based and sustainable solutions can solve the challenges of horticulture value chains.
- 4) **Higher Incomes:** Horticulture farming promises higher incomes and offers a steady income stream throughout the year, unlike traditional subsistence farming.
- 5) **Agri-Inputs Sector:** Increase in horticulture production will also unlock immense potential for the agri-inputs sector that comprises seeds, agrochemicals, and fertilisers.

What steps should be taken to improve horticultural production in India?

The issues of **higher productivity, better price realization, and the affordability and accessibility of agri-inputs** are crucial. This can be achieved by:

- 1) Focusing on **value-added, export-led businesses**.
- 2) **Integrated value-chain approach** from sourcing to processing.
- 3) **Supply of key agri-inputs** to the farmer can help improve yield.
- 4) **Innovation in Seeds:** Agronomic and genetic seed innovations, including high-quality hybrids, can enhance shelf life and improve access to quality F&V produce. High quality seeds can help extend the geographical footprint for cultivation.
- 5) **1.0 Hectare Model of Integrated Farming:** This cluster-based, whole-farm approach includes multiple interventions such as solar-powered farming equipment, water conservation practices, diversified cropping integrated with livestock, vermicompost, etc., soil health replenishment with natural bio-based agri-inputs, village cluster creation for produce aggregation and exports. It holds the potential to address the challenges of droughts and erratic weather patterns.
- 6) **Specific Approaches for Diverse Agro-Climatic Zones:** A tailored approach to F&V agri-inputs is needed for India's diverse agro-climatic zones.
Note: An "**Agro-climatic zone**" is a land unit in terms of major climates, suitable for a certain range of crops.
- 7) **Multi-stakeholder Partnerships:** Partnerships among farmers, government, customers, industry, and academia/research need to be strengthened to achieve demand-backed production, high productivity, robust credit and risk management, and market linkages.

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices

Recommendations of Swaminathan commission

News: This article discusses the demands of protesting Punjab farmers for a law ensuring minimum support prices (MSP) for crops.

[Read extensive coverage of the MSP guarantee here.](#)

What are the demands of protesting Punjab farmers?

The Punjab farmers' primary demand is for a law that ensures the procurement of all crops for all farmers at Minimum Support Prices (MSP). They seek a system where MSP is not just a guideline but a legally enforceable standard.

This demand aligns with the recommendations of the Dr. Swaminathan Commission to some extent but diverges in that the Commission did not recommend a legal guarantee for MSP.

To know who M.S. Swaminathan was [read here](#)

What were the objectives of the Swaminathan Commission?

1. The **National Commission on Farmers (NCF)** was formed under the leadership of agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan.
2. The **Commission's 10-point agenda** focused on strategies for food and nutrition security and enhancing the productivity, profitability, and sustainability of farming in India.
3. Between 2004 and 2006, the Commission submitted five reports totaling 1,946 pages. These reports made several recommendations, including some on MSP, but **did not suggest a legal guarantee for MSP or a specific formula for its calculation.**

What recommendations of Swaminathan Commission?

1. **Support for Farm Women:** Establishing a National Board for New Deal for Women in Agriculture under the Union Food and Agriculture Minister, with the Union Ministers for Women and Child Development, Rural Development, and Panchayati Raj as co-chairs.
2. **Farm Schools:** Recommending the establishment of Farm Schools to spread innovative farming methods.
3. **Grain and Fodder Banks:** Proposing the establishment of a grain bank and community food and fodder banks.
4. **Insurance and Soil Testing:** Advocating for promoting insurance and setting up a national network of advanced soil testing labs.
5. **Market Reforms:** Suggesting a code of conduct for contract farming, and amendments in the state APMC Acts and the Essential Commodities Act.
6. **Agricultural Costs and Prices:** The Commission made **suggestions for the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)**, which recommends MSPs, to consider various factors in deciding the level of MSP, including the weighted average cost of production and risk factors.
7. **Minimum Support Prices (MSP):** Recommending timely issuance and better implementation of MSP across regions, but not supporting the specific formula of C2 cost plus 50%.

What are the different commission recommendations on Minimum Support Prices?

Swaminathan Commission

1. **Timely MSP Issuance:** Emphasized the need for prompt declaration of MSP, especially for Kharif crops.
2. **Improving Implementation:** Recommended improving MSP implementation across different regions.
3. **Abhijit Sen Committee** (High Level Committee on Long Term Grain Policy, 2002)
4. **Cost Calculation Method:** Suggested that the CACP should base MSPs on C2 cost of production (including imputed costs) in more efficient regions.
5. **A2 + FL Costs:** Recommended that CACP also indicate its estimates of A2 + FL costs for high-cost regions.

Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)

1. **Cost of Production Consideration:** Advised that MSP should be based on the weighted average cost of production, considering variability between regions and farmers.
2. **Exclusion of Risk and Post-Harvest Expenses:** Noted that risk factors and marketing and post-harvest expenses are not considered in the MSP determination process.

