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Index

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GS Paper 1

Subject: Indian Society

Topic: Population and associated issues

Female migration in India - A blurred mapping of internal female migration

News: The article discusses how internal migration in India is often male-focused, but women, especially working-age ones, are also a big part of this. However, their migration reasons and work involvement are less recognized and understood due to issues in data collection and societal views.

What is the current status of female migration in India?

1. **Predominant Reason for Migration**: 81% of women in India migrate due to marriage, overshadowing other reasons like employment (2.42%) and education (0.48%).
2. **Unemployment and Informal Employment:** The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data indicate that about three quarters of migrant women are unemployed, and only a small fraction is in self or wage employment (14%) or casual labor (12%). Many women likely engage in informal work, which is underreported.
3. **Educational Disparities:** A large percentage (85%) of migrant women have less than 10 years of education, potentially limiting their employment opportunities.
4. **Post-COVID Impact:** After the pandemic, 55% of women didn't return to work, and those who did earned only 56% of their pre-pandemic income.

What challenges do female migrants face in employment?

1. **Definitional Issues in Employment:** National surveys' definition of employment, focusing on formal contracts, leads to many women's works being classified as unpaid or not part of the labor force.
2. **Underreported Employment:** Despite PLFS data indicating high unemployment among migrant women, many engage in casual or informal jobs like agriculture or domestic help, which are often not recognized as employment.
3. **Lack of Social Networks:** After migrating, women often face the challenge of having limited social networks. This lack of connections, especially in new environments, can significantly hinder their chances of finding employment. Their reduced social capital compared to non-migrant women exacerbates this issue.
4. **Policy Gaps:** Current policies do not adequately address the unique needs and challenges of female migrants. For instance, initiatives like One Nation One Ration Card, e-Shram, and affordable rental housing complexes are mainly targeted towards male migrants, overlooking the specific requirements of female migrants.

What should be done about these challenges?

1. **Collect Comprehensive Data:** Enhance national surveys like the PLFS to **include more information on female migrants' socio-economic conditions post-migration and their time-use data.** This will help understand their actual employment status and challenges.

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2. **Change the Employment Definition:** Alter the definition of employment in surveys to include informal and unpaid family work, which is common among migrant women but currently not recognized as employment.
3. **Tailored Policies:** Develop policies that address the specific needs of female migrants, **moving beyond the male-centric focus of current policies like One Nation One Ration Card or e-Shram.** This includes creating targeted support for their employment, social security, and other challenges they face post-migration.
4. **Political Recognition:** Increase political attention towards female migrants, recognizing them as a significant group with unique needs, rather than treating them the same as male migrants.

Topic: Role of women and women's organization

Evolution of women's rights in India

News: This article discusses the history of women's rights in India. It covers their struggle for voting rights, participation in government, social reforms, and economic empowerment. It also highlights key figures and organizations involved in these movements.

How have women's rights evolved in India before partition?

1. **Voting Rights:** Women's struggle for voting rights began with the Government of India Act 1919. **Madras was the first province to give this right in 1921,** followed by Bombay and United Provinces. Bengal initially rejected women's voting rights (enfranchisement Bill), but after campaigns by **Bangiya Nari Samaj**, it was granted in 1925. However, these rights were initially limited to women meeting certain property or income criteria.
2. **Legislative Participation:** The **Nehru Report of 1929 proposed equal civic rights for all.** Despite Britain's reluctance, Indian leaders like **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Shareefa Hamid Ali advocated for these rights internationally**. The Government of India Act 1935 expanded women's voting rights and allowed them to hold public office, leading to women participating in the 1936-37 elections.
3. **Social Reforms:** The **All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), formed in 1927**, initially focused on education but later campaigned against child marriage, for raising the age of consent, and against polygamy. They sought to reform religious laws to empower women, including in economic aspects and inheritance rights.
   Indian Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties: Adopted in 1945-46, this charter demanded equality in all areas, especially highlighting economic empowerment and recognition of domestic work. It influenced laws like the Hindu Code Bill, which came into effect a decade later.

How Did Women Influence Post-Partition Policies?

1. **Opposition to Religious Seat Reservations:** Influential leaders like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a Christian, and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul, a Muslim, argued in the Constituent Assembly against reserving seats based on religion.
2. **Advocating for Unified Electorates:** The All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) strongly opposed separate electorates. They believed such systems deepened communal divisions.
3. **Against Women's Reservation:** AIWC also argued against reservations specifically for women in politics, emphasizing the need for a more integrated approach.

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4. **Influencing Constitutional Debates:** Their arguments and activism were pivotal in shaping post-partition policies, particularly in the framing of the Constitution where reservation was eventually limited to Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Way forward

The way forward involves continuing the work of earlier feminists by pushing for more inclusive policies and legal reforms. This includes expanding women's economic rights, advocating for equal property and inheritance laws, and addressing the societal challenges that still hinder women's full participation in all areas of life.

Challenges of Female Labour Force Participation (LFP)

News: This article discusses how women's participation in India's labor market is affected by caste and gender biases.

What challenges of Female Labour Force Participation (LFP)?

Limited Opportunities in Key Sectors: Structural issues in manufacturing and service sectors have led to limited employment opportunities, especially in the informal sector which involves about 90% of the workforce.

Read More - Female Labour Force Participation Rate- Explained

Conditional participation in economy: As per the analysis presented from seven states, women's participation in informal rural work mainly increases due to two reasons:
First, when there are more households belonging to lower castes.
Second, when there are many households led by women.
However, in the second case, women work mainly when women-led households are financially weak. Whereas, women, even in the leading roles in families, are less likely to look for jobs when their households are financially stable.
Impact of Caste on Women's Work: Higher caste women tend to participate less in the workforce due to better education and societal norms. Whereas lower caste women, driven by economic necessity, are more likely to work in informal sectors.
Education's Role: Education level greatly influences women's employment. Lower caste women often lack education, leading to jobs in the informal sector. While educated women, including those from lower castes, can access formal jobs due to affirmative action.
Societal Expectations: The prevalent belief that women should prioritize housework and caregiving roles over professional careers hinders their participation in the workforce.
Legal and Economic Barriers: Women encounter legal constraints in employment, such as restrictions on night shifts, alongside economic challenges in seeking jobs.

Why is women's workforce participation important?

1. **Economic Independence:** Women's earnings increase their capacity to make decisions for their family, promoting independence.
2. **Social and Domestic Benefits:** Employed women tend to delay marriage and childbirth, enhancing family health and well-being.

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3. **Educational Impact on Children:** A mother's income is often associated with higher chances of her children's schooling.
4. **Resource Control:** Women with control over resources face less domestic violence and enjoy more mobility.
5. **Societal Improvement:** Participation in the workforce leads to broader socio-economic benefits, contributing to a more educated and enlightened society.
6. **Affirmative Action Benefits:** Education and employment, especially for lower caste women, open opportunities in formal sectors, demonstrating the impact of affirmative action policies.

Way forward

To improve women's employment in India, policies should focus on reducing gender and caste discrimination, enhancing access to education for all women, and creating more opportunities in formal sectors. Addressing societal norms that limit women's workforce participation and implementing affirmative action policies effectively can lead to greater economic empowerment and social mobility for women across different castes.

Topic: Secularism

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

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

Background:

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

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

AMU's origins can be traced back to the **Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental (MOA) College**, established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875. It was established to help Muslims overcome educational backwardness and prepare for government services.
It imparted Western education as well as Islamic theology. Sir Syed also advocated for women's education.
In 1920, the institution was conferred university status.

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

Article 30 (1) of the Constitution empowers all religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
This provision reinforces India's commitment to ensure the welfare of **minority communities** by guaranteeing that it will not discriminate in giving aid based on their 'minority' status.

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

The legal dispute over AMU's minority status started in1967:

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

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the right to manage it.
Observations of the Court:

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

Why has this legal issue persisted?

Since 1967, the issue has persisted due to a combination of judicial interpretations and executive actions. These include:
In 1981, an amendment to the AMU Act explicitly affirmed its minority status.
In 2005, the AMU implemented a reservation policy (reserving 50% of seats in postgraduate medical courses for Muslim candidates). This was challenged in the **Allahabad High Court** which overturned the reservation and **nullified the 1981 Act**. It held that AMU, according to the SC's verdict in the **S. Azeez Basha** case, did not qualify as a minority institution.
In **2006**, various petitions, including one from the Union government, contested the High Court's decision before the Supreme Court.
In **2016**, the government withdrew the appeal filed by the government. It held that the government cannot be seen as setting up a minority institution in a secular state.

Topic: Effects of Globalization

Third Globalisation and India

News: The article discusses the undergoing changes in Globalization. It also highlights its impact on India.

Earlier, the **'Second Globalization'** featured unconditional access for the periphery (underdeveloped world) to the core (developed or advanced economies) of the world economy. However, it is currently undergoing changes.

What is 'Second Globalization'?

It broadly refers to the international regulations and organizations to **support economic integration** at the global level created after World War II, as part of the **Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944**.
The technologies of **telecommunication, container ships, wide-body aircraft, and modern finance** yielded unprecedented levels of cross-border activity.
The core gave complete access to their economic and technological progress **even to countries that were unfriendly or hostile**.

How is globalization undergoing change with Third globalisation?

Since 2018, the third globalization has emerged.
According to the author, the **'third globalization'** (currently) makes the access given in the 2nd globalization, (for the periphery to the core) more conditional based on **foreign policy** and **military alignment**.
It has seen access to the core being given in more limited ways for countries that have a **hostile foreign policy and military stance**. The core does full integration with each other, but they impose limitations upon

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hostile nations, having impact on **both trade and FDI. For instance,** since 2018, **China's share in USA's imports** has dropped sharply.

What should be the way forward for India?

1) For India's Foreign Policy:
a. In the case of China: There is a substantial trade engagement with China, hence there should not be any sudden disruptions.
b. For rest of the world: India should be a **status quo power**, which will work with the core and try to obtain economic growth in the coming years.
2) For Firms: Strategy thinking at firms needs to bring a better understanding of the political system in various countries, the risks associated with doing business in undemocratic countries, and the evolving rules of the game that are being established by the core.

Topic: Urbanisation, their problems and their remedies

Issues in Indian Urban Planning: Trapped in central planning

News: The article discusses the problems with town planning in India. It highlights how detailed government control leads to inefficient land use and fails to create nice cities.

What are the current issues in Indian town planning?

1. **Uncoordinated Private Development:** The private sector, built in an uncoordinated manner and focused on individual profits, results in the overuse of land for private projects and insufficient space for public amenities. Consequently, essential services like water, sanitation, electricity, and telecom suffer due to poorly planned and executed infrastructure.
2. **Excessive Government Control:** Development authorities in cities meticulously plan urban areas, often over-regulating and mismanaging land use. This includes dividing cities into detailed zones (residential, commercial, industrial, and green) with strict compliance requirements.
3. **Constitutional Violations and Legal Issues:** These overly detailed plans can violate constitutional principles. For instance, landowners in green zones face restrictions on building or modifying properties, leading to legal disputes and land misuse.
4. **Widespread Corruption and Arbitrary Power:** The system's complexity and over-regulation breed corruption and give undue power to authorities, enabling them to selectively enforce rules.

How does government control impact land use?

1. **Rigid Zoning Laws:** Government authorities divide cities into detailed zones, like residential and commercial areas, leading to inflexible land use.
2. **Restrictions on Property Rights:** In green zones, property owners face severe limitations, such as being unable to build or modify houses, which infringes on their rights.
3. **Excessive Land for Open Spaces:** Indian cities, as per renowned urban planner Mr. Patel's observations, allocate 50-60% of land for private open spaces, compared to less than 10% in well-planned foreign cities.
4. **Lack of Economic Understanding:** The planning approach shows a misunderstanding of urban economics, leading to inefficient and underutilized urban spaces.

What should be done?

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1.Use minimal yet effective state interventions, avoiding over-regulation and rigid zoning laws.
2.Create laws and institutions that can efficiently manage urban growth and planning, based on a deep understanding of urban economics.
3.Emulate successful urban planning models from abroad, where less than 10% of land is private open space compared to 50-60% in Indian cities.
4.Align planning policies to support economic growth while achieving sustainable development goals, as suggested in the Barker review of 2006 in the UK.

On the Issues with Mumbai's Urban Development Model

News: The article discusses the issues with Mumbai's urban development model as exemplified by the construction of Atal Setu.

Background:

Last week, the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link bridge, the Atal Setu was inaugurated. It has been advertised as a symbol of the city and the country's development.
However, according to the author, this development model (involving the construction of bigger concretised roads and paving over open spaces) belongs to the 1960s. It does not take into account the importance of urban ecology and is hence outdated.

What are the issues with Mumbai's urban development model exemplified by the Atal Setu?

This mode of development based on the **Concretisation** and **Infrastructure Development** of the city with roads, highways and tunnels creates several problems:
1. This mode of development **produces more traffic** (by encouraging car transit).
2. It harms **open spaces, wetlands, gardens and playgrounds** that perform vital climate mitigation and adaptation services.
3. Increases **toxic air quality levels** in the city.
4. The increasing extent of **rainwater runoff in the streets**.
5. The city's **trees are cut down** on account of infrastructure projects.

What should be done?

1) A different mode of development that takes into account **urban ecology** and **dissuades car transit** should be   followed.
2) Urban planning should **address and mitigate the air quality crisis and the lack of open spaces, intertidal regions and mangroves** performing critical services.

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Subject: Geography

Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena

On the Variability of Indian Monsoon – Gearing up for change

News: The article discusses the findings of IMD's data at the sub-divisional (tehsil) level on monsoon trends.

A detailed article on the **Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)** can be read here. In the150 years of its existence, the IMD has collected immense amounts of meteorological data that underlie its forecasts of the monsoon.

What are the findings of IMD's data on monsoon trends?

In an analysis of monsoon trends at the sub-divisional (tehsil) level, from 1982-2022, the following was noticed:
1. **Increase in Rainfall:** Monsoon rainfall is increasing in more than half, or 55%, of India's roughly 4,400 tehsils.
2. **Decline in Rainfall:** About 11% of them saw decreasing rainfall. In those tehsils, 87% showed a decline during June and July, which are crucial for the sowing of kharif crops.
3. **Abnormally High or Low Rainfall:** 30% of India's districts witnessed several years of deficient rainfall years and 38% districts witnessed several years of excessive rainfall.
4. **Reversal of Rainfall Patterns:** Some tehsils in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu, that were historically dry, were getting wetter.
5. **Changes in North-East Monsoon:** The northeast monsoon rain has increased by more than 10% in the past decade (2012-2022) in several tehsils in Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh.

How should these findings be utilised?

There is still research happening on whether Indian monsoon's long dry spells followed by torrential wet spells can be attributed to **natural variability or global warming**. In this regard, prioritising regional and sub-district forecast data over national level data would be helpful.
This will help in making **region-specific plans** to improve **climate resilience** and channel necessary **funds and resources**.

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GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

Topic: Indian Constitution- features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure

Simultaneous elections in India - Pros and cons of simultaneous elections

News: The article is about a proposal in India to hold simultaneous elections for the national parliament (Lok Sabha), state assemblies, and local bodies. It explores the benefits and challenges of this idea, focusing on aspects like cost, governance, and its impact on India's democracy and federal system.

What is the need for simultaneous elections in India?

1. **To Reduce Election Costs:** The cost of holding separate elections is high. With the Lok Sabha elections costing around ₹4,000 crore, adding state elections increases these costs. Simultaneous elections could drastically cut down these expenses.
2. **To Avoid Constant Election Mode:** Currently, political parties are in a continuous campaign mode due to frequent state elections. This distracts from governance and policy implementation. Simultaneous elections would enable a more focused approach to administration.
3. **To Enhance Administrative Focus:** Regular elections divert administrative resources and attention to election management. Simultaneous elections would free up these resources for more consistent governance throughout the year.
4. **To Mitigate Social Polarization:** The ongoing cycle of elections leads to polarizing campaigns, intensifying social divisions. Simultaneous elections would reduce the frequency of these campaigns, potentially easing social tensions.

What are the challenges involved in holding simultaneous elections in India?

1. **Overlapping of National and State Issues:** Simultaneous elections could lead to national issues overshadowing regional ones, affecting the representation of state-specific concerns.
2. **Reduced Feedback for Governments:** Holding elections once every five years might limit the electorate's ability to provide regular feedback, impacting policy responsiveness.
3. **Need for Constitutional Amendments:** Implementing simultaneous elections requires amending Articles 83, 85, 172, and 174 of the Constitution, which govern the duration and dissolution of the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Additionally, amending Article 356, related to the President's rule, is necessary.
4. **Fixed Tenure Complications:** Aligning the fixed tenure of both Lok Sabha and state assemblies is complex, especially when governments lose majority or seek early dissolution.

What are the various recommendations related to simultaneous elections in India?

Recommendations for Simultaneous Elections in India by Law Commission (1999, 2018) and Parliamentary Committees on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2015) are:

1. **Staggered Election Cycles:** Conduct Lok Sabha and half of the state assembly elections together, and the rest after two and a half years. This requires adjusting the tenures of current assemblies.

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2. **Linked 'No-confidence' and 'Confidence' Motions**: Any 'no-confidence motion' should be accompanied by a 'confidence motion' for an alternative government. This discourages unnecessary dissolution of houses.
3. **Shortened Tenure for Prematurely Dissolved Houses**: If a house dissolves early, the new house should only serve the remainder of the original term. This aims to prevent frequent elections.
4. **Annual By-Elections**: Clubbing bye-elections caused by death, resignation, or disqualification, and conducting them once a year to streamline the process.

Way forward

Moving forward, apart from the measures already suggested, it's essential to engage in a broad-based consensus among political parties, civil society, and constitutional experts. This collaborative approach can ensure that any shift towards simultaneous elections aligns with India's democratic ethos and federal structure, while addressing practical challenges and respecting the constitutional mandate. This inclusive dialogue is key to successfully navigating the complexities of implementing simultaneous elections.

Basic Structure Doctrine- How Basic Structure doctrine became one of the strongest safeguards for Indian democracy

News: The article discusses the Basic Structure doctrine in India's Constitution, which prevents Parliament from making amendments that could lead to dictatorship or violate core constitutional principles.

What is the Basic Structure Doctrine?

The "Basic Structure" doctrine is a legal doctrine made from judicial innovation specific to the Indian context. The doctrine prescribes that certain constitutional features are essential for the state's functioning. Such features are beyond the limits of the amending powers of the Parliament.

For more information read here

How did the Basic Structure Doctrine evolve in India?

1. **Early Cases:** The Shankari Prasad (1951) and Sajjan Singh (1964) cases initially allowed Parliament extensive amendment powers, but also started discussions on constitutional limitations.
2. **Introduction of "Basic Features":** In the Sajjan Singh case, **Justice J.R. Mudholkar first used the term "basic features,"** while expressing his thoughts about the potential limits of Parliament's power to amend the Constitution. He drew **inspiration from the Fazlul Chowdhury case in the Supreme Court of Pakistan,** which used the phrase "essential features." This discussion laid the groundwork for what would later become the Basic Structure doctrine in India.
3. **Influence of Professor Dieter Conrad:** His lecture at BHU in 1965, discussing implied limitations on constitutional amendments, influenced Indian legal thought and laid the groundwork for the Basic Structure concept.
4. **Shift in Golaknath Case:** The Golaknath verdict in 1967 marked a pivotal change, with the Supreme Court ruling that fundamental rights are unamendable, thus laying the groundwork for the Basic Structure concept.
5. **Establishment in Kesavananda Bharati Case:** The Kesavananda Bharati case in 1973 officially established the Basic Structure Doctrine, stating that Parliament can't alter the essential elements of the Constitution.

Why is the Basic Structure Doctrine important?

1. **Protection Against Tyranny:** The Basic Structure Doctrine prevents Parliament from creating amendments that could lead to dictatorship or undermine democratic values, as emphasized in the Kesavananda Bharati case.
2. **Checks Unlimited Power:** It serves as a safeguard against the absolute power of the majority in Parliament, ensuring that even popular decisions cannot violate core constitutional principles.
3. **Guarantees Constitutional Consistency:** The doctrine ensures that essential features of the Constitution, like fundamental rights and democratic principles, remain unchanged, despite parliamentary amendments.
4. **Balances Judiciary and Legislature:** By allowing the judiciary to review constitutional amendments, it maintains a balance between legislative authority and constitutional integrity.
5. **Upholds Democratic Ideals:** The doctrine is pivotal in sustaining democracy by preventing the institutionalization of tyranny, even if proposed amendments have unanimous parliamentary support.

Way forward

The way forward requires steadfast adherence to the Basic Structure doctrine, as a means to protect democratic principles and avert authoritarian rule. It's essential for the judiciary to consistently monitor and ensure that Parliament's amendments do not contravene the core values of the Constitution. This approach, rooted in the precedent set by the Kesavananda Bharati case, will maintain the crucial balance between legislative power and constitutional sanctity.

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

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

What is the importance of Law in Society?

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

What changes are happening in Indian Laws?

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

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What is the crisis with the Rule of Law?

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

What are the concerns related to these changes?

1. **Bypassing fair legal processes:** New methods like bulldozers and encounters skip traditional legal procedures, risking unjust outcomes.
2. **Targeting the innocent:** Quick justice methods can mistakenly target innocent people, as seen in wrongful actions in Kashmir.
3. **Abuse of power:** These shortcuts allow for potential abuse at the ground level, as highlighted in the shooting incident in France.
4. **Loss of accountability:** Without adequate debate and democratic checks, these methods lack transparency and accountability.
5. **Risk of majoritarian misuse:** These changes could lead to law enforcement based on majority opinion, not on impartial justice, affecting minority rights and fair treatment.

What should be done?

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

Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

Issues with the Tenth Schedule

News: The article explains the application of India's Tenth Schedule, an anti-defection law, in a recent dispute within Maharashtra's Shiv Sena party. It also highlights the need for reforms in the law to better address political defections and related challenges.

What is the Tenth Schedule?

1. **Introduction and Purpose:** The Tenth Schedule, added to the Indian Constitution in 1985, is an anti-defection law. It was introduced to address political instability caused by frequent defections of legislators during the 1960s and 70s.

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2. **Key Provisions:** It mandates the disqualification of Members of Parliament or state legislatures if they voluntarily give up their party membership or defy party directives during voting.
3. **Enforcement by the 'Whip':** Party discipline and voting instructions are enforced through a party-appointed 'whip'.
4. **Amendments for Strength:** Originally, it allowed a one-third faction to split without disqualification (paragraph 3). This was removed in 2003 (91st Constitutional amendment act) to strengthen the law against defections.

For more information read here.

What are the Issues with the Tenth Schedule?

1. **Misuse for Political Gains:** The Tenth Schedule is often manipulated by lawmakers to defect without facing disqualification. For instance, in Rajasthan in 2019 and Goa in 2022, entire groups of MLAs from one party merged with another, essentially defecting but evading disqualification under the anti-defection law. This tactic undermines the purpose of the Schedule.
2. **Ambiguity in Definition:** The law's criteria for what constitutes defection can be interpreted in various ways, leading to confusion and manipulation. The recent case in Maharashtra illustrates this, where the Speaker recognized the Eknath Shinde faction as the legitimate Shiv Sena, despite claims from the rival Uddhav Thackeray group.
3. **Speaker's Biased Role:** The Speaker's role in disqualification decisions is criticized for potential partiality. The Speaker, expected to be neutral, often makes decisions favoring the ruling party. The Maharashtra case again serves as an example, where the Speaker's decision favored one faction over the other.

For more information on challenges associated with the Tenth Schedule read here.

What should be done?

1. **Establish an Independent Tribunal:** To ensure unbiased decisions on disqualification, an independent tribunal, possibly led by judges, should replace the Speaker's authority, as recommended in the **K.M. Singh vs Speaker of Manipur case (2020)**.
2. **Strengthen Inner Party Democracy:** Implementing regular, transparent inner-party elections, monitored by the Election Commission, can reduce defections. This addresses the root cause, as lack of democracy within parties often leads to dissatisfaction and defections.
3. **Clear Guidelines for Faction Recognition:** The Supreme Court, in **Sadiq Ali vs. Election Commission of India (1971)**, proposed a three-test formula—consisting of the party's aims and objectives, adherence to the party constitution, and majority in legislative and organizational wings—to strictly determine the legitimacy of political factions.

Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

CCI in India's rapidly changing economy

News: The article discusses the role of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) in overseeing fair competition in India's rapidly changing economy. It highlights CCI's efforts to regulate markets, prevent anti-competitive practices, and protect consumer interests, especially in the digital age.

What is the role of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) in India's rapidly changing economy?

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1. **Overseeing Fair Competition with a Dual Approach:** CCI employs enforcement actions to combat anti-competitive practices such as price-fixing and bid-rigging. Simultaneously, it undertakes advocacy measures to foster a culture of competition, thus ensuring a level playing field in India's market.
2. **Oversight of Corporate Actions:** Mergers and acquisitions are scrutinized to prevent market dominance that could harm economic health and consumer welfare.
3. **Consumer Protection:** CCI safeguards consumer interests by ensuring fair prices, quality products, and market choices.
4. **Educating Stakeholders:** CCI educates about the benefits of competition and provides policy recommendations affecting competition.
5. It also **provides opinions and recommendations on policy** matters affecting competition, as and when sought

For more information function of CCI read here.

What are the challenges faced by CCI in India's rapidly changing economy?

1. **Digital Economy Dominance:** The rise of tech giants poses challenges due to their data control and resource abundance, potentially stifling competition and innovation.
2. **Rapid Technological Advancements:** Keeping up with swift technological changes and understanding their implications for competition.
3. **Global Market Dynamics:** Navigating the complexities of global interconnectedness and its impact on domestic markets.

What initiatives have been taken by CCI to address new-age challenges?

1. **Streamlining Processes:** CCI has improved the efficiency of its investigation and decision-making processes. This has reduced investigation and decision-making times, enhancing market efficiency.
2. **Addressing Digital Economy Challenges:** Focused on scrutinizing practices like predatory pricing and data monopolisation by tech giants.
3. **Regulatory Framework Evolution:** Continuously updating regulations to stay robust and flexible for future challenges.
4. **International Cooperation:** Collaborating with global entities for knowledge sharing and harmonizing regulations.

What should be done?

1. **Balance Regulation and Innovation:** The commission must ensure regulations are robust yet flexible enough to accommodate new business models and innovations.
2. **Update Regulatory Frameworks:** Regularly revising regulations to align with current market dynamics and technological advancements is essential.
3. **Faster Resolution of Cases:** Building on CCI's recent initiatives to streamline processes and reduce investigation times, further efforts are needed to enhance the speed and efficiency of case resolutions.
4. **Global Best Practices Integration:** As CCI collaborates internationally, it should continue learning from global entities, integrating these insights into its regulatory framework, akin to its current international cooperation efforts.

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SCs verdict on the Adani-Hindenburg case-The Adan episode gave investors lessons on risk

News: The article discusses the Indian Supreme Court's (SCs) decision not to order a new investigation into Adani Group, despite allegations of stock manipulation and other violations.

Background:

The Adani-Hindenburg case began when Hindenburg Research accused Adani Group of financial irregularities, causing a sharp decline in Adani's stock and investor losses. As calls for investigation rose, the case reached the Supreme Court, seeking a probe into alleged market manipulation.
The Supreme Court formed an expert committee to assess the regulatory setup. SEBI, meanwhile, conducted its investigations, submitting detailed reports. After reviewing SEBI's comprehensive investigation and the expert committee's findings, the Supreme Court concluded this verdict.

What was the SCs verdict on the Adani-Hindenburg case?

1. **Rejection of Additional Probe:** The court dismissed demands for a new investigation by a Special Investigation Team or the Central Bureau of Investigation, relying on the ongoing SEBI probe.
2. **Confidence in SEBI:** It found no reason to doubt SEBI's ongoing investigation and directed it to conclude the remaining parts within three months.
3. **Regulatory Amendments:** The court did not find grounds to order SEBI to revoke changes to the Foreign Portfolio Investors and Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirement Regulations.

For more information read here.

What are the implications of the SCs verdict on the Adani-Hindenburg case?

1. **Market Confidence Boost:** The SC's decision resulted in a positive market response, with Adani's market value soaring to ₹15 trillion, indicating restored investor confidence.
2. **Ongoing Sebi Investigation:** The verdict reinforces Sebi's role in the ongoing probe, highlighting the importance of regulatory bodies in maintaining market integrity.
3. **Need for Transparency:** The case underscores the need for more transparent and robust oversight in the capital markets, as suggested by the concerns over offshore entities and shareholding rules.

Way forward:

To ensure market integrity, there's a need to **enhance transparency and plug regulatory gaps**, especially regarding offshore entities and shareholding rules.
Strengthening oversight mechanisms is crucial to prevent potential manipulation and maintain investor trust, as highlighted by the recent fluctuations in Adani Group's market value.

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

Issues with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

News: The article discusses the importance and challenges faced by Panchayati Raj Institutions in India, especially with regards to funds.

A detailed article on **Local Governance in India** can be read here.

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Background:

Recently, the RBI's report on **'Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions'** was released. It helps in understanding the fiscal health of the third tier of government in India: local institutions of governance.

What is the current state of local government bodies in India?

Post-independence, the 73rd Amendment in 1992 institutionalized PRIs at three levels. As of December 2022, India has 255,623 gram panchayats, 6,707 mandal panchayats, and 665 zila parishads. The Fifteenth Finance Commission suggested ₹2.4 trillion for the period under its review.

Why are Panchayati Raj Institutions important?

1. **Governance and Rural Development:** Critical to providing **local governance** and helping in **rural development**. This is important as almost 69% of our population resides in rural areas.
2. **Implementation of Policies:** Significant role in **translating the vision and developmental policies** of both the Central and State governments into action.
3. **Familiarity with Local Needs:** Local governments have a more detailed information on the local needs of citizens than any higher level of government. This makes them best suited to provide basic public goods and services, such as health, education, sanitation, etc.

What are the challenges with Panchayati Raj Institutions?

a. **Funds:** Inadequate independent financial resources and heavy reliance on grants from upper tiers of government.
b. **Functionaries:** Lack of trained manpower.
c. **Functions:** Lack of political will (to devolve more power and functions to local governments).
d. **Weak infrastructure**.
e. **Regional Disparities:** The devolution of powers and functions to panchayats (and their performance) varies greatly across states (India's southern states have done better than others).

According to the author, the main challenge is inadequate resources.

What are the issues with PRI finances?

1) **Lack of Own Revenues:** PRIs have done little to augment their own revenues—items like property tax, fees and fines.
2) **Dependence on Transfers:** PRIs have preferred the option of transfers from higher levels of government. This reliance on grants has meant they are not financially self-reliant, restricting their power to take spending decisions.

It is **against the principle of subsidiarity**, which means that higher levels of government should perform only those functions that cannot be effectively performed at the local level.

How can the fiscal position of PRIs be improved?

1. **Increase financial autonomy** for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by enhancing their revenue-generating capabilities.
2. **Implement Article 243 (I) effectively**, requiring states to establish Finance Commissions for fair revenue sharing with PRIs.
3. Enhance administrative skills at local levels for better financial handling and ensure steady, ample funding for effective planning and program execution.
4. **Learn from global examples** where local governments manage significant portions of tax revenue, such as over 20% in Finland and Switzerland.

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5. Encourage decentralization, **empowering local leaders** to make decisions based on community-specific needs and circumstances.

Topic: Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

On Republic Day Parade Tableaux Selection – Show of fairness

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

Background:

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

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

What is the procedure followed for tableau selection?

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

What should be the way forward?

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

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

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

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

A detailed article on **Anti-Defection Law** can be read here.

The recent decision by Maharashtra Assembly Speaker's ruling in the case of disqualification petitions by rival factions of the Shiv Sena has brought to attention the Presiding Officer's powers under the anti-defection law.

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According to the author, if decisions on defection disputes are in the hands of Speakers instead of an independent authority, political considerations will keep leading to unfair rulings.

What was the Speaker's ruling in this case?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Subject: Governance

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

On the Jal Jeevan Mission – Water Water Everywhere

News: The article discusses the challenges in achieving 100% coverage under the Jal Jeevan Mission. It also highlights what needs to be done to ensure it.

A detailed article on the **Jal Jeevan Mission** can be read here.

Background:

Launched in 2019, the Jal Jeevan Mission aims to achieve the objective of providing piped water in adequate quantities and of prescribed quality on a regular and long-term basis to every rural household in India (55 litre per capita per day of water).

Data shows **73.57% of the rural households** have already been covered by this flagship scheme.

What are the challenges in achieving 100% coverage?

There are challenges in achieving 100% coverage.
For instance, 3 states — Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and West Bengal — are way below the national average (73%), and even below the halfway mark (50%) of providing functional tap water connections to every household. These challenges include:

1) **Geographic Challenges:** Rajasthan's arid and rocky terrain, unlike UP's plains, is not very conducive to piped water supply. Also, the state has the issue of generally low availability of water.
2) **Political Challenges:** For instance, change of government in the state in the recent elections has also slowed the implementation in Rajasthan, as per the author.
3) **Sustainable Source:** Unless the source of water is sustainable (such as through replenishment by groundwater recharge), the supply would become a long-term issue.
4) **Lack of Urgency:** For instance, West Bengal has plenty of water, which may have taken away the urgency required to implement the scheme. It has also led to the problem of contamination, which requires a much greater focus on treatment and supply.
5) **Raw Material Supply (Pipes):** The more immediate challenge has been the rising demand for duct iron pipes, which are an important raw material for piped water connections and its timely supply.
6) **Reaching the Last Mile:** Providing clean drinking water for PVTGs is part of the recently launched **PM JANMAN scheme**. The launch of this initiative makes it necessary to reach far-flung areas, which will be a challenge.

How did the Jal Jeevan Mission deal with the various challenges?

1. **Different Regional Needs:** Every region had different needs, which were taken care of. Insulated pipes were used in hilly and cold regions. In villages with water quality issues, multi-village schemes through bulk water transfer were planned.
2. **Transparency and Efficiency:** A dashboard that gives real-time updates, progress reports, and so on, ensures transparency and efficiency in water resource management. It also ensures continuous monitoring

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and surveillance of water quality parameters through advanced technologies.

3. **Water Quality:** A proactive Water Quality Management Information System helps detect contamination or deterioration in water quality, thereby enabling prompt corrective action and grievance redress.

What can be the positive impacts of the Jal Jeevan Mission?

Its impact has extended beyond the provision of clean water. This includes:

1. **Preventing Infant Mortality:** Providing safe water can reduce infant deaths by almost 30%, with the potential to prevent 25% of under-five deaths in India (1,36,000 child deaths annually).
2. **Preventing Deaths due to Diarrhoea:** A WHO study states that 4 lakh diarrhoeal deaths can be averted if tap water is provided in every household.
3. **Economic Savings:** The Jal Jeevan Mission can lead to economic savings of up to $101 billion or ₹8.37 lakh crore (due to savings on health-related expenditure).
4. **Community-Building:** It can strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural communities by bringing in a sense of community.
5. **Skill Building:** The empowerment of the youth through skill development, and the creation of local water enterprises can enhance skills of the rural population.
   For instance, **Nal Jal Mitra initiative** equips villagers with skills to carry out minor repairs and maintenance of the piped water supply.
6. **Employment Generation:** A study estimates that the Mission's employment generation potential during the construction phase, including both indirect and direct employment, is huge. Additionally, employment will be generated in the operation and maintenance stage.

What should be done?

1. **Planning Sustainability of Water Source:** This must be done by the panchayat. Villagers do not know how much water there is in the groundwater aquifers. Communities must be empowered in aquifer and groundwater management.
In this respect, states have put in place an implementation support agency to handhold the communities and train them in operation and maintenance of water connections for the next 3-4 years.

2. **Correct Identification of Area:** Appropriate area must be selected after field survey to house all three water supply units: The water treatment plan, storage unit, and distribution channel (meaning taps).

3. **Maintenance of Infrastructure:** The Centre has asked states to come up with a plan and decide on a mix of user charges and government subsidy for the upkeep of the drinking water infrastructure.

Records indicate that many states that did not perform well initially have progressed fast in the last two years. For instance, Uttar Pradesh, with only around 20% coverage in 2022, has improved it to above 76%.

Through the Mission, India is moving towards achieving **UN Sustainable Development Goal 6** (clean water and sanitation for all).

On Truck Drivers' Protests – Striking fear

News: The article discusses the reasons behind the recent truck drivers' protests and the issues raised by them.
Background:
Recently, truck drivers worried about the implications of **Section 106 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** abstained from work. This has led the government to promise to implement the provision after consultations with the All India Motor Transport Congress.

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What are the provisions in the BNS that are being protested by truck drivers?

Section 106 in the BNS will replace Section 304A of IPC. It will treat hit-and-run accident cases as an aggravated form of the offence of causing death by rashness or negligence.

First, Section 106 of the BNS prescribes a prison term of up to **5 years**, besides a fine, for causing death due to rash or negligent acts. The existing section provides for a **2-year** jail term.

Second, road accidents in which, if the person involved in rash and negligent driving "escapes without reporting it to a police officer or a Magistrate soon after the incident", the imprisonment may extend to **10 years** and a fine.

In other words, the jail term for accidents have been raised from the present 2 to 5 years in all cases, and to 10, in the case of failure to report them to the authorities.

What are the issues being raised with the provisions?

1. **Additional criminal liability:** Punishments have been made more stringent.

2. **Fear of Lynching:** Drivers usually run away from an accident scene out of a fear of lynching. It is a belief that such drivers can move away from the scene of crime and then report to the police. However, fleeing the scene would constitute a hit-and-run case, thus falling under 'causing death by rashness or negligence'.

3. **Lack of Focus on Wider Issues:** Given that many accidents are caused due to **poor road conditions**, questions have been raised on the **lack of a comprehensive accident prevention policy package** covering imprisonment, compensation and safety. Merely raising prison terms may not solve the prevailing issues.

Concerns related to India's Post Office and Telecommunications laws

News: The article discusses concerns about new Indian laws allowing postal and telecommunications authorities to intercept communications without clear safeguards against misuse.

What are the Interception-related concerns in the present Post Office and Telecommunications laws?

1. **Lack of Procedural Safeguards**: The new Post Office Act doesn't include necessary procedures to prevent misuse of the power to intercept messages. This contrasts with previous acts, where rules were eventually established, like the Telegraph Rules in 2007 and IT Rules in 2009.

2. **Vague Definition of 'Emergency':** The Act allows interception in 'emergencies' but doesn't define what this means, leading to potential arbitrary use of power.

3. **Privacy Concerns:** Interception without clear rules can infringe on privacy rights, a concern raised in past Supreme Court rulings like the PUCL vs Union of India (1996) case. It emphasized the need for safeguards in communication interception.

4. **Differences from Older Legislation:** Previously, acts like the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, required specific conditions like a 'public emergency' or 'public safety' to intercept messages. These conditions acted as checks to prevent arbitrary use of power. The new laws remove these specific requirements, potentially making it easier for authorities to intercept communications without needing to justify it under these stringent conditions.

5. **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:** Article 17 states that no one should face arbitrary interference with their privacy. As India is a signatory, the new laws might conflict with these international obligations.

6. **Directive Principle 51(c) of the Constitution:** This principle emphasizes respecting international conventions, raising questions about the new laws' alignment with international standards on privacy.

What has been stand of the Supreme Court (SC) on the matter or interception?

1. **PUCL vs Union of India (1996):** The SC emphasized that telephonic conversations are private. It stated that phone tapping infringes on freedom of speech (articles 19), permissible only under specific

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restrictions (articles 19(2)). The Court also noted the right to privacy is part of the right to life and personal liberty (article 21), and any curtailment must follow a lawful, fair, and reasonable procedure.

2. **Distt. Registrar & Collector, Hyderabad & Anr vs Canara Bank (2005):** This ruling established that the right to privacy isn't lost when confidential documents are entrusted to a third party, like a bank, implying similar protections should apply to postal correspondence.

3. **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) & Anr. vs Union of India & Ors. (2017):** The right to communication was declared a part of the right to privacy, protected under Article 21 of the Constitution.

These rulings emphasize the importance of privacy and the need for legal safeguards against arbitrary interception of communications.

Way forward:

To ensure the protection of privacy rights under India's Post Office and Telecommunications laws, it's crucial to establish explicit procedural safeguards. These safeguards should prevent the misuse of interception powers by defining 'emergency' situations more clearly. Drawing from historical legal precedents and international human rights norms, the government needs to implement effective accountability measures for authorities involved.

On Aadhaar-Based Payment Systems (ABPS) for NREGA Wage Payments

News: The article discusses the issues with using Aadhaar-Based Payment Systems (ABPS) in MGNREGS wage payments.

Background:

Recently, the Rural Development Ministry made **Aadhaar-Based Payment Systems (ABPS)** mandatory in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). There are 2 modes of wage payments in MGNREGS: account-based and ABPS. As per the government's data, out of 25.6 crore registered workers, only 16.9 crore workers are eligible for ABPS while all are eligible for account-based payments.

How are payments made through ABPS?