Way forward

To address the ongoing agricultural crisis, a balanced approach is needed that combines the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations with the current demands of farmers. This includes legally ensuring MSP, enhancing productivity, and improving market reforms while focusing on sustainability and support for farm women and innovative farming practices.

On Legalising MSP in India

News: The article discusses the issues with legalising MSP in India.

Background:

The government is left with less options to fulfill the demand of the protesting farmers for a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP), given the latest attack by an influential group of 19 agri exporting countries. The **Cairns Group** - comprising Australia, Brazil and Canada among other members — have claimed that India's **public stockholding (PSH) programme is highly subsidised**. So, the farm support that India gives is **distorting global food prices and hurting food security of other countries**.

What is the WTO 'Peace Clause'?

Currently, India cannot be dragged into a dispute over its subsidies as it is protected by the 'Peace Clause' that was agreed during the Bali ministerial in 2013.

However, India is open to face disputes. Because of the peace clause there is no restriction on what the level of MSP or the level of procurement should be.

What are the issues with legalising MSP?

1) **WTO Compliance:** If new schemes are to be implemented, then for those products India will have to comply with the 10% subsidy ceiling (under [WTO's Agreement on Agriculture](#)) and it will not be protected under the 'Peace Clause'.

This means that an MSP law will not be covered under the peace clause that gives India protection from legal disputes at the WTO.

2) **High Burden on Exchequer:** Experts have pointed out that there will be materially high expenditure if the government agrees to the farmers' demand for an MSP law.

Note: India's per farmer subsidy is very low. However, WTO rules are not based on per-farmer subsidy. India's subsidy to farmers comes in at \$300 per farmer, compared to \$40,000 per farmer in USA.

On Raising Farm Incomes – Policies favour the consumer, not the producer

News: The article discusses the demands of the ongoing farmers' protest. It highlights the implications of accepting these demands and the steps to raise farm incomes in India.

A detailed article on **MSP Guarantee Law and Farmer's Protest** can be [read here](#).

Background:

Farmers protesting on Delhi's borders are demanding to make minimum support prices (MSPs) legally binding and fixing the MSPs according to the **Swaminathan formula** (50% profit over comprehensive cost, often referred to as Cost C2).

What is the Cost C2 formula?

This cost concept includes not only all the paid-out costs of farmers and value of family labour (Cost A2+FL), but also the rent on owned land and the interest on owned capital. The difference between Cost A2+FL and Cost C2 is roughly 25 to 30% for most crops.

The current MSP formula that the government has accepted is minimum 50% margin over Cost A2+FL. If this is replaced by Cost C2 plus 50% margin, in most crops covered under MSP regime, the MSPs will go up by 25 to 30%.

What will be the implications?

1. **Raise the Fiscal Deficit.**

2. **Raise Food Inflation.**

3. **Similar Demands from other Sectors:** If the government agrees to raise the MSP (based on Cost C2), and make it legally binding, then milk producers, livestock producers, and horticulture producers will also demand the same treatment.

What should be done to increase farmers' incomes?

1) **Focusing on Livestock, Fisheries and Horticulture Sector:** These sectors need a **well-integrated value chain** approach. For instance, the Amul model in milk or the vertically integrated poultry sector.

2) **Raising Agricultural Productivity:** The best way to raise farmers' incomes in the 23 MSP crops is to raise productivity in a sustainable manner. This requires investments in agri-R&D and irrigation.

3) **Ensure Access to Markets:** Access should be enabled to markets not only in India but across the world.

This can be achieved by:

a. Remove all bans on agri-exports.

b. Remove stocking limits on private trade.

c. Stop selling wheat and rice in the open market at below the economic cost of the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

4) **Rethinking Consumer-Centric Subsidies:** India's agri-food policies are highly tilted towards consumers at the cost of farmers. For instance, 80% subsidies currently are geared towards consumers to keep food prices low.

Instead, according to the author, 75% of the subsidies should be focused on producers (in the form of a **price stabilisation fund** or PM-Kisan).

Topic: Marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints

Reasons for the increase in the import of edible oil in India - Finding the right policy for edible oil

News: This article discusses India's struggle to become self-sufficient in edible oil production. Despite efforts and policies, there's still a large gap between domestic production and demand, leading to heavy reliance on imports. The article suggests revising government policies to support local oilseed farmers better.

What is the current state of India's edible oil production?

India imports over 60% of its edible oil needs.

Production grows by about 2.2% annually, but demand increases almost twice as fast, at 4.3%.

From less than 1.5 million tonnes in the mid-1980s, imports swelled to 16.71 million tonnes in 2022-23, making edible oil India's third-largest import.

What are the reasons for the increase in the import of edible oil in India?