For ABPS, the following procedure needs to be done:

First, a worker's Aadhaar number must be linked to their job card. Authentication is successful only when all the details including spelling and gender match.
Second, Aadhaar must be linked to the bank account.
Third, the Aadhaar number of each worker must be mapped correctly through their bank branch with a software mapper of the National Payments Corporation of India.
The Aadhaar number acts as the financial address and cash transferred gets deposited to the last Aadhaar-linked bank account.

What are the advantages of using ABPS, as claimed by the government?	What are the issues with these claims?

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| 1) Will remove duplicate job cards and lead to savings. | No publicly available audits on the procedures followed by officials in deleting job cards and the valid scientific assessment of the gains of such an exercise are available.

Studies show how officials have resorted to deleting job cards owing to pressure from the Union government to meet 100% of the Aadhaar seeding targets. There are also strong evidence of exaggerated savings claims due to Aadhaar. |
|---|---|
| 2) Reduce wage payment delays. | Timely payments is only a function of the government allocating adequate funds. With adequate funds, the time taken to pay workers will not be different whether it uses ABPS or account-based payments.

The evidence for quicker payments in ABPS compared to account-based payments was not statistically significant (only 3%). |
| 3) Lower payment rejections. | Study finds no statistically significant difference between the rejection rates in the two modes of payments. |

What are some other issues with using ABPS in MGNREGS payments?

1. **Lack of Evidence:** No credible evidence supporting the decision to shift to ABPS was provided by the government.
2. **Complex Procedure:** Incorrectness in any of the steps for ABPS means that the worker is denied work, does not receive wages, or is not paid in their preferred account.
3. **Spelling Mismatches:** Since different administrative units are involved in creating different documents in rural areas, spelling mismatches are common.

Hence, according to the authors, the difficulties in resolving problems with ABPS are more than the difficulties in resolving problems with account-based payments and hence, account-based payments are advocated.

Topic: Important aspects of governance

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

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

What are the issues related to policing in India?

1. **Low Public Trust:** The Indian police are perceived negatively by the public, leading to a lack of trust and confidence in their capabilities.
2. **Centre-State Conflict:** There is tension between the central government and some state governments regarding the Indian Police Service (IPS). States view IPS officers as outsiders and prefer recruiting their own personnel.

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3. **Structural Imbalances:** The police hierarchy is skewed, with IPS officers receiving most attention and opportunities, while lower ranks lack chances to demonstrate their capabilities. This structure contrasts with many countries where officers rise through the ranks based on merit and performance.
4. **Political Influence:** Policing in India is heavily influenced by politics, with officers often struggling to resist illegal demands from politicians, affecting their autonomy and operational independence.
5. **Inadequate Training and Development:** Lower-ranking officers lack sufficient training and development opportunities, hindering their ability to effectively serve and protect the community.

Way forward:

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

On the Issues with the Media in India – Beleaguered Indian media: Quo Vadis?

News: The article discusses the importance of media in a democracy and the emerging challenges to its working in India. It also highlights steps that can be taken to tackle these challenges.

Since liberalisation in 1991, factors such as economic growth, the freeing of broadcast media from government control and the rise of Internet have led to a rapid rise in the number of media outlets.

What is the importance of media?

1. **Lifeblood of Democracy:** A free media is the lifeblood of India's democracy.
2. **Shape Public Opinion:** Media provides the information that enables a free citizenry to make the choices of who governs them.
3. **Ensure Accountability:** The media ensures that those who govern remain accountable to the people.

What are the emerging issues with media in India?

1. **Focused on TRP:** TV channels competing for **television ratings points (TRPs)** has led to the media giving up on its objective of providing a public service.
2. **Sensationalisation of News:** The **"breaking news" phenomenon** has led to prioritizing sensationalisation over the actual substance of the news.
3. **Illegitimate Media Trials:** Media is acting as the witness, prosecutor, judge, jury and the executioner – all by itself.
4. **Emergence of Unregulated social media:** social media, with its culture of unverified facts, has led to a new problem.
5. **Lack of Fact-checking:** Journalists now feel pressed to publish without fact-checking.
6. **Defamation of Individuals:** Unverified news can do irreparable damage to innocent people's reputations.
7. **Failing in Ensuring Accountability:** The media's obsession with the superficial and the sensational leads to lowering of quality of public discourse. This harms its role as the watchdog of democracy.
8. **Censorship/ Govt Pressure:** The government has intimidated newspapers and TV channels for publishing uncomfortable news. Journalists have also been arrested under the UAPA.

What should be done?

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1) **Culture of Fact-Verification and Accuracy:** Journalists should not feel pressed to break the news, but make sure their facts and accusations are accurate.

2) **Better Journalistic Training:** There should be better journalistic training at media institutes that emphasise values of **accuracy, integrity and fairness** in students. These standards should also extend to media organisations.

3) **Multiple Perspectives:** Different perspectives should be welcomed in the media houses that will prevent them from forcing their own unchecked opinions onto their viewers.

4) **Inviting Feedback from the Public:** Journalists must welcome comments and feedback from their viewers and readers. This will generate trust between the consumers and the media.

5) **Regulation of the Sector:** The government must introduce laws and regulations that limit control of multiple news organisations by a single business or political entity. This will encourage an independent and robust press in the country.

6) **Oversight Mechanism:** A single overseer for print and television news companies (recommended by **TRAI and the IT Parliamentary Committee**), would limit the power of corporate and political interests over the media.

India deserves a media that contributes to shaping an informed, educated and politically aware India which can hold its governments accountable.

Topic: The role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders

Concerns related to India's FCRA- A backsliding

News: The registration of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) has been revoked by the Union Home Ministry.

What is the FCRA?

The FCRA regulates foreign donations and ensures that such contributions do not adversely affect internal security.

It was enacted during the Emergency in 1976 amid apprehensions that foreign powers were interfering in India's affairs by pumping money into the country through independent organizations. For more information read here

Why was the FCRA registration of CPR cancelled?

Read here

What are the concerns related to India's FCRA?

1. **Restrictive Control on NGOs**: India's use of the FCRA to suspend or cancel licenses of NGOs like Centre for Policy Research and World Vision India showcases restrictive control over Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).
2. **Silencing Sensitive Issues:** The government targets NGOs working on environmental issues, civil liberties, and human rights, suggesting an attempt to silence voices on sensitive topics.
3. **Impact on India's Global Reputation:** International bodies like the International Commission of Jurists have criticized the FCRA amendments for being against international law. Additionally, Freedom House

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downgraded India to an "electoral autocracy" in its Democracy Index, citing erosion of civil liberties as a reason.

4. **Contradiction with Democratic Ideals:** As India positions itself as the 'Mother of Democracy' and a global leader, these actions contradict its democratic aspirations and impact its standing in global freedom and democracy indices.

Civil society under siege in India

News: The article discusses the recent attacks on civil society in India. It also highlights the instruments being used to attack civil society.

What is civil society?

Civil society refers to a wide variety of communities and groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations that function outside of government to provide support and advocacy for certain people or issues in society.
A free civic space regulated under constitutionally guaranteed principles is the **essence of democracy**. India is lucky to have a **diverse and vibrant civil society**.
However, according to the author, the anti-communal and progressive civic space is under attack by the state.

What is the status of attacks on civil society?

According to the author, civil societies in India are under varied degree of attacks:

1. **Highly attacked organisations:** These include organisations that actively fight against communalism. This has led to them running out of funds and their leaders sent to prison or being charged.
This includes organisations such as Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), Amnesty India, Oxfam, Centre for Equity Studies and Lawyers Collective.
2. **Moderately attacked institutions:** This has led to some organisations almost closing their operations. They have been attacked, for example, for having connections with Adivasi rights movements impacting mining interests.
They include the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and anti-communal NGOs such as ANHAD.
3. **Low-level attacks:** These include Institutions that are generally not active in the anti-communal area but pursuing significant human rights causes.
For instance, organisations such as Navsarjan, which is a leader in Dalit rights, and Save The Children's work on child rights.

What are the instruments being used to attack civil society?

1. **Legal Charges:** They have been attacked with charges that may lead to penal consequences such as imprisonment on **charges of money laundering.** This is done through:
a. Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002: The 2019 amendments enabled the Department of Revenue to work with a broader definition of proceeds of crime. This has resulted in attacks on NGOs by the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)**.
b. Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010: The FCRA was made stringent in 2010 and in 2020. This has been used to take away the right of NGOs to access foreign funds from **18,000 organisations** between 2015 and 2022.
Under the FCRA, the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** too is empowered to investigate NGOs and their

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personnel with lethal impact.

2. **Restrictions on Domestic funding:** The 2020 amendments to the Income-Tax Act provisions on tax exemptions for NGOs and donors have now made renewals of 12A and 80G certificates mandatory every 5 years.

Also, donor data (including their **PAN card numbers**) must be made available to the Ministry of Finance. This can enable the state to intimidate these domestic donors.

3. **Income-Tax Surveys:** It is a way of collecting data that can be used to file more cases either by the CBI or the Tax Department.

Because of the use of these instruments, the last ray of hope for India's democracy, its civic space, is under serious threat.

Subject: Social Justice

Topic: Issues relating to Health

On Issues with Public Health in India – Populism does not help public health

News: The article discusses the issues with public health in India and highlights steps that can be undertaken to deal with them.

What is the current status of public health and nutrition in India?

As per the 5th **National Family Health Survey 2019-21**:

a. 35.5% of children under 5 were stunted.
b. 32.1% were underweight.
c. Prevalence of anaemic children aged 6-59 months increased from 58.6% to 67.1%.
d. Prevalence of anaemia increased from 54.1% to 59.1% among women aged 15-19 years.

This highlights a significant gap in public health efforts.

What are the issues with public health in India?

1) **Emphasis on Short-Term Results:** Political leaders promote initiatives that promise immediate results, such as new hospitals, subsidised treatments, and populist health policies.
2) **Budgetary Constraints:** These short-term measures do not have much impact because of a lack of action beyond public announcements, due to budgetary constraints.
3) **No Emphasis on Critical Areas:** Attention is not given to critical areas such as sanitation, disease surveillance, and public health education, which are important to maintain population health and prevent disease outbreaks.
For instance, in the case of **Dengue**, immediate relief camps are set up but long-term strategies such as understanding vector control or developing effective vaccines is not undertaken.
4) **Profit-Driven Pharma Sector:** The pharmaceutical industry's profit-driven nature often sidelines areas such as public health. For instance, socio-economic factors such as poverty result in disparity in availability of medicine (as seen in the case of **TB**).
5) **Lack of a Comprehensive Approach:** Public health requires expertise from various fields such as

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environmental science, sociology, urban planning, and economics. India's current approach is physician-centric only.

What should be done?

1) **Focus on R&D:** Research and development is crucial. For example, research related to vaccine development and the impact of climate change on disease vectors.
2) **Separating Health from Political Processes:** Public health decisions should be based on scientific evidence and long-term goals rather than short-term political interests.
3) **Nutrition Support:** Investments in nutrition programmes have positive long-term implications for health and productivity.
4) **Comprehensive Approach:** Effective public health management should encompass preventive measures, policy formulation, community health, environmental health, etc.
5) **Autonomy to Health Ministries:** Health Ministries can be placed directly under the leadership of elected officials, such as the CM or PM, like India's space and the atomic energy departments. This would provide a degree of autonomy for them.

On the Cervical Cancer Vaccine Drive

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

Background:

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

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

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

How does the HPV vaccine prevent cancers?

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

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

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

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

1) The vaccine must be administered in **adolescent girls before they are sexually active**. This is because the vaccine can only prevent the entry of the virus. The response to the vaccine is also better in adolescence.
2) Although not covered by the planned government campaign, the vaccine can also be administered to **adolescent boys** and is recommended for **men who have sex with men**.

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3) While the vaccine is not as effective among older women, it can still be administered up to the age of 45 years.

What are the challenges in preventing cervical cancer through vaccination?

1. **Expensive:** It costs about Rs 2,000 a shot, hence expensive for a large section of the country's population.
2. **Lack of Awareness:** There is a huge lack of awareness about the disease. For instance, a minimum of two screenings of women by age 35 and again by age 45 is recommended but doesn't usually happen in India.

On Cervical Cancer – How Indian women can rid themselves of cervical cancer

News: The article discusses the causes, prevention and cure of cervical cancer. It highlights the steps taken by the government in this regard and suggests steps to augment cervical care in India.

Background:

The government is planning to include cervical cancer vaccine in the universal immunization program. The vaccination campaign targeted at girls in the 9-14 age group is likely to commence this year. Read more on this here.

What causes cervical cancer?

The main cause is the presence of **high-risk type of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection.** The risk of its progression to cancer also rises due to factors like; a) low socio-economic conditions; b) low immunity status; c) other genital infections; d. smoking.

Is cervical cancer preventable and curable?

Cervical cancer is both preventable and curable if detected early.
Prevention: Cervical cancer can be prevented through HPV vaccination of girls.
Cervical cancer has a long pre-invasive phase (from introduction of the virus to developing cancer) that lasts for 10–15 years. This gives a window of opportunity to detect and treat it.
Cure: When cervical cancer is detected and managed at an early stage, it is found to have over 93% cure rate.

What factors lead to high mortality in the case of cervical cancer in India?

1) **Lack of Detection in the Early Stages:** This is due to: a. Lack of awareness. b. Fear of cancer. c. Early symptoms of disease are not evident. d. Women not being screened.
2) **Dropping out of Patients:** People not completing their treatment post-screening.

What is WHO's global strategy to prevent cervical cancer?

It is along three pillars:
1. Widespread HPV vaccination.
2. Screening of women.
3. Early diagnosis and treatment of cervical pre-cancer and cancer.

What has the government done in this regard?

1. **Cancer screening by trained nurses in primary health centers.**
2. **Screening tools** like visual screening tests and HPV tests are simple and easily available.

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3. **Evidence-based management algorithms** are in place for guidance (methods that rely on the best available evidence to guide decision-making).

What more needs to be done?

1. **Raise Awareness:** Awareness on the causes as well as prevention methods for cervical cancer, HPV vaccine (overcoming vaccine hesitancy), and regarding screening is needed.
2. **Capacity Building:** Capacity building for pre-cancer treatment, quality cancer treatment and palliative services (care for the terminally ill) and the entire health system is required.
3. **Incorporating New Technologies:** New developments like single dose HPV vaccination, self-sampling for HPV testing, use of AI for diagnosis and treatment should be incorporated.
4. **Strengthening Health Insurance:** Mechanisms to reduce the financial burden for care should be strengthened.
5. **Cooperation with Civil Society:** Strengthening of partnerships with NGOs working in communities, innovators developing new methods of testing, and public health professionals.
6. **Collaborations and partnerships in the latest research** is important.
7. **Incorporating Best Practices:** Adopting successful models in community outreach and care pathways.

Topic: Issues relating to poverty and hunger

Status of multidimensional Poverty in India

News: As per the NITI Aayog discussion paper titled 'Multidimensional Poverty in India since 2005-06', approximately 248.2 million individuals in India emerged from poverty over nine years. It also addresses the challenges encountered in tackling multidimensional poverty.

What is multidimensional poverty?

Historically, poverty estimation was done by mainly focusing on one-dimensional measures – usually based on **income**. However, there was criticism that monetary and consumption-based poverty measures fail to capture the impact of lack of other non-monetary factors on standard of living.
It has been recognized that **poverty has multiple dimensions** that affect individuals' experiences and quality of life. Qualitative aspects of life such as access to basic services like water and sanitation that may not be directly related to household income, constitute an important part of poverty measurement.
For more information on **Multidimensional Poverty** read here.
For information on **National Multidimensional Poverty** read here.

What is the status of multidimensional Poverty in India?

1. Multidimensional poverty in India has substantially decreased.
2. In 2013-14, 29.2% of the population was in multidimensional poverty, which dropped to 11.3% in 2022-23.
3. Approximately 248.2 million people have escaped extreme poverty since 2013.
4. Niti Aayog's data shows a decline in poverty from 55.3% in 2005-06 to an anticipated level below 10% by 2024.
5. Similarly, World Bank figures indicate a drop in India's poverty rate from roughly 19% in 2015 to 11.9% in 2021.
6. The Indian government's goal is to further reduce this poverty metric to 1%.

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For more information read here

How did India achieve this reduction in multidimensional poverty?

1. **Digital Integration:** The 'JAM' trio - Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar identities, and mobile phones - played a crucial role in streamlining welfare distribution.
2. **Direct Cash Transfers:** These transfers ensured efficient coverage of various benefit schemes, reducing leakages significantly.
3. **Expanded Welfare Budgets:** Economic growth enabled increased funding for welfare programs, contributing to poverty alleviation.
4. **Targeted Measures:** Focused efforts on health, education, and living standards addressed key aspects of deprivation.
5. **Multidimensional Approach:** Adoption of the multidimensional poverty index (MPI), similar to the United Nations Development Program's method, helped in better targeting and measuring poverty.
6. **Data-Driven Decisions:** Use of National Family Health Surveys for accurate assessment and strategy formulation.

What are the challenges in countering multidimensional poverty?

1. **Data Quality Concerns:** The rejection of the 2017-18 consumer expenditure survey by the government due to data quality issues highlights challenges in obtaining reliable data.
2. **Regional Disparities:** There are significant disparities in poverty levels across different states, indicating uneven development and the need for region-specific policies.
3. **Educational Outcomes:** The index includes education but does not fully address the quality of education. For example, the learning outcomes in India are not at the desired level.
4. **Policy Direction and Spending:** The report questions the efficiency of current government expenditure, such as free food distribution and cash transfers, suggesting a need for more focused spending on development areas like education quality.

Way forward:

To further reduce poverty, India needs sustained economic growth and targeted policies for inclusive development. Accurate data collection and a shift in government spending towards areas like education quality are crucial. Addressing regional disparities and focusing on not just the quantity but also the quality of services will aid in balanced and inclusive progress.

Nutritional deficiencies in India

News: The article discusses the impact of poor nutrition on health issues like anemia in India. It covers government efforts to improve nutrition through programs and food fortification, the shift in dietary patterns, and the importance of awareness and education to tackle these challenges.

What are nutritional deficiencies?

Nutritional deficiency occurs when a body lacks essential nutrients due to insufficient nutrient-rich food intake (**primary deficiency**) or medical conditions hindering nutrient absorption (**secondary deficiency**). It can lead to various health issues but is preventable or resolvable through a balanced diet or targeted nutrient consumption.

What are the factors contributing to nutritional deficiencies in India?

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1. **Poor Dietary Choices:** Shift from traditional diverse diets to processed, sugar-rich foods.
2. **Economic Constraints:** As per FAO, 46% of South Asia's population, including India, can't afford a balanced diet. Around 74% of Indians can't afford a healthy diet, and 39% lack a nutrient-adequate diet (State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2023).
3. **Health Conditions**: Diseases like celiac and infections lead to nutrient absorption issues.
4. **Lack of Awareness**: Misunderstandings about fortified foods hinder acceptance.
5. **Implementation Challenges**: Government programs like Anemia Mukt Bharat face operational difficulties.

What are the impacts of nutritional deficiencies?

Health-Related Concerns: Nutritional deficiencies cause conditions like iron deficiency anemia, impair the immune system, and lead to digestive issues. These are especially prevalent in children and women. **Intergenerational Effects:** Anemic mothers often give birth to anemic babies, creating a cycle of malnutrition across generations.

What government initiatives are in place to address nutritional deficiencies?

1. **Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB)**: Focuses on administering iron and folic acid tablets, especially targeting children and women, to tackle iron deficiency anaemia.
2. **Mid-day Meal Scheme**: Aimed at school children, this scheme provides nutritious meals during school hours to improve their overall nutrition.
3. **Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF)**: Involves fortifying staple foods like wheat flour, rice, and edible oils with essential micronutrients. This is a relatively new approach in India to combat widespread nutritional deficiencies.
4. **National Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Programme:** Introduced in 1992, it significantly reduced goitre rates through the adoption of iodised salt. This program is an example of successful nutrient fortification in India.

What should be done?

1. **Enhance Awareness**: Implement intensive IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) campaigns to educate about fortified foods and nutrition.
2. **Promote Balanced Diets:** Encourage traditional diets rich in cereals, pulses, vegetables, fruits, and nuts, moving away from processed foods.
3. **Strengthen Government Programs:** Improve execution of Anaemia Mukt Bharat and the Mid-day Meal Scheme for better effectiveness.
4. **Expand Food Fortification:** Broaden LSFF (Large-Scale Food Fortification) to include more staples, learning from the success of the iodised salt program.

Topic: Issues relating to Education

Gender equity in education: the need to focus on early childhood education

News: The article discusses the status of gender equity in education in India. It also suggests steps to tackle the various issues.

Background:

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The 2023 **Annual Status of Education Report** shows that while girls and boys from rural India equally aspire to become doctors or engineers, when it comes to choosing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses, it is boys who take up STEM courses more than girls.

What are the various findings regarding the status of gender equity in education in India?

1. **Gender Equity in Learning Outcomes:** National Achievement Survey (2017) shows parity in learning levels between boys and girls in elementary and secondary classes across the country.
2. **Gender Gap in Mean Years of Schooling:** Over the past two decades, the mean years of schooling for girls has almost tripled from just 1.7 years in 1990 to 4.7 in 2018, while for males from 4.1 to 8.2 years. The gender gap has increased from 2.4 years to 3.5 years.
3. **Widening Gender Gap with Level of Education:** Girls have higher dropout rates compared to boys as the level of education increases. This is due to greater barriers to schooling for girls due to social norms and gender stereotypes correlated with female adolescence.
4. **Gender Gap in Enrolment in Private Schools:** More boys than girls tend to be enrolled in private institutions. Girls' enrolment is free government schools highlights societal gender biases in exercising school choice.

What should be the way forward?

1. **Focus on early childhood education (ECE):** Focus should be shifted to early childhood education (ECE) where the roots of the gender gap in education lie. This is because gender norms, biases and stereotypes are ingrained in early childhood.
2. **Addressing Structural Challenges:** The lack of a regulatory framework, inadequate funding, poor quality and no legislation for universal access to early childhood education must be addressed urgently.
3. **Eliminating Gender Stereotypes:** Early childhood education should also focus on imparting education that eliminates gender stereotypes and helps erase the gender gap.
4. **Government Schemes:** Schemes such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and the new National Education Policy places importance on ECE and hence, should be implemented at the earliest in mission mode.

There are positive social externalities and intergenerational benefits to girls' education. It leads to a virtuous cycle of reduced poverty, infant mortality, crime and improved economic development. Hence, it must be given attention.

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

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

What is Mulya Pravah 2.0?

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

Key aspects of Mulya Pravah 2.0 include:

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

For information on Mulya Pravah read here

What are the concerns related to Mulya Pravah 2.0?

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

Way forward:

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

ASER 2023 report

News: The article discusses the **'Beyond Basics'** Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) **released by Pratham.** It focuses on a survey of **rural students aged 14 to 18 years,** addressing their educational progress and challenges in India.

What were the major findings in the ASER 2023 report?

1. **Enrolment Rates:** 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.
2. **Foundational skill gaps:** 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.
3. **Digital technology underutilized:** Despite the high availability of smartphones in rural households (95%), their use for educational purposes is limited.
4. **Gender disparities:** Fewer females (28.1%) are in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics stream (STEM) stream compared to males (36.3%).
   Females are better at reading in their regional language, while males excel in arithmetic and English.
   Males are more likely to own and use smartphones.

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5. **Vocational training:** The survey shows a low enrollment in vocational training, with only 5.6% of young people participating. Among these, college students are more engaged, with 16.2% enrolled in courses, usually lasting no more than six months.

What were the suggestions provided in the ASER 2023 report?

1. **Pedagogic Reforms for Rural Students:** The report suggests reforming teaching methods to help students who balance academic and farm work, addressing the educational challenges faced in rural areas.
2. **Leverage Smartphones for Education and Address Digital Gender Gaps:** ASER advocates using the widespread access to smartphones (95% of households) for educational purposes and emphasizes closing the gender gap in digital skills, as females lag behind males in smartphone proficiency.
3. **Rethink vocational education:** To increase the 6% enrollment in vocational courses, ASER suggests reimagining vocational training to make it more aspirational and aligned with students' interests.

Smartphone Impact on Education in India - How smartphones can make education inclusive

News: This article talks about how the availability of smartphones is making 'education anytime, anywhere' possible in India. It shows that many young people use phones for both study and fun, and emphasizes the need for flexible, tech-based learning, especially for subjects like agriculture.

What opportunities does smartphones bring to Education?

1. **Widespread Smartphone Access:** The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 shows that 89% of Indian youth aged 14-18 have a smartphone at home, and 92% can use one. About two-thirds of those who know how to use smartphones have used them for their studies, indicating a significant shift in learning methods.
2. **Opportunity for Flexible Learning:** Smartphones offer a chance for flexible, anytime-anywhere education, especially beneficial for working students or those requiring non-traditional education paths.
3. **What challenges does smartphones bring to Education?**
4. **Overemphasis on Entertainment:** Despite high smartphone availability, they are used more for entertainment than education, possibly distracting students.
5. **Exam-Centric Focus:** Current technology solutions in education are mainly geared towards exam preparation, not comprehensive learning or skill development.
6. **Challenge in Knowledge Transfer and Certification:** Despite the easy access to information, the process of knowledge transfer and certification remains a restricted and challenging area.
7. **Misinformation Risks:** The widespread availability of smartphones and cheap data presents challenges in ensuring the accuracy and reliability of educational content.

What should be done?

1. **Develop Flexible Learning Models:** Adapt open schooling and digital technology to support students who work, as noted in the need for underprivileged students to study while earning.
2. **Focus on Practical and Environmental Education:** Incorporate subjects like agriculture and environmental studies, reflecting the real-life applications and workforce needs, as highlighted by the low study rates in agriculture (0.7%) despite its workforce importance.
3. **Enhance Open Schooling Systems:** Leverage digital technology to strengthen open schooling, providing flexible learning opportunities for working students.

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Regulating coaching centres

News: The article discusses the provisions in the guidelines for regulating coaching centres and the challenges in implementing them.

Background:

The government recently laid out guidelines for coaching centres due to news of a growing number of student suicides and accusations of misleading claims in advertisements.

What are the provisions in the guidelines for coaching centers?

a. A coaching centre must have more than 50 students with a minimum age limit of 16 years.
b. All teachers must be graduates.
c. The centre must not make false promises.
d. Fees from students leaving a course halfway must be refunded.
e. Classes must not be held during regular school hours, and they should not exceed five hours a day.
f. Periodic sensitisation sessions for students with mental health professionals.
g. Assessment tests should remain confidential.
h. Basic requirements such as fire and building safety codes, medical treatment facilities and adequate ventilation and lighting in classrooms.

What are the challenges in regulating coaching centres?

According to the author, these guidelines are unlikely to bring about any significant change due to the following reasons:

1. **Large Number of Coaching Centres:** This will make it challenging to monitor standards with any degree of efficacy.
2. **Lack of Clarity regarding Redressal Mechanism:** The guidelines refer to a "competent authority" without specifying the nature of this body.
3. **Jurisdictional Issues:** The regulation of education at the 10+2 level falls within the jurisdiction of states and Union Territories. Monitoring standards could be different based on the local governments.
4. **Small Amount as Penalty:** The penalties are unlikely to act as a deterrent. It is just Rs. 25,000 for the first offence and Rs. 1 lakh for the second, and registration revocation for any subsequent breach.
5. **Online Classes not Covered:** The guidelines also do not appear to cover online classes, where violation of standards could be more rampant.
6. **Structural Issues:**
a. **Lack of Quality Institutions:** A lack of quality engineering, management and medical institutes intensifies competition for a limited number of seats at IITs, IIMs, etc.
b. **Deficiency in the Job Market:** The low availability of employment, especially one that offers perks and benefits, leads to cut-throat competition.

Thus, changing this will require deeper economic reforms to expand the job market so that coaching centres gradually lose their current significance.

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

Child Marriages in India- Rise in child marriages in West Bengal

News: The article discusses the persistent issue of child marriage in India, focusing on its prevalence in West Bengal despite various policies and schemes.

What is the current state of child marriage in India?

Lancet Report:
Child marriage in India is decreasing but still prevalent, particularly in Bihar (16.7%), West Bengal (15.2%), Uttar Pradesh (12.5%), and Maharashtra (8.2%).
West Bengal saw an alarming increase of over 500,000 child marriages, a 32.3% rise in headcount.

NFHS-5 Report:
Consistent High Rates: West Bengal's child marriage rate remains high at 41.6% for women aged 20-24.
District Variance: Murshidabad, an economically challenged district, shows a rise in child marriage rates from 53.5% to 55.4%.

Countries with the highest number of child marriages*

India	15,509,000
Bangladesh	4,451,000
Nigeria	3,538,000
Brazil	3,034,000
Ethiopia	2,104,000
Pakistan	1,909,000

Source: Population data from United Nations |
*Women who were first married or in a union before they were 18-years-old

Figure 1.Source: UNICEF

What are the reasons for child marriage in India?

1. **Poverty and Social Norms:** Child marriage is often driven by poverty and entrenched social norms in regions like West Bengal.
2. **Migration and Security Concerns:** Families often marry off daughters before migrating for work, fearing for their daughters' safety at home alone, as noted in West Bengal.
3. **Policy Implementation Gaps:** Despite high rates of child marriage in West Bengal, only 105 cases were registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2021, indicating a significant gap in law enforcement and policy implementation.

What are the impacts of child marriage on health?

A. Health Risks:
a) Child marriage is linked to **higher infant mortality rates**, as evidenced by the death of 10 infants in a day at Murshidabad Medical College.
b) The same incident noted **infants born with extremely low birth weight**, a common issue stemming from child marriage.
c) **Young mothers face increased risks during pregnancy and childbirth**, affecting both their health and the health of their infants.
d) The consistent high rates of child marriage, such as 41.6% in West Bengal, indicate a **widespread health burden affecting generations.**
B. Education Disruption: Early marriage often ends a girl's education prematurely, limiting her future opportunities and economic independence.

What initiatives have been taken to overcome the issues of child marriage in India?

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1. **Kanyashree Prakalpa:** West Bengal launched this **cash transfer scheme** to **incentivize education for girls and discourage child marriage**, reaching 81 lakh girls.
2. **Rupashree Prakalpa:** A **cash incentive scheme** for the marriage of girls, **aiming to delay the age of marriage.**
3. **Legal Age Amendment:** Introduction of the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, to raise the legal marriage age for women to 21.
4. **District Action Plans:** In 2022, West Bengal called for **district-specific plans to tackle child marriage**, indicating a move towards localized solutions.

For information on **Steps taken to check Child Marriage,** read here.

Way forward:

To address child marriage effectively, a comprehensive approach is needed, involving social campaigns, community involvement, and stricter law enforcement. Enhanced political will and public awareness are crucial to enforce existing laws and policies like Kanyashree Prakalpa and to create lasting change at the grassroots level.

Topic: Issues relating to Education

On Higher Education

News: The article discusses the status of graduate unemployment in India. It also highlights the structural problems with the Higher Education sector.

What is the status of graduate unemployment in India?

1. **Unemployment Rate:** In 2012, the unemployment rate among graduates was 20%; it has now increased to 34% in 2021. Among postgraduates, it used to be 18% in 2012; it has now doubled to nearly 37%.
2. **Employability:** Some reports state that fewer than half of India's graduates were employable in 2021.
3. **Status of Women:** India's female labour force participation is among the lowest in the world.

What are the problems with the education system leading to unemployment?

The problem with the education system is structural. It includes:

1. **Deteriorating Quality of Higher Education:** The rise in the number of private colleges, industrial training institutes (ITIs) and polytechnic colleges has led to a **lowering of quality**. The governments and the University Grants Commission did not have the capacity to regulate these colleges.
2. **Lack of Access to Higher Education:** A vast majority of the country's youth don't get higher education. Higher education enrolment rates are still about 27% (18-23 year olds).
3. **Impact of Online Learning:** There were learning deficiencies, which affected students' abilities to acquire knowledge and become employable.
Apart from the above, other issues leading to unemployment includes:
4. **Lack of Job Creation in the Economy:** Unemployment is also because the economy is not creating enough jobs.
5. **Sector-wise Issues in the Economy:** Agriculture has not become high tech, so graduates are not likely to join it. Jobs, such as delivery boys, are not preferred jobs for educated people. In the services sector, the jobs being created require high knowledge.

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What are the structural problems with the Higher Education sector?

Higher education institutions create new knowledge, and it leads to the development of new technologies. This leads to the possibilities of new businesses, innovation, entrepreneurship, and start-ups. However, it is constrained by the following issues:

1. **Low R&D Expenditure:** India's R&D expenditure is only 0.7% of GDP. In Korea, it is 4%.
2. **Lack of Participation of the Private Sector in R&D:** Globally, the private corporate sector accounts for about 70% of total R&D expenditure. In India, the public sector accounts for some 70% of total R&D expenditure.
3. **Lack of Research Funding to Universities:** A very small proportion of public funding goes towards **research within universities** in India, unlike other countries.
Most of it goes towards the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Indian Council of Medical Research, etc. This is problematic because these institutions don't translate their research into usable products/processes.
4. **Foreign Ownership of Research:** Indian researchers are absorbed in MNCs. There are 800 MNCs which have their global research hubs in India. The value of that research goes abroad.
5. **Equity Issues:** There is a larger issue of social equity. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims are underrepresented in higher education.
6. **Issues with the National Education Policy (NEP):** It has not led to substantive change in the education system.
For instance, there is an emphasis on autonomy of higher education, however imposing the Central University Entrance Test on colleges was against that ideal, leading to confusion.

What should be done?

1. **Converting Research into Products:** Creating institutions that convert patents or research scientific research papers into products and processes.
2. **Increasing Funding:** Universities must be funded more, and private industry will have to play a role in this.
3. **Vocational Training:** Divert students at the end of Class 10 and Class 12 away from higher education towards ITIs and vocational training can increase employability.

The need to examine the examination system

News: The article discusses the issues with examination system in India. It also highlights the steps that should be taken in this regard.

What is the status of higher education examination systems in India?

India has more than **1,100 universities** and **50,000 affiliated colleges** including 700 autonomous colleges. This includes a total enrolment of **40.15 million students**.
There are also **60 school boards** for secondary and higher secondary levels of school education, certifying more than **15 million students every year**.
These reflect the diversity of higher education examination systems in India.

What are the issues with examination system in India?

1. **Focus on Memory and Rote Learning:** An examination should test memory, application and critical thinking. However, there are complaints that the examination boards test only memory. Hence, students are

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only taught to memorize answers and score marks.

2. **Narrow Objectives:** Scoring marks and achieving a very high pass percentage have become the key objectives.

3. **Quality Issues:** There are question papers that have flaws such as language errors, errors in conceptualization, irrelevant questions and questions that do not test higher order learning.

4. **Poor Mode of Assessment:** The employability of a graduate depends on higher order learning; however, the examination boards do not assess students on those skills.

5. **Creation of a Coaching Market:** Since employers have their own rigorous assessment of a candidate's academic achievements and suitability, it has created a coaching market for competitive examinations and skilling.

6. **Advisories Not Followed:** There are elaborate advisories on curriculum design, pedagogy, and examination systems from all the regulatory boards. In the absence of regular and effective oversight, these advisories are hardly followed by educational institutions.

7. **Lack of Standardizations:** The presence of the provision of autonomy of colleges gives the regulatory bodies no oversight authority over the autonomous colleges and their examinations.

8. **Issues with Secrecy:** Secrecy without proper checks and balances and audits leads to negative outcomes. There is secrecy involved in the whole examination process, from question paper setting to evaluation of answer scripts and mark sheet preparation. They are prone to malpractice.

What steps should be taken in this regard?

1. **Proper Assessment:** A good assessment system should be created.

2. **Involvement of Professional Bodies:** A greater involvement of professional bodies in curriculum design and teaching should help.

3. **Maintaining Transparency:** The credibility of assessment and standard of education can be ensured only through transparency in teaching and assessment. Transparency in accessing the evaluation process by students and grievance redressal measures should be in place.

4. **Specifying Learning Outcomes:** Minimum standards of learning outcomes should be specified.

5. **Participatory Approach:** Currently, the entire assessment process is in the teacher's hands. Real time oversight with participative process of students' assessment of teachers should make it better. This would lead to a system of checks and balances.

6. **Use of Technology:** The use of technology in assessment can enhance credibility. The setting of question papers and evaluation can be standardised.

7. **External Audits of Assessment Systems:** An external audit of assessment systems in universities and school boards is essential. Grading examination boards in terms of transparency, reliability and consistency should be a part of audit reports.

These steps will help university degrees and school board certificates to properly reflect the learning achievements of students.

Topic: Issues relating to Health

On Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) - Drug war

News: The article discusses the causes for the rise in Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

A detailed article on **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** can be read here.

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Background:

According to a study by the Health Ministry:

1. Over 70% of the patients in tertiary-care hospitals were prescribed antibiotics. Of this, over **50%** of antibiotics prescribed have the **potential to cause AMR**.

2. **55%** of the patients were prescribed antibiotics as **prophylaxis**, or as a preventive.

What according to the author is causing a rise in AMR?

According to the author, due to a rise in the prophylactic use of antibiotics (a prophylactic is a medication, or a treatment used to **prevent a disease from occurring**), antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is becoming deadlier.

What is AMR?

AMR occurs when pathogens evolve, fortifying themselves against drugs, and stop responding to antimicrobial drugs. This crisis is increasing due to unsound medical, and animal husbandry practices. According to **WHO**, bacterial AMR was directly responsible for **1.27 million global deaths in 2019** and **contributed to 4.95 million deaths**.

What are the implications of rising AMR?

According to the WHO, it invalidates the multiple gains that modern medicine has achieved over years in the following manner:

1. It makes infections harder to treat.
2. It also makes performing other medical procedures and treatments such as surgery, caesarean sections and cancer chemotherapy much riskier.

What steps should be taken?

1. **Rational prescription of antibiotics**.
2. **Curbs on the use of drugs to promote growth in animals and plants**.
3. **Antibiotic research and development:** urgent measures are required to develop new drug candidates.
4. **Equitable access** to these new drugs.
5. **Role of doctors and the government:** Their role in regulating use of drugs is crucial.
6. **Role of Patients:** They are impatient with the medical process, expecting immediate relief to ailments. This leads to unhealthy antibiotic usage.

On Lead Poisoning - 'Lead exposure caused millions to lose health'

News: The article discusses the impact of toxic chemicals, particularly Lead, on children.

Why are children particularly vulnerable to such chemicals?

Children are much more sensitive to hazardous exposures than adults. This is because:

1. **They are growing and developing:** These development processes are very complex and operate in a strict time sequence. A toxic chemical like lead can disrupt those delicate processes.
2. **Exposure of mother also supplements:** Any chemical that gets into the body of an expectant mother also enters her baby and damages its tissues.

What is the impact of toxic chemical exposure on children?

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A range of diseases may result due to toxic chemical exposure. These include:
a. If the child's brain is impacted, there could be a **loss of IQ** and an increased risk of **autism**.
b. If a lung is damaged, there is a greater risk of **asthma.**
c. If a chemical disrupts the hormones or endocrine glands, it may lead to **birth defects of reproductive organs**.
d. Low exposure may also lead to **shortening of attention spans** and **disruptions in behavior** of children.

What are the sources of lead that have impacted people's health?

In the 20th century, it began to be put into **consumer products from paint to toys.** This has now been abandoned.
In the mid-20th century, lead started being **added to petrol** in large quantities as a chemical called **tetraethyl lead**, intended to help automobile engines work better. This has now been phased out.
Other sources include **batteries and battery recycling plants.**
Note: Lead is a chemical element (atomic number 82). It is a heavy metal. It has been recognized as a toxic chemical.

What are other common toxic chemicals?

1. **Pesticides** such as **Organophosphates** cause brain damage in children exposed in the womb.
2. **Weed-killers or herbicides** such as **Glyphosate** is known to cause cancer.
3. **Asbestos** is also very toxic. It is used in building materials, roofing tiles, concrete asbestos pipes, etc. It is cheap, durable and resists heat and fire — but it's also a powerful cause of cancer of the lungs, throat and ovaries.

Subject: International Relations

Topic: India and its Neighborhood - relations

On India-Maldives Relations – Don't overreact

News: The article discusses the recent developments in India-Maldives ties, especially Maldives' insistence of the removal of Indian troops from Maldives.

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

What are the recent developments in India-Maldives ties?

Since the election of Mohamed Muizzu as president, Maldives has been moving away from India and closer to China, as visible in the recent China-Maldives joint statement.
Maldives has proposed the removal of Indian troops by March 15.
For more on this, read here.

What are the factors which have led to an anti-India Maldivian stance?

1) **Internal Politics of Maldives:** The withdrawal of Indian troops was an election promise by the current political leadership. It is not a strategic concern as India reportedly has less than 90 soldiers in Maldives.

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2) **Big-Brother Syndrome:** Militarily, economically and strategically, India has a huge impact on its neighbors.
3) **India's Internal Politics:** Some aspects of India's internal politics, such as an expansionist rhetoric, religion, illegal migration, social media jingoism and calls for boycotting a smaller neighbor – may lead to an anti-India sentiment.
4) **Geopolitics:** Smaller countries like Maldives usually try to use the rivalries among greater powers (India and China) to their own advantage.