1. **Heavy Reliance on Imports:** Over 60% of India's edible oil needs are met through imports.
2. **consumer-centric Policies:** Government policies have been more consumer-focused, with interventions like limiting stock and trade, and lowering import tariffs (5.5%). These policies harm local producers' interests and discourage them from expanding oilseed cultivation.
3. **Economic and Social Factors:** Growing urbanization, rising population, and higher income levels have contributed to the increased demand for edible oils.
4. **Limited Domestic Growth:** Despite potential, there's a significant gap in actual and attainable yields in oilseeds, averaging 60%. This gap indicates underutilized capacity and inefficient farming practices, contributing to insufficient domestic production.

What efforts have been made by India for self-sufficiency in edible oil?

1. **Formulation of Strategies:** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced plans to formulate a strategy for self-reliance in edible oils in her budget speeches, including the Interim Budget speech of the current year.
2. **Research and Modern Farming:** The strategy includes research on high-yielding crop varieties and the widespread adoption of modern farming techniques.
3. **Market Linkages and Value Addition:** Efforts to establish market linkages, procurement, and value-addition for oilseeds.
4. **Crop Insurance:** Initiatives for providing crop insurance to oilseed farmers.
5. **Past Success with the Oilseed Technology Mission:** The setting up of the Oilseed Technology Mission in 1986 led to a period of near self-reliance in the early 1990s, known as the "yellow revolution".

For more information read [Artical1](#), [Artical 2](#)

Way forward

To move forward, India should revise its pricing and trade policies to incentivize local oilseed production, reducing the heavy import dependency of over 60%. Learning from the success of the 1990s Oilseed Technology Mission, the focus should be on making oilseed cultivation more economically rewarding.

Subject: Science & Technology

Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

AI reshaping merit and the idea of meritocracy- Recalibrating merit in the age of Artificial Intelligence

News: The article discusses how meritocracy, where people succeed based on ability and effort, is changing. It explores different views on meritocracy's impact, focusing on its problems and potential reforms. It also examines how AI complicates meritocracy by affecting jobs and increasing inequality.

What is meritocracy?

Meritocracy is a system where people's success is based on their abilities and effort, not their background.

How will AI be reshaping merit and the idea of meritocracy?

1. **Redefining Human Merit:** AI introduces non-human capabilities surpassing human intelligence in tasks and creativity, as shown by OpenAI's Sora, making traditional metrics of merit less relevant.
2. **Technology Access as Merit:** Individuals with AI tools have an advantage, shifting merit to technology access rather than personal abilities.
3. **Perpetuating Biases:** AI, trained on historical data, can reinforce existing biases in hiring and other fields, disadvantaging marginalized groups.
4. **Job Displacement:** AI's advanced capabilities, like early cancer detection as mentioned in a Nature Medicine paper, can replace skilled jobs, impacting both high and low-wage sectors.
5. **Polarization of Workforce:** AI pushes jobs towards high-skill, high-wage roles or low-skill, low-wage roles, increasing socioeconomic disparities.
6. **Opaque Decision-making:** The unclear nature of AI decision-making processes makes it hard to understand and challenge merit evaluations, undermining meritocracy's transparency.

Way forward

To move forward, we need to redefine merit in the AI era, ensuring fair access to technology and education. Addressing AI's biases and promoting transparency in AI decision-making are crucial. We should also focus on balancing workforce opportunities, supporting both high-skill and accessible low-skill jobs to mitigate socioeconomic disparities.

On RBI's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) - Digital future

News: The article discusses the CBDC-R pilot project being run by RBI. It also highlights the improvements being made in the CBDC by RBI and the benefits due to these improvements.

A detailed article on **Digital Rupee** can be [read here](#).

Background:

9 PM Compilation for the Month of February [Third Week] 2024

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been issuing the central bank digital currency (CBDC) on a pilot basis since late 2022. Based on blockchain technology, in the retail segment, CBDC-R was launched for a closed group comprising participating customers and merchants.

What is the CBDC-R pilot?

The CBDC-R pilot currently enables person-to-person and person-to-merchant transactions using digital rupee wallets.

What are the improvements being made in the CBDC by RBI?

- 1) **Programmability:** It will permit users like government agencies to ensure that payments are made for defined benefits. This means that certain built-in rules will impose restrictions on the usage of money.
- 2) **Offline functionality:** It will enable transactions in areas with poor or limited internet connectivity.

This could not only increase the adoption of the digital currency but also help attain public policy goals.

What are the benefits?

1) **Desired Spending:** The government would be able to ensure that the money is used for the intended purpose. For instance, if the government is making transfers to school students in the digital currency for buying books, it will be used only in bookshops.

2) **Reduce the Risk of Fraud:** Such functions can also be used by private firms to meet specified expenditures like fuel costs and business travel expenses of employees.

3) **Improve Spending Efficiency:** If properly implemented, this can improve the spending efficiency of the government and enhance citizens' welfare.

For instance, the digital currency will augment cash transfers with a fair amount of certainty that the money will be used for the intended purpose.

What are the challenges?

- 1) **Time Requirements:** Implementing such programmes on scale will take time.
- 2) **Digital Literacy:** The use of the CBDC requires basic digital literacy and access to a mobile phone.