Why is Maldives anti-India stance problematic?

It does not consider Maldives' geography and convergent interests with India.
For instance, Maldives is only 700 km from the Indian coast and over 6,000 km from China. India was the first to help Maldives during the tsunami in 2004 and the drinking water crisis in 2014.

How should India react to these developments?

Delhi must continue to engage with the political leadership of Maldives as well as its people. As External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar said – It can't be guaranteed that every country will support or agree with India every time. Hence, as the regional power, it should not overreact to Maldives' concerns.

On the Challenges of India-Iran Bilateral Ties – Iran, also ran

News: The article discusses the challenges in India-Iran Bilateral Ties in context of Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's recent Iran visit.

Foreign Minister Jaishankar's recent meetings with the Iranian leadership indicate a willingness to revive India-Iran ties.

What are the challenges in India-Iran Bilateral Ties?

1. **India's Support to US Sanctions on Iran:** Bilateral ties deteriorated after India stopped Iranian oil imports following US exiting the Iran nuclear deal (**ICPOA**) and imposing sanctions against Iran.
2. **China's Expanding Presence:** China deepened its ties with Iran by signing a 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement. Beijing has also been buying Iranian oil.
3. **Changing Situation in Afghanistan:** India relied on the working relationship between US and Iran to protect its Afghan strategic interests. However, souring of US-Iran ties and US withdrawal from Afghanistan has left India in a tight spot with respect to Afghanistan.
4. **India's Ties with Sunni Arab Countries and Israel:** Simultaneously, India's improving ties with Arab nations and Israel (such as platforms like **I2U2**) is a challenge due to Shia Iran's hostility to these countries.
5. **Geopolitical Balancing:** India is caught between the Iran-Russia-China on one hand and the US-Israel-Arab partnership on the other hand. The Gaza conflict and the current situation with Houthi rebels in Yemen shows that the two groupings are still hostile.

What should be the way forward for bilateral relations?

1. **Not Completely Abandoning Iran:** According to the author, given the modernisation drive in Gulf Arab states, Israel's economy and growing India-US strategic partnership, India's interests lie with this grouping. However, India should not completely isolate Iran. It should utilise the strategic need of Iran requiring India to balance China.
2. **Focus on Connectivity:** Cooperation regarding the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor should be undertaken.

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Myanmar Military Coup and India

News: This article discusses the political and military situation in Myanmar. It describes how, since a military coup three years ago, there has been resistance against the army, involving various ethnic armed groups and local defense forces.

What is the Free Movement Regime (FMR)?

The FMR, started in 2018, let people living along the Indo-Myanmar border travel 16 km into the other country without a visa. This regime has been suspended since September 2022. Now Government is planning to formally end the Free Movement Regime (FMR) regime.

For more information read here

What are the major concerns related to the India-Myanmar border?

1. **Security Concerns:** The decision to fence the border stems from concerns over security, particularly due to the trafficking of arms and drugs.
2. **Refugee Influx:** Since the military takeover in Myanmar in 2021, the Chin province has become a battleground, leading to an influx of refugees into India's Northeast.
3. **Local Opposition to Fencing:** Tribal groups like the Kukis in Mizoram and Manipur, who have kinship ties with Myanmar's Chin community, oppose the fencing, as it might exacerbate ethnic tensions.
4. **Varied State Responses:** Mizoram has provided sanctuary to refugees, while Manipur's government has framed the crisis differently, highlighting the diverse political responses.
5. **Disrupt local lives:** The FMR allowed border residents to travel 16 km into either country without a visa. Its suspension could disrupt local lives.

What are the consequences of the Myanmar military coup?

1. **Widespread Civil Disobedience:** Following the coup, a significant civil disobedience movement emerged, indicating widespread public opposition to the military takeover.
2. **Formation of Resistance Forces**: The ousted parliament members established the **People's Defence Forces (PDFs)**, demonstrating organized political resistance against the military.
3. **Escalating Armed Conflict:** Ethnic armed organizations, like the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, and Ta'ang National Liberation Army, inflicted significant losses on the military, especially in Shan State.
4. **Loss of Territorial Control:** The military's loss of Paletwa town, a critical node in India's Kaladan project, exemplifies the significant territorial setbacks they faced.
5. **Internal Displacement and Refugees:** Military actions against civilians caused substantial internal displacement and a refugee crisis in neighboring countries.
6. **Military Recruitment and Desertions:** There's growing difficulty in military recruitment and increased desertions, including over 150 soldiers seeking refuge in India.
7. **Diminished Military Cohesion:** The punishment of army officers for failing to prevent desertions points to internal issues and weakening cohesion within the military.

What should India do?

1. **Enhance Humanitarian Aid:** India could increase its humanitarian assistance to help displaced people in Myanmar, which might also reduce the number of refugees entering India.

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2. **Recognize Ongoing Resistance**: India should be aware of the continuous resistance against the military coup, showing no signs of abating despite the lack of a charismatic leader and substantial international support.

3. **Adapt to Myanmar's Political Fragmentation:** It's important for India to consider the fragmented control in Myanmar, with different areas being controlled by the military, ethnic armed groups, and PDFs.

4. **Reassess Policy with Stakeholder Input**: India could benefit from revising its Myanmar policy after engaging in discussions with all relevant parties, responding to the complex regional dynamics.

What is India's stance on Myanmar?

1. **Engagement with Military Regime:** Unlike Western countries focused on democracy, India has chosen to engage with Myanmar's military regime.

2. **Look East Policy:** Myanmar is an integral part of India's Look East Policy, highlighting economic and strategic interests over political ideology.

3. **Limited Condemnation:** Despite occasional admonitions, like the External Affairs Minister's comment in 2021, India has largely refrained from strong opposition against Myanmar's actions that affect Indian interests.

4. **Balancing Security and Diplomacy:** India's approach reflects a balance between security concerns and maintaining diplomatic relations with Myanmar's military government.

Way forward

To address the India-Myanmar border issues, a balance between security needs and humanitarian concerns is essential. India should consider the impact of border fencing on local communities and maintain a diplomatic approach towards Myanmar, while addressing the refugee crisis and ethnic tensions in the Northeast.

Emerging Challenges for India after the Bangladesh Elections

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

Background:

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

What are the positive outcomes for India?

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

What are the allegations against the Awami League?

1. **Election Irregularities:** Large-scale false voting (such as the use of under-age children voting by turn several times) has been reported. This signals a firm step towards a one-party police state.

2. **Allegations of Corruption:** Controversies such as stock market scams, large-scale money laundering, bank defaults, and crony capitalism have emerged.

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3. **Anti-Secular Islamist Agenda:** The Awami government plans to create model mosque cum islamic cultural centres. These can replace the syncretic and secular Bengali linguistic culture, threatening Bangladesh's secular identity.

What are the emerging challenges in front of India?

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

What should be done?

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

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

On India-Maldives Bilateral Relations – Change for the worse

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

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

Background:

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

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

What other incidents signal a decline in bilateral relations?

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

How should both countries respond to this situation?

Both countries need to reassess their responses to this situation.

Maldives:

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It cannot afford to alienate India because:

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

India:

India must realise that hostility towards a much smaller neighbour serves no purpose. Instead, both countries can benefit from a stronger relationship through the intense **strategic partnership** and **cooperation on the international stage** shown in the past. Hence, India should ensure that these developments do not change the basic structure of bilateral ties or affect regional stability.

Why is the Maldives important to India?

1. **Strategic Location:** The Maldives archipelago, with its 27 atolls, is strategically positioned in the Indian Ocean, integral to India's maritime security.
2. **Exclusive Economic Zone:** It has a nearly one million square km exclusive economic zone, vital for regional influence and security.
3. **Proximity to India:** Located just 700 km from Kochi, India, the Maldives offers a significant geographic advantage.
4. **Historical Importance:** The British maintained a base on Maldives' Gan Island until 1976, indicating the long-recognized strategic value of the region.

What is the issue with India's diplomatic approach?

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

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

1. **Creation of a Specialized Naval Unit:** In 2005-06, India established a dedicated naval organization for foreign cooperation, led by a two-star admiral.
2. **Equipment Transfer to Neighboring Countries:** India transferred patrol boats, aircraft, and helicopters from its own navy to Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, and Seychelles.

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3. **Training and Advisory Support:** The Indian Navy has provided training and advisors to maritime neighbors.
4. **Responsive to Regional Crises:** India has consistently been the first responder in regional crises, such as the 1988 Maldives coup attempt, the 2004 tsunami, and the 2014 water crisis in Maldives.
5. **Maritime Diplomacy Enhancement:** India's maritime diplomacy initiatives aim to shape the maritime environment favorably, aligning with its foreign policy and national security objectives.
6. **Promotion of SAGAR Vision:** India's 2015 SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative emphasizes broad regional maritime cooperation.

For more information on SAGAR read here

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

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

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

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

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

Oman is India's 29th largest trading partner, but the **3rd largest export destination** among the 6 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.
India exports gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery to Oman, and imports petroleum products, urea, propylene, and ethylene polymers.
Bilateral trade has been growing, increasing from $3.15 billion in 2021-22 (FY22) to $4.48 billion during FY23 (**42% growth**).
The GCC countries contribute about **1/6th of India's total trade.** The trade balance, however, is in favour of the GCC (due to India's petroleum imports).

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INDIA-OMAN TRADE (in $ bn)

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

Year	Exports	Imports	Trade Balance
2019-20	2.26 (0.7)	3.67 (33)	-1.41
2020-21	2.35 (4.13)	3.08 (-15.8)	-0.73
2021-22	3.15 (33.7)	6.84 (121.5)	-3.69
2022-23	4.47 (42.2)	7.91 (15.65)	-3.44
2023-24 (Apr-Oct)	2.37 (-14.2)	2.55 (-51.4)	-0.18
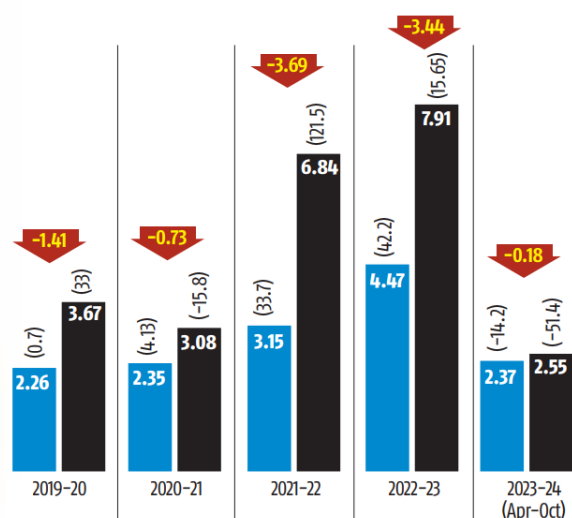
Source: Department of Commerce

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

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

What are the challenges?

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

India and Singapore are strengthening their economic and trade relationships

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

What is India's economy situation?

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

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

1. **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement**: Signed in 2005, this agreement significantly boosted bilateral trade, which quadrupled to reach $35.6 billion by 2022-23.
2. **100% FDI Policy in India:** India's policy allowing 100% Foreign Direct Investment in most manufacturing sectors attracted numerous Singaporean conglomerates and institutions to ramp up investments in India.

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3. **Growth of Indian Companies in Singapore:** From 2014 to 2023, the number of Indian companies in Singapore increased from 6,000 to over 9,000, covering diverse sectors like tourism, telecommunications, financial services, and e-commerce.
4. **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)-PayNow Linkage:** Launched in 2023, this is the first real-time payment systems linkage in the world, facilitating easier and faster financial transactions between the two countries.
5. **Trade Trust Framework:** Introduced in 2023, this framework utilizes blockchain technology for electronic Bills of Lading, enhancing efficiency in trade finance transactions between Singapore and Indian entities.
6. **Focus on Renewable Energy:** India's renewable energy initiatives, with 92% of its 2022 power capacity growth from renewables, attract interest from Singapore for investment and sourcing.

How does this partnership affect global trade and Investment?

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

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

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

The United Arab Emirates-India relationship is one of the region's most dynamic partnerships. It highlights the positive benefits that can be achieved through **open, consistent and constructive dialogue; visionary leadership; and mutual respect**.
It has shown exemplary progress in ensuring **free and open trade**, **promoting the development of resilient and sustainable economies**, to **multilateral cooperation**.
The [Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)](#) remains fundamental to the continued dynamism of this partnership.

What have been the outcomes of India-UAE CEPA?

The CEPA has led to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

What will be the objectives of the UICC?

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

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

Who are the Global South?

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

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

What is the Global South?

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

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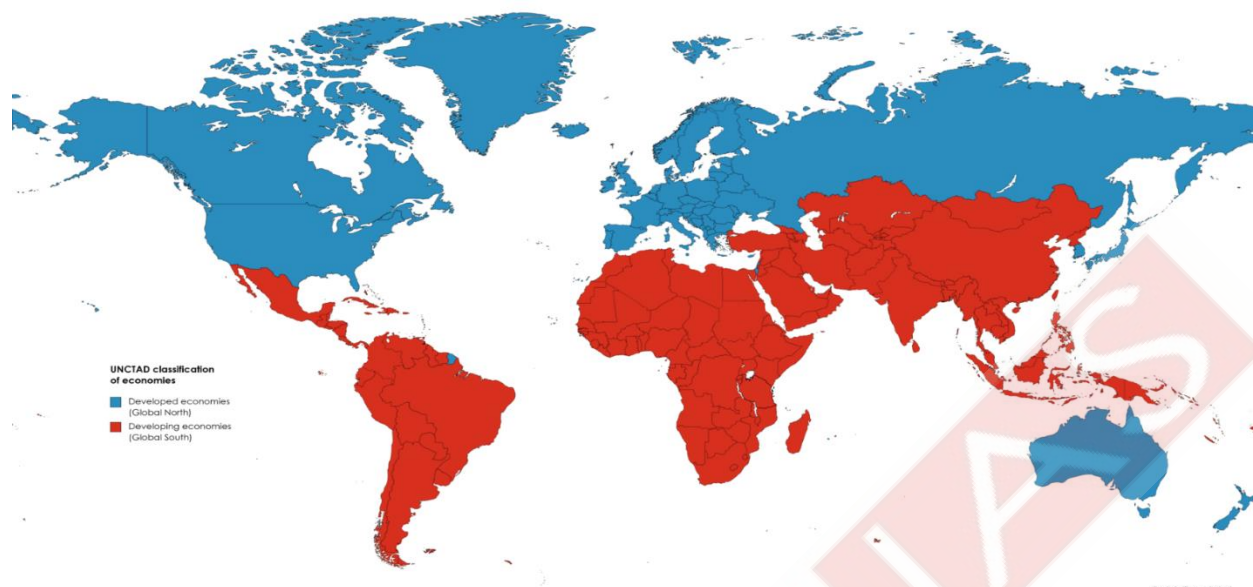
Source: Wikipedia.

What is the history of the term?

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

What are the variations within the Global South countries?

According to the author, the best way to study the composition of GS is to look at data on population and per capita income of GS nations. Data on the 50 most populous GS countries (with over 20 million population) brings out the following insights:
The situation of these countries varies enormously with respect to income and population, both across continents and within them.

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

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

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

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1. **Increased Participation:** GS is building forums within important North-created international institutions, such as IMF, WTO and UN agencies.

2. **Increased Cooperation:** GS has created membership-limited organisations such as OPEC, ASEAN, and the African Union. Organisations such as the OPEC have been effective in advancing the interests of its members.

On India-U.K. Defence Ties

News: The article discusses the need for better defense ties between India and the UK. It highlights the sectors of cooperation as well as emerging challenges in this regard.

Background:

Recently, India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh visited the United Kingdom (U.K.) after a gap of 22 years.

Why are better defense ties needed between India and the UK?

1) **Chinese Presence in Indian Ocean:** China has emerged as a major naval power whose deployments in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are expanding rapidly thereby threatening India and **Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs).**

2) **India's Naval Modernization Plans:** Indian Navy has several technological gaps when compared to the Chinese Navy. Securing key technologies from the UK will be important in this regard.

What are the recent developments in the bilateral defence ties?

1. **Cooperation in Electrical Propulsion Technology:** Indian Navy's aircraft carriers are not powered by electric propulsion technology while the British Navy has mastered this technology. Since the Chinese are already advancing in this field, the British have agreed to train and help establish the necessary infrastructure.

Note: Warships integrated with electric propulsion produce a low acoustic signature (low generation of sound, making it harder to detect).

2. **Military Exercises:** Several joint military exercises have taken place between the two countries which signal deeper defence cooperation. The British also plan to train and increase interoperability with the Indian Navy.

What are the challenges in the ties?

1) **UK-Pakistan Ties:** U.K. governments have simultaneously supplied India and Pakistan with weapons or curbed weapons exports. This raises questions on British motives and objectives in the Subcontinent.

2) **Khalistan Issue:** Issues surrounding Khalistan and Sikh separatism (allegations of UK harbouring them) remain as a challenge.

Consensus regarding cooperation between India and France - Why India Says France Mon Ami

News: The article discusses the strong 25-year partnership between France and India. They want to deepen their ties to address modern challenges like security in the Indo-Pacific, climate change, and technology cooperation.

What is the consensus regarding cooperation between India and France?

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1. **Strategic Partnership Foundation:** Both nations view their alliance as a pillar of stability in a turbulent world, having cultivated ties for over 25 years without major contention.
2. **Focus on Indo-Pacific Region:** Key areas of joint concern include security, climate change, and regional architecture development. France, with its significant Indian Ocean presence, partners with India in addressing these challenges.
3. **Security Cooperation:** They collaborate against traditional threats like piracy and non-traditional ones such as illegal fishing. France's regional military bases, like in La Reunion and Djibouti, facilitate joint naval patrols and resource pooling.
4. **Technology and Digital Initiatives:** Joint efforts in digital technology aim to foster economic growth and sustainable development, emphasizing an inclusive digital environment.
5. **Research and Development:** Collaborations in frontier technologies, such as AI and quantum computing, are central, highlighted by the Indo-French Centre of Excellence in quantum computing.
6. **Environmental Initiatives:** They share a roadmap for developing Green Hydrogen, aspiring to lead in decarbonized hydrogen production.
7. **Defence and Space Collaboration**: Defense relationship is evolving, with India diversifying its defence acquisitions and France emerging as a key supplier. In space, joint initiatives include the Gaganyaan project and collaboration in the upcoming Venus mission.

What more needs to be done to enhance cooperation between India and France?

1. **Maritime Security Enhancement:** Increase frequency and scale of joint naval exercises, utilizing French bases more effectively for regional security.
2. **Institutional Mechanism Synergy:** Foster better integration between the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, and the Indian Ocean Commission, led by India and France for a unified approach to maritime challenges.
3. **Trade and Technology Coordination:** Strengthen collaboration in the EU-India Trade and Technology Council, utilizing France's influence for beneficial outcomes, and align strategies in the Mineral Security Partnership with the US and G7 countries.
4. **Defense Manufacturing Collaboration:** Beyond purchasing French defense equipment, India should focus on manufacturing items like Rafale jets domestically, benefiting from the trilateral partnership with France and UAE, to deepen defense ties.
5. **Joint Research Initiatives:** Expand consortiums involving academic, governmental, and corporate entities for projects in crucial sectors like health and climate change, leveraging the Indo-French Centre of Excellence in quantum computing.

Challenges faced by IMEC - A revival of the IMEC idea amid choppy geopolitics

News: The article discusses the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a proposed trade route. It mentions how conflicts like the Yemen conflict and Gaza war affect trade through the Suez Canal, making alternatives like IMEC more important.

What is the IMEC Project?

India Middle East Europe Corridor is a network of **transport corridors** comprising **railway lines** and **sea lanes** to **promote economic integration** between Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe. For more information on IMEC read here

What are the challenges IMEC is facing?

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1. **Geopolitical Tensions:** The conflicts in Yemen and Gaza have impacted regional stability, crucial for IMEC's success. The Yemen conflict undermines confidence in the Suez Canal, highlighting the need for alternatives like IMEC.
2. **Turkey's Exclusion and Alternative Proposal:** Excluded from IMEC, Turkey has shown dissatisfaction and proposed an alternative trade route. This route, positioning itself as an alternative to Saudi Arabia, would pass through Iraq to reach the Mediterranean.
3. **Saudi Israeli Link Controversy**: The key part of IMEC, connecting Saudi Arabia to Israel, faces opposition due to longstanding regional disputes. Critics argue that the Arab Street would not support a major trade link between these two nations, especially following the Gaza war.
4. **Uncertain U.S. Support:** The potential political return of Donald Trump casts doubts on the U.S.'s commitment to IMEC. Trump's unpredictable nature raises questions about sustained U.S. interest in such a global project.

How does IMEC benefit India?

1. **Enhanced Container Shipping:** For India, particularly the southern region, IMEC holds the potential to reduce delivery schedules by up to 40%. This improvement hinges on the development of dedicated freight corridors as part of a comprehensive all-India network, thereby making trade faster and more efficient.
2. **Reduced Logistics Costs:** Aligning with India's National Logistics Policy of 2022, IMEC could help in reducing logistics costs to global levels by 2030.
3. **Optimizing Transport Modes:** Currently, 70% of India's containers move by road. IMEC could shift this towards a more balanced split among road, rail, and coastal shipping, as recommended by industry experts.
4. **Integration with Indian Ports:** The corridor plans to integrate with major Indian ports like Mundra and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, enhancing their global connectivity and trade capacity.
5. **Support for the Hydrogen Economy:** IMEC includes plans for hydrogen pipelines, which could benefit India in the transition to a decarbonized economy.

Way forward:

The future of IMEC hinges on overcoming geopolitical hurdles and infrastructure challenges. Successful resolution of issues, like Turkey's exclusion and the Saudi Israeli link, will be crucial. With potential global financing and support, especially from the U.S., Europe, and Saudi Arabia, IMEC could become a major, transformative trade route, benefiting regional economies and enhancing global trade connectivity.

On India's Multi-Alignment Policy – Express View on Modi-Putin call

News: The article discusses the state of the current global geopolitics and how India is navigating its relations amidst these challenges through its Multi-Alignment Policy.

What is the state of the current global geopolitics?

The current geopolitical scenario is marked by increasing power rivalries. For instance:
a. Conflicts in Europe and West Asia – between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas.
b. Rivalry between the US and China on economic, technological and strategic fronts.

How is India dealing with these developments?

India has managed to engage with diverse partners who are often against each other. Its current **"multi-alignment"** policy is guided by national interest and the need to forge bilateral relationships. For instance:

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1) Engaging with Russia: Recently, India's PM and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone conversation. They reportedly discussed the **"special and privileged strategic partnership",** the Ukraine conflict and a deepening of bilateral ties.

2) Engaging with Iran: Recently, India's External Affairs Minister visited Iran where he finalised cooperation on developing the Chabahar Port.

3) Maintaining Ties with USA: The US put considerable pressure on India to take a stronger position against Russia's aggression in Ukraine. However, India maintained its relations with both the major powers.

4) Maintaining Ties with West Asia: India has deep partnerships with Israel and Saudi Arabia, even though they are in a regional cold war with Iran.

At the same time, India hasn't compromised on its core principles: that **war cannot be a solution** (in context of the Ukraine conflict) and **zero tolerance for terror** (in context of the Houthi attacks).

What are the factors which have allowed India to maintain this stand?

1. **Economic Rise:** The size of India's market as well as its potential for future growth gives it both strategic and diplomatic weight.

2. **Counterbalance to an Aggressive China:** As China has grown more aggressive in Asia and beyond, the US and the West see India as a crucial regional counterbalance.

3. **Democratic Credentials:** Its credentials as a liberal, pluralist democracy make India an attractive partner.

Hence, to navigate the current delicate geopolitics and geoeconomics to secure its interests, India must ensure it does well on all these fronts.

On India-ASEAN FTA Review – The importance of ASEAN for India

News: The article discusses the issues with the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) signed in 2009. It highlights the areas that should be kept in mind for the review of the AITIGA.

Background:

The review of the **ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA)** is scheduled to begin next month. This has been a long-pending demand from the Indian industry seeking to alter the provisions of the agreement so that the bilateral trade balance, which is in favour of ASEAN, can be potentially reduced or reversed.

What are the issues with the AITIGA signed in 2009?

1) It was a shallow free-trade agreement (FTA) with less than 80% tariff line liberalisation.

2) The FTA also granted a greater advantage to some of the ASEAN economies through a relatively large negative list.

3) The rules of origin (RoO), specified a lower value-added content compared to India's bilateral FTAs with member economies such as Singapore.

4) The expected gains for India in the agreement on services liberalisation also did not materialise due to ASEAN's limited internal services sector liberalisation.

5) Agriculture and textiles, part of the ASEAN FTA, are sectors that usually remain outside the realm of preferential market access in most FTAs across the world.

What areas should be kept in mind for the AITIGA review?

1) **Access to RVCs and GVCs for India:** The larger context of the FTA review, however, needs to be viewed in terms of the distinct advantage that it can provide India by facilitating its integration with regional and global

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value chains (RVCs/ GVCs).

2) **Compensate for Not Joining RCEP:** The FTA revision with ASEAN gives India an opportunity to make good the loss of staying out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and a means to integrate with a proximate regional GVC hub.

3) **Scope for ASEAN's Growth:** This is particularly timely as the centrality of ASEAN to the RVCs/GVCs is getting reinforced in the wake of the "China plus one" diversification strategy reorienting along the lines of ally-shoring.

4) **Regarding RoOs:** The foremost consideration should be given to the formulation of appropriate RoOs. Accepting some form of region-wide cumulation in the RoOs will also help India overcome the limitation of staying out of the RCEP and assist in its integration with the RVCs/GVCs.

5) **Look East Strategy:** Finally, India must appreciate the importance of looking east. This is the only region following the FTA rulebook, as opposed to North America and the EU adopting selective trade protectionism and inwardlooking regionalism.

On India-France bilateral relations – Ceremony, substance

News: The article discusses the recent developments in India-France bilateral relations in light of French President Macron's recent India visit.

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

Background:

French President Macron recently visited India as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day Parade.

What are the recent developments in India-France bilateral relations?

1) India and France in 2023 sealed several agreements as they marked 25 years of their strategic partnership.
2) Announcement of the **Horizon 2047 framework** (to advance cooperation in many areas, including defence, space, and nuclear energy).
3) Announcement of **Defence Cooperation Plans** (joint production of military hardware, cutting-edge technology transfers and purchase deals for French aircraft, engines and submarines).

What were the outcomes of the visit?

1. **Defence Industrial Roadmap:** It is meant to expand on plans to co-design, co-develop and co-produce defence hardware in the air, on land and sea, as well as a space-defence partnership.
2. **Miscellaneous MoUs:** MoUs were signed regarding agriculture, digital health and science and technology cooperation.
3. **Joint Statement on Global Geopolitics:** India was able to take shared positions with France on the condemnation of terror attacks in Israel, the need for humanitarian assistance in Gaza and Ukraine, and concerns over the Red Sea attacks.

What are some areas which need focus?

1) Defence hardware deals.
2) Nuclear cooperation for the long-delayed power project in Jaitapur and for small modular reactors.

The India-France relationship is a work in progress, demonstrating the continuity in a partnership built on a **mutual respect for strategic autonomy** and a **shared commitment to "tradition and innovation"**.

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Reigniting the flame of India-South Korea defence cooperation

News: The article discusses the India-South Korea defence relations marked by recent Indian Army Chief's visit to South Korea in November 2023, which aims to strengthen military ties and address mutual challenges in defence cooperation.

About India-South Korea relations:

India and South Korea recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.
In 2020, the two nations endorsed a Roadmap for Defence Industries Cooperation.
The Korea Plus initiative is designed to boost Korean investments in India.

For more information on **India-South Korea relations**, read here.

What are the challenges in India-South Korea defense relations?

1. **Reassessment of India's Role:** The Korean side has till now resisted the change in view towards India. It still looks at India as an old Cold War ally of Soviet Bloc, which hinders the deeper strategic ties.
2. **Overemphasis on Acquisition and Sales:** India has been focused on acquiring weapons and technology from South Korea, whereas Korea has been looking for aprofit-driven sale to India.Both the aims are short sighted and driven by powerful arms lobbies, and not aimed at broad strategic considerations.

What are the opportunities in India-South Korea defense relations?

1. **Geopolitical Dynamics:** The evolving coalition of North Korea, China, and Russia introduces new challenge. It demands a deeper understanding of each country's strategic needs and alignments.
2. **Technology Collaboration:** During the Indian Army Chief's visit to Korea, there was a focus on joint development of advanced defense systems, particularly in future conflict areas like space and cybersecurity. This underscored the technological capabilities of both nations.
3. **Maritime Security:** There's potential for collaboration in maritime security, including joint patrolling and information sharing, given both countries' significant maritime interests.
4. **Counter Terrorism:** India and South Korea share concerns about terrorism, indicating room for collaborative strategies and coordinated efforts to bolster defense and security.
5. **United Nations Peacekeeping:** Both countries have experience in UN peacekeeping, suggesting they can share insights and resources to enhance global stability, a point underscored in recent diplomatic exchanges.
6. **Joint Military Exercises:** The visit of the Chief of Army Staff of India was seen as a catalyst for extending military cooperation, indicating opportunities for enhanced joint exercises and interoperability.

Way forward:

Adopting a strategic approach that includes shared visions, technological partnerships, and adapting to changing global dynamics is crucial for a robust India-South Korea defense relationship.

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No, the US-led Global Order is not collapsing

News: The article discusses the challenges to US-led global order due to global conflicts, the rise of China, and internal US divisions. It explores Eastern perspectives, India's strategic positioning, historical resilience of the West, and the complex global power dynamics.

What is the US-led global order?

The US-led global order is a system where the United States, due to its economic and military might, takes a leading role in shaping international policies, norms, and institutions. It emphasizes democracy, free markets, and security alliances, influencing global governance, trade, and diplomacy. This order has guided international relations and conflict management since the end of World War II.

What are the arguments favoring the decline of the US-led global order?

1. **Military Stalemates and Conflicts:** The ongoing military stalemate in Ukraine and escalating conflicts in the Middle East highlight the challenges to US-led Western military and diplomatic influence.
2. **Rising Eastern Powers:** Chinese assertiveness in Asia, along with increasing confidence among Eastern political elites, points to a shift in global power dynamics, signaling a perceived end to centuries of Western dominance.
3. **Internal Political Turmoil:** The United States is experiencing intense political polarization, and there are signs of potential further instability. This undermines the West's global standing.
4. **Economic Indicators:** The continuous decline in the share of G7's GDP in the global economy, particularly Europe's diminishing economic weight, suggests a relative economic decline of the West compared to emerging powers.

For information on **G7** read here.

What are the arguments against the decline of the US-led global order?

1. **Historical Resilience:** Despite numerous crises, the West has continuously adapted and overcome challenges, from the defeat of totalitarian regimes to the survival and adaptation of its capitalist and democratic institutions.
2. **Dominant Position:** The U.S. still holds nearly 24% of global GDP, leading in technological innovation and production of new scientific knowledge, indicating a sustained economic and cultural influence. Western societies continue to attract millions worldwide, evidenced by immigration trends and the global influence of Western academia, arts, and culture.
3. **Desire for Westernization:** Even within rival powers like Russia and China, there are significant political forces advocating for integration and accommodation with the Western-led order, suggesting its enduring appeal.
4. **Current Confrontation with China:** Despite assumptions that China would dominate, its economic slowdown and demographic decline suggest it won't overtake the U.S. economy soon, maintaining Western economic leadership.
5. **Challenges within Non-Western Institutions:** The deepening contradictions between members of non-Western institutions like the BRICS and SCO, particularly between India and China, undermine their effectiveness as alternatives to the Western order. This discord highlights the lack of a unified front that could challenge the West's dominance.

For information on **BRICS** read here.

For information on **SCO** read here.

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What is India's stance?

1. **Balanced Approach:** While acknowledging the shifting dynamics due to Eastern assertiveness, India does not wish for a decline of the West, especially as it does not desire China to replace the US as the dominant power in Asia.
2. **Economic and Political Engagement:** Two decades of engagement with the West have provided India with confidence and negotiating skills, leading to a strategic partnership despite occasional disagreements.

Topic: India and its neighborhood-relations

On India-Maldives Hydrography Pact - An 'India out' plan that could impact the Maldives

News: The article discusses the recent developments in India-Maldives ties, especially in the context of Maldives' decision regarding joint hydrographic surveys.
A detailed article on **India-Maldives relations** can be read here.

The recent decision by the Maldives to revoke an agreement with India for joint hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters has raised concerns. The pact was signed during India Prime Minister's 2019 visit to the islands and was seen as a symbol of India-Maldives defence ties.

What are the recent developments in India-Maldives ties?
Since the election of Mohamed Muizzu as Maldivian President, there has been an attempt by Maldives to distance itself from India. This is suggested by steps such as:

1. Earlier, Maldives formally asked India to **withdraw Indian military presence** from its shores.

2. Maldives also **skipped the latest meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave**. This signaled its reservations about defence engagement with India.

3. It is **expanding its relations with China**. For instance, getting Indian hydrographic ships out of Maldivian waters can aid China's marine surveys of the surrounding seas.

What is the importance of the hydrography pact?
Hydrographic data collected from the seas can be used for both civilian and military purposes.

1. **Non-Military Objectives:** This includes ensuring navigational safety, marine scientific research, and environmental monitoring.

2. **Military Objectives:** This includes surveillance of a nation's vital coastal installations and war-fighting assets.

What are China's interests in this hydrography pact?

1. **Part of China's Maritime Strategy:** For China, marine surveys and reconnaissance are critical enablers of its maritime strategy in the far seas. To achieve this, it has a large oceanographic research programme, in which **oceanographic research vessels** (and intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance ships) are regularly deployed in the Indian Ocean.

For instance, China approached **Sri Lanka and the Maldives** many times last year to allow the docking of these research ships.

2. **Applications in Anti-Submarine Warfare:** China's ocean surveys play an important part in enhancing China's antisubmarine warfare capabilities. The mapping of the ocean's temperature profile and the study of phenomena such as currents and eddies can **improve sonar performance** and **detection of enemy submarines**.

3. **Cut Down Indian Presence:** Indian Navy's operations in the waters of Indian Ocean island states could interfere with China's own marine survey efforts.

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What are Maldives' concerns with India's hydrographic activity?

Maldives has apprehensions about India's hydrographic activity being a form of **intelligence collection**.

These concerns arise because the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** does not explicitly authorise a coastal state to regulate hydrographic surveys or military surveys **conducted beyond its territorial sea**.

What should be the way forward for Maldives?

The Indian Navy has an exemplary track record of hydrographic surveys in their neighbourhood. For instance, it has rendered hydrographic assistance to Mauritius since the 1990s, charting the vast Mauritian EEZs and helping build capacity.

Considering all this, according to the author, Maldives must recognise that it is not India but China that seeks to weaponize ocean surveys. A partnership with India is the best option for Maldives to enhance maritime awareness and security.

Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate

On the Global Nuclear Order

News: The article discusses the global nuclear order (GNO) - its formation, elements, successes and failures. It also highlights the emerging challenges to GNO.

What is the global nuclear order (GNO)?

The GNO was created during the Cold War. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, both US and USSR understood two things:

First, they needed bilateral mechanisms to prevent tensions from escalating to the nuclear level.

Second, the spread of nuclear weapons should be curbed.

This is how the GNO came into being. According to the author, it is presently under strain.

Note- Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: Confrontation between US and USSR, when American deployments of nuclear missiles in Italy and Turkey were matched by Soviet deployments of nuclear missiles in Cuba. Both countries came very close to launching a nuclear war.

What are the elements of GNO?

1. **Hotline/Communication Link:** It was established in 1963 to enable the leaders of the two countries to communicate directly. It was later upgraded into nuclear risk reduction centers.

2. **Arms Control Agreements:** It was followed by arms control negotiations. This led to the formation of the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** in 1968.

3. **Controls on Transfer of Nuclear Technology:** The third element was formed in 1975 following **India's underground peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) in 1974**.

7 countries (USA, USSR, UK, Canada, France, Japan, and West Germany) concluded that export controls were urgently needed to ensure that nuclear technology, transferred for peaceful purposes, not be used for PNEs. This became the **Nuclear Suppliers Group**.

What have been the positive outcomes of the GNO?

The GNO has performed well on the following fronts:

1. **Taboo against nuclear weapons usage:** Humanity has survived 75 years without going to nuclear war.

2. **Success of Non-proliferation:** Only 4 countries have since gone nuclear (India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan). Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan that hosted Soviet nuclear weapons were denuclearised.

3. **Crisis Management:** Emergency communication links provided crisis management stability.

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4. **Nuclear Deterrence:** There was a shared notion of 'strategic stability' guaranteed by the enormous nuclear arsenals with the US and USSR. This ensured deterrence.

Where has the GNO failed to achieve its objectives?

Nuclear Arsenals Kept Growing: Due to the US-USSR nuclear race, their arsenals grew from 28,000 bombs in 1962 to over 65,000 bombs in the early 1980s.

How is the changing geopolitical scenario negatively impacting GNO?

1) **China's Assertiveness:** China has steadily built up its naval and missile capabilities.

There are also concerns about USA's deterrence guarantees, especially in East Asia - Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. It is possible that the USA may support independent nuclear deterrent capabilities to handle the rivalry with China.

2) **Withdrawal From Nuclear Treaties:** In 2002, the U.S. withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and in 2019, from the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF)** Treaty. The **New START treaty** will lapse in 2026. Last year, Russia de-ratified the **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)**, raising concerns about the resumption of nuclear testing.

3) **Active Proliferation:** There were no reactions by the USA when Israel and Pakistan went nuclear. More recently, the nuclear submarine AUKUS deal with Australia, a non-nuclear weapon state, is raising concerns.

4) **Shift in Japan's Stance:** There has been a recent shift in Japan's anti-nuclear sentiment, visible in its decision to increase defence spending.

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

Taiwan's elections and the Indo-Pacific

News: The article discusses the reactions of major world powers after the recent Taiwan election results. It also highlights why Taiwan is an important player in global geopolitics and India's stance on the same.

Background:

Lai Ching-te, the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), emerged as the winner of the Taiwan elections. It has now won 3 presidential elections in a row with its stance of independence (rejecting China's assertion of sovereignty and unification).

It also rejects the **1992 consensus** which declares that both entities accept that there is only one China but referred to as the PRC and the other as the Republic of China.

What has been the reaction of the major powers to the election result?

1. **China:** Chinese Foreign Minister reiterated that it cannot change that there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is a part of China.
2. **USA:** It has welcomed the elections as a demonstration of Taiwan's vibrant democracy but also reiterated that it does not support the island's independence. It emphasises the need to maintain peace and security in the Taiwan Strait.
3. **Japan:** It has also congratulated Taiwan on its democratic polity and the shared values between the two countries.

Why is Taiwan an important player in global geopolitics?

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1. **Economic Weight:** Taiwan is a major trading power and the world's **16th largest economy**.
2. **Major Source of Semiconductors:** It is the source of **92% of the world's most advanced logic chips** and it **fabricates 55% of the semiconductors** embedded in vehicles, laptops, tablets and smartphones all over the world.
3. **Major Maritime Trading Route:** Any conflict in the Taiwan Strait would affect critical digital supply chains and the nearly **60% of global maritime trade** that moves through the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

What is India's changing stance with respect to Taiwan?

India has a stake in the maintenance of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific, with Taiwan at its centre. It maintains **non-official relations with Taiwan.** Lately, the following changes have occurred with respect to its stance on the Taiwan issue:

1) **Expansion of Economic Relations:** Trade and investment relations between the two countries have recently expanded significantly.
2) **Direct Criticism of China:** India for the first time in 2022, criticised China for its "militarisation of the Taiwan Strait".
3) **Not Affirming the One-China Principle:** India has lately stopped reaffirming the **one-China principle**. Its stance is now more aligned with its partners in the QUAD.

What is the impact of Taiwan's stability on India?

1. **Technology**: Taiwanese companies are integral to India's ambition in technology. **Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and United Microelectronics Corporation (UMC**) are central to India's efforts to develop modern semiconductor capacity.
2. **Manufacturing**: Major Apple suppliers such as Foxconn and Pegatron, both Taiwanese firms, are vital to India's manufacturing sector. Their involvement is crucial for India's goal to attract global supply chains.
3. **Geopolitical Stance:** A stable Taiwan Strait is beneficial for India. An autonomous Taiwan aligns with New Delhi's interests. Stability in Taiwan helps ensure the smooth operation of technology and manufacturing collaborations between the two nations.

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

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

On the Atal Setu and Indian Economy – Bridge to prosperity

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

Recently, the country's longest sea bridge, the **22-km long six-lane Atal Setu (or the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link)** was inaugurated.
It is a significant step in India's bid to project itself as a key investment destination.

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What are the positive signs for the Indian economy?

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

Why is infrastructure creation important?

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

What should be the way forward?

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

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

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

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

What are the problems with India's import duties?

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

What government initiatives are in place to overcome these issues?

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

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

What should be done?

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

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

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

A new research report by the **State Bank of India (SBI)** seeks to debunk claims of India's "K-shaped" economic recovery.
Note: K-shaped recovery occurs when, following a recession, different parts of the economy recover at different rates, times, or magnitudes. This contrasts an even, uniform recovery across sectors, industries, or groups of people.
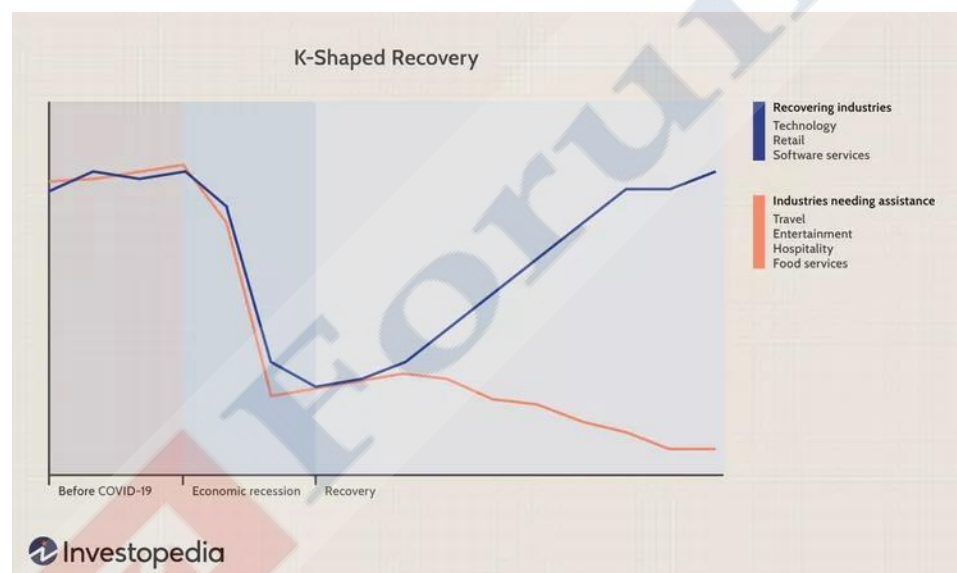
Figure 2.Source: Investopedia.

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

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

1. **Positive Emerging Patterns:** It highlights patterns of income, savings, consumption, expenditure and policy measures aimed at public welfare.
2. **Questions Parameters:** It questions the use of old parameters like **low two-wheeler sales** or **fragmented land holdings.**
For instance, low sales of two-wheelers could reflect savings being utilised to buy physical assets (real estate) and buyers shifting to purchasing used/entry-level cars.
3. **Rising Disposable Incomes in Non-Metro Areas:** It cites data from Zomato as an example of rising

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disposable income in non-metro areas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gender comparison
More women aged 30-59 at work has been a recent trend but the proportion of working men in that age group has declined.

Worker-population ratio for 30-59 age group (WPR, %)
- Rural male
- Urban male
- Rural female
- Urban female

Sources: Statistics ministry, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, Employment unemployment surveys till 2011-12, Annual PLFS since 2017-18
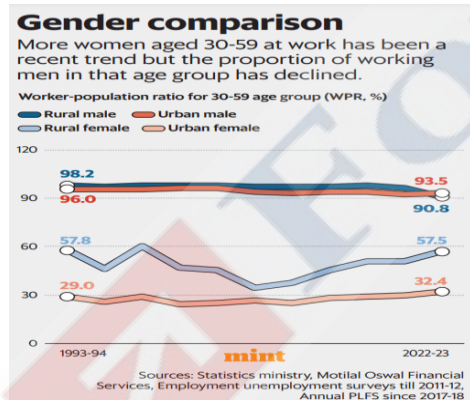
First, while the LFPR and worker population ratio (WPR) of males aged above 15 years have increased in 2022-23, they have fallen for all ages, and **decreased sharply for the prime working age group of 30-59 years**.

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

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

What are the reasons behind these patterns noticed in the male rates?	
A simultaneous rise in both male rates for the 15-29- years age bracket and fall in the 30-50-years group is surprising. There could be at least two plausible causes for this:	
1. **Reversal of pandemic-related migration trends:** Leading to a fall in male workers in rural areas, thus resulting in a WPR contraction.	2. **Rise in the number of discouraged workers** (one who is unemployed and not actively looking for work).

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What are the problems with this reasoning?	What could be the reasons behind discouragement?
One, there should have been a sudden rise in WPR during the pandemic (2019-20 or 2020-21), as population estimates would not have fully captured reverse migration (from urban to rural). However, as the graph depicts, it was not so.	**One**, lack of job opportunities in rural areas (especially non-farm) led to a lower workforce. It fits well with sustained strong demand for MGNREGA work.
Two, no simultaneous rise in urban male LFPR and WPR or a rise in the urban male unemployment rate.	**Two**, fiscal support to males (in the form of rural job, free/subsidized gas cylinders, free food, subsidized housing, etc.) was sufficient to make them stay out of the workforce.
Three, higher-than-pandemic demand for work under the (MGNREGA raises doubts over a substantial reversal of reverse migration.	This scenario, according to the author, would be one of the worst situations because such lazy behaviour is unwarranted and indicates acceptance of subsistence living, which is unproductive for any economy.

What are the reasons for the rise in female LFPR?

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

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

Issue of tax distribution among state - Tax contribution by States needs to be revisited

News: The article discusses how the Finance Commission in India decides the share of tax revenue for each state.

How were taxes historically distributed?

Until the 10th Finance Commission (up to 2000), state shares in Union tax revenue were limited to personal income tax and Union excise duties.
Population was a major factor, with 80% to 90% weight in the distribution formula for income tax in the first seven Finance Commissions.
For Union excise duties, due to a lack of consumption data, states' tax contribution was not a determinant.
Post-2000, all central tax revenues were combined for distribution, with a unified formula for both income tax and Union excise duties, focusing more on equity.

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In the 15th Finance Commission, the distribution formula included tax effort (2.5% weight) and demographic performance (12.5% weight), along with equity indicators like per capita income and population as per the 2011 Census.

Read more about **Finance commission**

What are the issues regarding Tax Contribution?

1. **Primary Issue:** The main issue is whether states with higher tax contributions should receive a larger share of Union tax revenue. **States' Viewpoint:** States with substantial tax contributions argue for greater recognition in the distribution formula.
2. **Historical Weightage:** Historically, state tax contributions were given limited weight (10% to 20%) in the revenue distribution formula.
3. **Complexity in Attribution:** Accurately attributing income tax revenue to specific states is challenging, complicating the assessment of contributions. **States' Demand:** States with significant income tax collections demand higher weighting for their tax contributions.
4. **Balance Challenge**: The debate involves finding a balance between rewarding states for economic efficiency and maintaining equitable distribution among all states.

What should be done?

1. **Include State GST contributions in the distribution formula** as a measure of efficiency. This is because GST, being a consumption-based tax, accurately reflects a state's tax base and is equally divided between the State and Central governments.
2. **Consider the relative share of petroleum consumption by States as another efficiency indicator.** Since petroleum taxes are outside GST, this reflects the State's contribution to Union excise duties and customs duties on petroleum products.
3. **Assign significant weightage (suggested at least 33%)** to these efficiency indicators (GST revenue and petroleum consumption) in the distribution formula. This is supported by the fact that GST revenue and petroleum consumption are stable and fair measures of a state's contribution to the national exchequer.
4. **Maintain a balance between efficiency and equity indicators** in the distribution formula. Equity factors like population, area, and income levels must be considered alongside efficiency to ensure a fair and equitable allocation of Union tax revenues among States.

Increased capital expenditure by Indian states- States are spending

News: The article discusses how state governments in India veered towards the path of fiscal consolidation after the COVID-19 pandemic. They are now spending more on capital expenditure rather than just on regular expenses like salaries and pensions.

How have state governments managed their finances Post-COVID-19?

1. Post COVID-19, state governments in India kept their fiscal deficits below 3% of GDP in 2021-22 and 2022-23, lower than the allowed limits of 4.5% and 4%.
2. States spend more than the central government, accounting for over 60% of total government expenditure.
3. In 2023-24, states (excluding Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Manipur and Meghalaya) shifted focus to capital expenditure with a 45.7% increase, while regular expenses grew only by 9.3%.
4. The ratio of capital outlay to total expenditure hit an eight-year high of 14.1%, indicating more spending on productive assets.

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What drives the increased capital expenditure?

Increased capital expenditure by Indian states is driven primarily by two factors:

1. **First,** proactive policies by the Union government, including the **early release of tax devolution funds**. In 2023-24, Rs 973.74 billion was approved, with Rs 590.3 billion disbursed for capital projects by November.
2. **Second,** states' own revenues have shown robust growth. **Tax and non-tax revenues grew by 11.5% and 19.5%, respectively**. This indicates improved tax administration efficiency and economic formalization.
3. **Thirdly**, the state tax revenues outpacing nominal GDP growth, estimated at 8.9% according to the National Statistical Office's First Advance Estimates, suggests two key aspects. Firstly, it reflects enhanced **efficiency in tax administration** by the states, indicating better collection and management of taxes. Secondly, it points to an **increase in the formalization of the economy.**
4. **Additionally**, significant revenue from the mining sector, boosted by reforms like e-auction of mining leases, contributed to this growth, particularly in mineral-rich states.

What are the challenges?

1. Overall revenue receipts grew by only 5.5% due to a 29.2% reduction in grants from the Union government.
2. States increased market borrowings to a record Rs 5.8 trillion in nine months, mainly for capital expenditure.
3. States might slightly exceed their fiscal deficit target of 3.1% of GDP, potentially reaching up to 3.3 - 3.4%.

Effectiveness of IBC, 2016 - A performance appraisal of IBC

News: The article discusses the effectiveness of India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016. It evaluates how well the IBC resolves financial distress in companies, improves bank balance sheets, and benefits the economy, despite some challenges in efficiency and asset value realization.

What is the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)?

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code was enacted in 2016, and it replaced all the existing laws with a uniform procedure to resolve insolvency and bankruptcy disputes. The code aimed to address the issue of Non-performing Assets (NPAs) and debt defaults.
For more information on IBC read here.

What is the impact of the IBC on banks and the economy?

1. **Reduction in Non-Performing Assets (NPAs):** The IBC helped decrease the NPA rate of banks significantly, from a peak of 14.8% in September 2018 to a low of 3.2% by September 2023.
2. **Increase in Bank Profits:** Banks experienced a remarkable turnaround, recording a historic profit of €2.63 trillion in 2022-23, compared to a loss in 2017-18.
3. **Improvement in Corporate Balance Sheets**: Post-IBC, firms showed enhanced performance with more robust balance sheets, better leverage management, and an improved interest coverage ratio exceeding 3.5.
4. **Enhancement in Corporate Governance:** There was a notable improvement in corporate governance, indicated by a reduction in related party transactions, as identified in a study post-IBC.
5. **Global Ranking Improvement:** India's ranking in global insolvency resolution improved drastically, moving from 136th to 52nd within the first three years of the IBC's implementation.

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What are the concerns related to the IBC?

1. **Inefficient Time Management:** The resolution processes under IBC are prolonged, averaging 867 days, far exceeding the intended 180 days.
2. **Gap in Asset Value Maximization**: Resolutions are realizing only 86% of the fair value of the companies, indicating a shortfall in achieving the desired value maximization.
3. **High Incidence of Liquidation:** The IBC results in more liquidations than rescues, particularly impacting companies that were already sick or defunct at the time of entering the process. Most companies going into liquidation were already sick or defunct, having assets valued at about 5% of their claims.
4. **Methodological Issues in Appraisal:** Some appraisals of the IBC's performance use flawed methodologies, like focusing solely on recovery rates, which overlook other important factors like realizations from equity holdings or the resolution of guarantors.

What is the way forward?

To improve the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), stakeholders like the government, adjudicating authority, debtors, creditors, and professionals should play their roles more effectively. This does not require legislative changes but rather better implementation and adherence to the IBC's processes, particularly in ensuring time-bound resolutions and maximizing the value of stressed assets.

On Income Poverty in India – In Viksit Bharat, rural real wages are in decline

News: The article discusses the current status of poverty in India, especially focusing on agricultural wages and unemployment rates.

What is the current status of poverty in India?

According to NITI Aayog's **National Multidimensional Poverty Index** **(NMPI)**, **248.2 million Indians** have been lifted out of poverty in the last 9 years.
NITI Aayog argues that NMPI is a better measure to estimate poverty than the traditional estimates based on income/consumption.
However, there is a doubt over sustainability of a development model that improves access to public utilities but does not enhance the quality of these services or income levels.
Therefore, household income is still an important indicator of poverty levels. Hence, importance should be given to **income poverty, real wages, and unemployment** in the country.
For instance, India still has the largest number (160 million) of people under extreme poverty in the world as per the **World Bank**'s estimate based on $2.15/capita/day income.

Since most of these poor people are in rural areas, it is important to look at employment in agriculture and the real wage rates in rural areas.

What is the status of these indicators?

1. **Low Growth in Real Agricultural Wages:**
   a. During 2009-10 to 2013-14, real agriculture and non-agriculture rural wages grew at 8.6 per cent and 6.9 per cent per annum respectively.
   b. However, during 2014-15 to 2018-19, this decelerated to 3.3 per cent and 3 per cent per annum respectively.
   c. In the last five years 2019-20 to 2023-24, it has become negative for both agriculture (-0.6 per cent)

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and non-agriculture (-1.4 per cent). Reasons behind this include COVID-19 and more people moving into the agricultural workforce.

2. **High Unemployment Rates Persist:** As per ILO, it averaged around 8.4% during 2004-05 to 2013-14 and roughly 7.9% during the last 10 years. So, the growth model has not seen a significant reduction in unemployment.

The government data shows that in rural areas, real wages have had negative growth in the last 5 years. In this regard, there is a need to create more employment-intensive growth processes.

Understanding GST revenue performance

News: The article discusses the GST revenue performance, while suggesting reforms in the current GST regime to boost collections.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) has been a major policy success of recent years. According to the author, it has stimulated the growth of a truly national market, replacing multiple distorting taxes with a single system. A detailed article on **GST** can be read here.

What are the recent GST collection figures?

The **GST collection figure** reported for 2022-23 is Rs. 18.1 trillion, equivalent to **6.6% of GDP**.

With **refunds** of Rs.1.8 trillion, the **net GST revenues** (both Centre and state, including the cess) amounted to Rs.16.1 trillion, or **5.9% of GDP**.

This gap (between collections and revenue) has hovered around 0.6-0.7% of GDP.

FIGURE 1. **GST: GROSS COLLECTIONS VERSUS NET REVENUES (% OF GDP)**
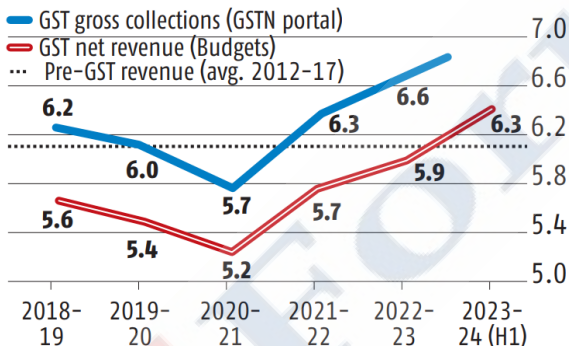
Note: The comparison of net revenues under the GST and those under the pre-GST regime should not be affected by refunds because both sets of numbers are from government budgets.

What are the refunds granted on GST?

Since in the case of GST, taxes are paid on actual revenues, in most cases there is no need for refunds. However, there is one major exception. In GST, **exports are zero-rated**, which means that exporters don't pay taxes on their output but are entitled to refunds on the taxes they paid on their inputs. This constitutes the major chunk of refunds under the GST.

Note: Zero-rated items are different from exempt items. Exempt items are not taxed but are also not entitled to input tax credits.

According to the author, data suggests that the gap between collections and revenues reflects **refunds paid to exporters** to reimburse them for the **Integrated GST (IGST)** they paid. The author makes further inference that since exports often rely heavily on imported parts, a large share of refunds is to compensate exporters for the IGST paid on their **imported inputs**.

What does this imply?

The large amount of refunds has important implications for ascertaining the performance of GST.

As seen in the infographic, the **GST collection** data implies that the GST regime immediately overtook the pre-GST average , then dipped during the pandemic period, and once again surpassed the pre-GST regime in 2021-22.

However, as per **GST revenue** figures (GST collection minus the refunds), GST revenue overtook the pre-GST regime only in the current fiscal year.

Why did GST revenues decline?

This is due to two reasons:

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1. **Faster Export Refunds:** Export refunds have become much smoother, quicker, and fuller with the GST than they were under the previous regime.

2. **Rate Cuts:** There were rate-cuts in the years leading up to the pandemic. This led to reduction of the weighted average collection rate from 14.4% in 2017 to 11.6% in 2019.

What needs to be done to further boost GST collections?

The real need is to address the remaining major design flaws. This includes:

1. **Reversing Rate-Cuts:** The rate cuts of 2018-2019 need to be reversed, even if not fully, as part of a rationalisation of the overall rate structure.

2. **Simplification of the Rate Structure:** The current complexity, especially for the cesses, is bringing down revenue collections and is complicating enforcement.

For instance, moving to a **three-rate structure** (as per the **Revenue Neutral Rate (RNR) Committee in 2015**) with a standard rate of 18%, a lower rate of say 10%, and a demerit rate of 40%.

3. **Incorporating GST Compensation Cess into the rate structure:** This would simplify the system and eliminate the exclusion of revenues from the divisible pool of taxes.

On the Necessity of Economic Growth in Poor States

News: The article discusses the **status of economic growth in the poorest states of India.** It also highlights the areas these states can economically benefit in, and suggests steps for the same.

According to the author, India becoming a developed country by 2047 depends not only on its most advanced cities, but also on the contribution of its poorest states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal.

These together constitute **a third of India's population (460 million)**.

What is the economic status of these states?

1. **Low Average Income:** Bihar's average income is less than a third (32%) of the country's average income. UP's average income is under half (49%).

2. **Historically Low Growth:** In the preceding decade from 2012 to 2022 and before, the growth rates of UP and Bihar were below the national average. West Bengal grew only at 3.9% over the decade from FY12-22.

In contrast, other poorer states like Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Assam have grown faster than the national average from 2012-2022.

3. **Recent Rise in Economic Growth:** These states have however experienced GDP growth much higher than the national average in FY23 (10.7% for Bihar, 8.4% for UP and 8.6% for West Bengal).

What are some of the areas these states can benefit economically from?

1. **Agricultural Sector:** As Punjab and Haryana eventually shift away from cereals to higher-value crops, UP and Bihar could benefit from a second Green Revolution.

2. **Tourism:** Increased investment in tourism - highlighting the rich historical heritage of the Gangetic Plain - can be a huge employment generator.

3. **River Transportation:** Developing better river transport through the Ganges (like the Rhine or Danube) can connect these places to the world.

4. **Demographic Dividend:** These states will experience a continuous **increase in their share of the working-age population** for another decade (especially UP, Bihar), while richer states-especially in the South-will see that share declining.

What needs to be done?

1. **Focus on education and skilling**.

2. **Infrastructure Development:** Within infrastructure, a focus on expressways is important but rural roads and rural electrification must also be prioritised.

3. **Developing IT-based services sector:** These offer a pathway to higher incomes for these **landlocked states**.

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4. **Control over crime**.

5. **Bifurcation of States:** Bifurcating UP and Bihar into several smaller states can ensure better governance.

6. **Changing the perception of these states as business-friendly states**.

What happens in UP, Bihar and West Bengal will determine whether India will become an advanced economy or be stuck in a **middle-income trap.**

Their development is necessary to prevent large regional disparities and the resulting social and political tensions.

On Upskilling Rural Youth

News: The article discusses the issue of the education and skilling of rural youth. It highlights steps to control the migration of rural youth, as well as improving the education available to them.

With almost 50% of India's population set to be living in urban areas by 2047, the focus shifts on developing rural areas. In this context, making the youth in rural India employment-ready is of utmost importance.

How can migration of rural youth be controlled?

The following steps can be used to control migration of rural youth to urban areas in search of meaningful employment:

1. **Making Agriculture an Aspirational Vocation among rural youth:** The rural economy is experiencing a major occupational shift with more farmers quitting agriculture to join non-farming jobs.

2. **Creating alternative employment opportunities** is also important.

3. **Improving vocational training:** This can imbibe relevant rural skills in youth so that they can secure a living where they currently live.

According to a survey, **2/3rds of youth** had never taken any vocational training.

Also, the current vocational education landscape in rural India (comprising **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)**) lack placement opportunities.

4. **Skill Development:** Presently, rural education scarcely focuses on skill development. Skills in fields like agricultural mechanisation, nursing and digital technologies can be imparted.

The **Delhi government's 'Skills On Wheel'** initiative can be emulated in this regard.

How can rural education be improved?

1. **Imparting Technical as well as Life skills:** These are needed to empower youth and hence should be made accessible through formal education.

2. **Incorporating International Best Practices:** Initiatives such as **Mexico's tele-schools** and **Bhutan's well-being-infused curriculum** can be replicated. The tele-schools can provide a higher level of access to education for remote areas.

3. **Role of Civil Society and NGOs:** For instance, organisations such as NIIT Foundation and Pratham Institute are working with children in rural areas to provide upskilling opportunities.

Through these initiatives, employability of rural youth in both traditional and non-traditional trades can be raised, leading to a vibrant economy.

Indian Development Model - India's way forward: Services or manufacturing?

News: The article questions India's economic direction, particularly the wisdom of prioritizing services over manufacturing given its unique developmental path. It highlights the challenges in job creation this approach brings, especially for the educated youth.

What is the Indian development model?

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India's service sector is, notably high-tech, is growing very fast compared to manufacturing. This shift differs from traditional models where countries transition from agriculture to manufacturing before services. This model leverages global service demand, benefiting from outsourcing trends and advances in information technology, making it a part of the global supply chain for services.

What are the issues with the Indian development model?

1. **Unbalanced Growth:** India's manufacturing growth has plateaued at or below 20% of the economy. India's growth relies heavily on the service sector. Without a strong industrial base, growth might **not be sustainable in the long term**.
2. **High Unemployment:** Despite economic growth, India faces a high overall unemployment rate over 8%. Specifically, youth **unemployment for ages 15-24 soars above 40%**, indicating job creation is not keeping pace with labor force growth.
3. **Quality of Employment:** The service sector is creating jobs primarily in low value-added, low-skill areas, not in high-tech services, failing to meet the higher aspirations of a more educated workforce.
4. **Educational Focus with Skill Mismatch**: While **producing 2.2 million STEM graduates** yearly, the development model faces challenges with the employability and industry relevance of these graduates.
5. **Emphasis on Aggregate GDP**: The development model often focuses on increasing total GDP rather than GDP per capita, overlooking the individual prosperity aspect.

What should be done?

1. **Combine Growth Models:** India should integrate growth in both the service and manufacturing sectors. It needs to extend beyond the PLI schemes, which focus more on production than employment, by incentivizing private industry expansion.
2. **Reform Policies:** Implement land and labor regulatory reforms to attract more investment and incentivize private industry to scale up, creating more jobs.
3. **Address Skill Deficit:** Focus on closing the skill gap by aligning education with industry needs and by raising its investment in higher education. This will ensure the large young population is ready for the jobs being created.

Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it

Inequality in India - Growth mania can be injurious to society

News: The article discusses India's economic growth and increasing inequality. Despite ambitions for a $5 trillion economy, growth has benefited the rich more, leaving many poor behind. This rising inequality impacts social issues and democracy, and the focus on just economic size may worsen these problems.

What is the current status of economic growth and inequality in India?

India's growth has led to more inequality. Since the 1980s, the gap between rich and poor has widened, making India one of the most unequal societies.
World Inequality Report', 2022 describe India as "**a poor country with an affluent elite**".
Data from the Labour Bureau shows that from 2014 to 2022-23, **real wages for agricultural labor slightly increased by 4.6%, but for non-agricultural workers, wages actually decreased.**
Over the period 2014-23, **real per capita income in India has increased by 37% while the real wage of agricultural labour has increased by less than 5%.**

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What are the challenges in estimating inequality in India?

1. **Limited Data Availability:** Government agencies are reluctant to supply complete data on inequality, making precise estimates challenging.
2. **Gender Data Gap:** There is a lack of wage data for women workers, who constitute a significant portion of the labor force in certain sectors.
3. **Focus on Male Workers:** Rural wage rate data from the Labour Bureau, while reliable, only covers male workers, leaving a gap in understanding the full wage trends.

Why is data on rural wage rates reliable in estimating inequality in India?

1. **Market-Based Quotes:** The rural wage rate data is based on actual market quotations, providing a realistic view of wages.
2. **Non-Survey Based:** Unlike survey responses, this data reflects real-world transactions, reducing biases or inaccuracies common in surveys.
3. **Comprehensive Coverage:** It covers a wide range of rural jobs, offering a broader perspective on wage trends in rural areas.
4. **Indicative of Living Standards:** Since a large portion of India's workforce is in rural areas (51.7% according to sixth economic census of India reports), these wage rates are indicative of the living standards of a significant population segment.

What are the consequences of inequality in India?

1. **Social Pathologies:** Growing inequality in India is linked to increased violence, disease, and mental health disorders.
2. **Impact on the Rich:** Inequality affects all, with the affluent building gated communities for security, highlighting a divided society.
3. **Eroded Trust:** The trust between different societal groups diminishes, impeding collective efforts on public issues.
4. **Hindrance to Public Goods:** Efforts to improve public goods like sanitation and waste management face challenges due to inequality. Issues like open defecation continue, as commitment to public hygiene varies across different income groups.
5. **Challenge to Democracy:** Inequality poses a threat to democratic values, as it contradicts the principle of equitable opportunity for all.

Way forward

To address these challenges, India needs policies that balance economic growth with reducing inequality. This includes focusing on increasing wages, especially in rural areas, and ensuring equitable access to public goods. Strengthening data collection on inequality can also help in creating more effective policies.

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

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

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

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

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Source: Handbook of State Statistics (RBI) and author calculations
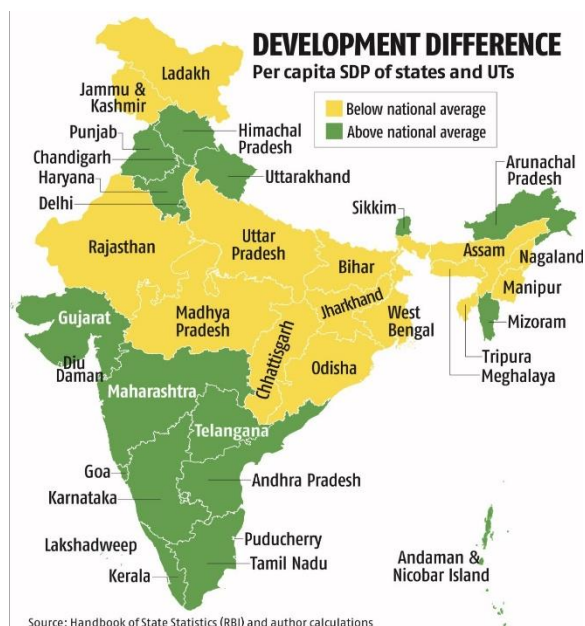
What are the reasons for economic divide in India's States?

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

Way forward:

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

Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy

Shift in India's Trade Policy - Reverse India's trend of trace barriers going up

News: The article discusses the global decline of free trade, and the challenges India has faced with its Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). India's trade deficits have grown due to these agreements, prompting a reevaluation of its trade strategy and tariff policies.

What Is the Global Trade Scenario?

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1. **Protectionism on the Rise:** Western nations are increasing trade barriers, indicating a shift away from free trade.
2. **Ineffective International Bodies:** The World Trade Organization is struggling to enforce global trade rules, diminishing its effectiveness.
3. **Geopolitical Divisions:** The geopolitical split is challenging the past three decades of globalization efforts. The global market is now a mix of bilateral deals instead of a unified system.

Why Is India's Trade Policy Shifting?

1. **Increased Tariffs:** After decreasing import tariffs in the 1990s, India raised them again, signaling a shift in policy towards protectionism.
2. **Trade Deficits Concerns:** The growing merchandise trade deficits with FTA partners like ASEAN (over 300%), South Korea (160%), and Japan (138%) highlight the challenges India faces in boosting exports relative to imports. India left the RCEP in 2019, aiming to reduce trade imbalances and overdependence on Eastern economies, particularly China.
3. **Pursuit of Western and West Asian FTAs:** Post 2019, India shifted focus to forge free trade agreements with Western and West Asian economies, moving away from the RCEP to avoid further trade imbalances and attract global value chains.

For information on **RCEP** read here.

Way forward:

To improve trade, India should consider reducing tariffs to foster competitiveness and attract global value chains. Reversing the growing trade deficits, as seen with ASEAN (300% increase), South Korea, and Japan, could be achieved by integrating more effectively into global markets and making domestic industries more competitive, thereby enhancing exports and economic health.

For more information On **Shift in Global Trade Policy,** read here.

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

On the Semiconductor Design-Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme

News: The article discusses India's semiconductor strategy and the issues with the Semiconductor Design-Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme.

A detailed article on **Semiconductor Manufacturing in India** can be read here.

Background:

The **Semiconductor Design-Linked Incentive (DLI) scheme** has approved only 7 start-ups till now, falling short of its target of supporting 100 over 5 years.

What are the goals of India's semiconductor strategy?

1. Reduce dependence on semiconductor imports, particularly from China, and especially in strategic and emerging   sectors.
2. Build supply chain resilience by integrating into the semiconductor global value chain (GVC).

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3. Taking advantage of India's comparative advantage such as the presence of the design houses of every major global semiconductor industry player and Indian chip design engineers.

What are the issues with the DLI scheme?

1. **Barriers on FDI:** It mandates that beneficiary start-ups maintain their domestic status for at least 3 years after receiving incentives, and for this they cannot raise more than 50% of their funds via FDI.
2. **Lack of Domestic Funding:** Costs for semiconductor design startups are significant. The funding landscape for chip start-ups in India continues to be challenging due to an absence of a mature start-up funding ecosystem.
3. **Incentives Not Enough:** Incentives under the DLI scheme are not very high, making it unattractive for start-ups (For e.g. it is capped at ₹15 Crore for Product DLI).
4. **Issues with the Nodal Agency:** As the nodal agency Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) is also a market player in the Indian chip design sector, there are concerns of conflict of interest.

What should be the way forward?

1) **Focusing on the Broader Objective:** The scheme should focus on facilitating design capabilities within the country, as long as the entity engaging in the design development process is registered in India.
2) **Focusing on the Design Stage:** Stimulating the design ecosystem is less capital-intensive than the foundry and assembly stages of the semiconductor GVC. The financial outlay of the scheme must be enhanced.
3) **Regarding Nodal Agency Reform:** The Karnataka government's Semiconductor Fabless Accelerator Lab **(SFAL)**, with its specific partnerships with the Indian Electronics and Semiconductor Association, vendors, IP, and testing companies, could be an appropriate example for an implementing agency for DLI.

A recalibrated policy focused on chip design implemented by a capable institution can help establish India's foothold in this high-tech sector.

Reduction of import duties on EVs - Import concessions:

News: The article discusses India's proposal to lower import taxes on electric vehicles (EVs) to help secure a free-trade deal with the UK.

About India's electric vehicles (EV) Market:

India is the **fourth-largest automobile market globally** after China, the US, and Japan, valued at about $250 billion.
It's **anticipated to grow annually by more than 9% from 2022 to 2027.**
In 2023, EV sales in India surged by 45%, indicating growing market potential.
However, fully assembled EVs priced above $40,000 face a 100% import duty, while those under $40,000 face a 70% duty. This is much higher than in countries like the US, France, Saudi Arabia, and China.

What are the implications of the reduction of import duties on EVs?

Positive Implications:

1. **Attract Foreign Investment:** Lower duties may entice companies like Tesla to set up manufacturing units in India.
2. **Competitive Pricing:** Increased competition could lead to better and cheaper EVs, benefiting consumers.
3. **Global Integration:** Lowering tariffs is vital for India's participation in free trade agreements and attracting global players.

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Negative Implications:

1. **Local Industry Threat:** Domestic manufacturers fear reduced duties will flood the market with imports, harming local industry and investment.
2. **Sunrise Industry Risk:** Lowering duties might deter investments in the domestic EV sector, considered a nascent yet promising industry.

What are the government initiatives to support the EV market?

1. **Production-Linked Incentive Scheme:** A scheme with an outlay of ₹25,938 crore aimed at boosting local manufacturing in the automotive sector, including EVs.
2. **National Programme on Advanced Chemistry Cell:** With an investment of ₹18,100 crore, it focuses on promoting advanced cell chemistry for batteries.
3. **FAME Scheme:** The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles scheme (FAME 1,2 and 3) encourages the use of hybrid and electric vehicles through incentives.

For more information on FAME read Article1, Article2.

Way forward:

Balancing reduced duties and nurturing the local industry is crucial. With the right policies, lowering import duties could lead to a more competitive market, resulting in better and cheaper EVs, benefiting consumers and the industry.

Topic: Infrastructure

Develop Lakshadweep but protect its ecology

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

What is the need for developing Lakshadweep?

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

What are the challenges in developing Lakshadweep?

1. **Limited Area:** Lakshadweep's small size (32 sq km) and limited inhabited islands (10 out of 36) pose a challenge for large-scale development.

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

What can be learn from Maldives?

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

What should be done?

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

Subject: Agriculture

Topic: Major crops-cropping patterns in various parts of the country

On Production of Pulses in India – Attaining self-sufficiency

News: The article discusses the benefits of increasing production of pulses in India. It also highlights the constraints in increasing production and the steps that can be taken to tackle the challenges.

India is the largest producer, consumer, and importer of pulses in the world.

What are the benefits of increasing production of pulses in India?

1. **Address food-security concerns**.
2. **Address environmental challenges**.
3. **Reduce Import bill**.
4. **Addressing protein deficiency:** Pulses are a source of dietary fibres and plant-based proteins.
5. **Enhancing soil fertility:** Pulses can fix nitrogen in the soil.
6. **Low Water Requirement:** Suitable for cultivation in rain-deficient or depleting groundwater regions.

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What are the govt's initiatives for increasing pulses production?

The government recently stated its objective of **achieving self-sufficiency in pulses by the end of 2027**.
Tur Dal Procurement Portal: Farmers can register and sell their produce to the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) and the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF).
The government also hopes to launch similar facilities for **urad and masoor dal procurement** in the future.
Hike in MSP: There have been several hikes in the minimum support prices (MSPs) of different varieties of pulses.

What is the current status of pulses imports?

India's imports of pulses have come down from a high of 6.61 million tonnes (mt) in 2016-17 to 2.7 mt in 2021-22, and further to 2.52 mt in 2022-23.
The imports have declined mainly due to a **sharp decline in the import of yellow peas (matar)** and **chickpea (chana)** over the past 10 years, due to **high import duties and procurement**.

What are the constraints with pulses production in India?

1. **Low Yields:** The low yield arises mainly from those being grown in marginal and sub-marginal lands with low input usage.
2. **Storage Issues:** Pulses are difficult to store and their shelf life is shorter than that of wheat and rice.

What should be done?

1. **Improving productivity of pulses cultivation.**
2. **Increased land under pulses cultivation:** Diversion from paddy must be encouraged in water-deficient states such as Punjab.
3. **Higher MSPs:** It can incentivise farmers to shift to pulses, resulting in higher availability and consumption at reasonably stable prices.

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies

On Fertiliser Price Control Regime – Price of price distortion

News: The article discusses the recent decision of the government to cap the profit margins companies can earn from sales of non-urea fertilisers.

Background:

The current cost monitoring and price control regime in urea is being extended to all other subsidized fertilizers.
This is a result of the government's decision to **cap the profit margins companies can earn** from sales of non-urea fertilisers. The MRP of these fertilisers cannot be more than 8-12% higher than their total cost of sales. While urea is a controlled fertiliser, DAP, MOP and complexes (with varying nitrogen, phosphorus, potash and sulphur content) will also cease to be "decontrolled" fertilisers.

What are Controlled and Decontrolled fertilisers?

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

Why has this decision been taken?

1. **Benefits to Farmers:** The government's argument is that the benefit of fertiliser subsidy should also accrue to farmers.
2. **Prevent Unreasonable Profiteering:** Any unreasonable profit (**more than 8-12%**), will have to be foregone by fertiliser companies.

What are the issues?

It takes the fertiliser industry back to the full-control era before the introduction of the nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) system in 2010. As seen in the case of Urea's exclusion from NBS – its fixed MRP led to over-application, worsening nutrient imbalance and declining crop yield response.

What should be done according to the author?

1) Not regulating MRPs of fertilisers.
2) Encouraging balanced nutrient use.
3) Developing fertiliser products customised to different crop and soil-type requirements.
4) Fertiliser subsidy can be converted into a direct income support scheme on a per-farmer or per-hectare basis.

On India's Violation of WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)

News: The article discusses the complaint against India breaching WTO's AoA limits. It also highlights why AoA is discriminatory against developing countries and what India should do in this regard.

A detailed article on **WTO reforms and India** can be read here.

Background:

The 13th Ministerial Conference of the **World Trade Organization** (WTO) will be held in Abu Dhabi next month.
India's main focus at this conference will be to defend its right to purchase food grains from its farmers at minimum support prices (MSPs) without violating the WTO's **Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)** rules.

What is the complaint against India?

India breaching AoA limits: The AoA permits **price support up to 10% of the market value of a product** in developing countries (like India). In 2020-21, India's price support for rice rose to about **15%**. However, the US and other countries claim that India's support is much higher, around **94%**. This high level of support has led to India becoming the top rice exporter, holding 40% of the global market share.

What is the calculation methodology for MPS adopted under WTO's AoA?

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Market Price Support or MPS is the gap between a fixed external reference price and the applied administered price multiplied by the production quantity eligible for the MSP.

For instance, the AoA uses a fixed external reference price of $262.51 per tonne to calculate price support for rice. This price is based on the export or import price of rice from **1986 to 1988** and remains unchanged.

Why does the issue of different calculations of MPS arise?

The flawed methodology of the AoA causes the significant difference in Indian and US calculations of MPS. This is due to:

1. **Definition of Eligible Production:** The AoA defines "eligible production" as the amount of produce that is entitled to receive MSP, regardless of whether it was actually bought. However, India considers the quantity actually bought under MSP.
2. **Incorporating Currency Exchange Rates:** The AoA does not specify that calculations must be in a specific currency. India calculates its subsidy figures in US dollars, benefiting from the weakening INR. However, the US argues otherwise.
3. **Unchanged Reference Point:** Comparing the MSP with a 35-year-old reference price (1986-1988) results in a higher calculated subsidy share for developing countries (since the benchmark of support provided by developed countries was already high in 1986-88).

As a result, the US and the EU today offer over 50% and 65% support and still comply with AoA rules. However, India is considered non-compliant for providing 15% price support.

This makes the AoA **discriminatory against developing countries**

What should be the way forward for India?

1. **MSP as Green Box:** India should seek the classification of MSP programme as "Green Box" support. This would exempt it from obligations to reduce support levels.
2. **Higher Production Targets:** India can consider setting higher production targets for some crops and limit its support to only 75% of the output. This strategy fits into the AoA's Blue Box category.
3. **Expand Team of Experts:** India currently has fewer specialists focusing on agricultural trade issues compared to other countries.

Topic: Economics of animal-rearing

Increasing Milk Production in India – Bull semen imports are a pragmatic experiment

News: The article discusses the status of milk production in India. It also highlights the recent initiative to increase milk production in India, and the associated challenges.

What is the status of milk production in India?

India is the largest producer of milk in the world. In 2022-23, the country produced 230.6 million tonnes of milk.

However, since all of it gets consumed within India, India is not a major exporter. Thus, there is a need to scale up India's dairy farming sector to meet rising domestic demand and serve overseas markets. In this regard, the government is aiming for 330 million tonnes of annual milk output by 2033-34.

How can milk production be increased?

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1) **Increasing the number of cattle.**
2) **Increasing milk producing capacity of Indian cattle.**

According to the author, it is more efficient to increase the milk producing capacity of our existing livestock.

What steps are being taken to increase milk producing capacity of Indian cattle?

The [National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)](#) is importing 40,000 doses of Gir bull semen from Brazil for domestic insemination to raise milk volumes.
The Gir breed is claimed to be capable of producing as much as 40 litres of milk every day per animal. Even its average of **20-22 litres daily** would exceed Indian cattle's usual average (estimated at **8 litres per day**).

Thus, having these genes in the local bovine population could boost milk supply without the need of cattle farm expansion.

Note: The Gir cow is a breed of cattle that originated in the Kathiawar peninsula of western India. Gir cows were imported to Brazil between 1870 and 1962.

What are the issues with this initiative?

1. **Genetic Challenges:** The genetic hybrids may not necessarily acquire all the traits sought to be passed along.
2. **Resistance to Imports:** Imports often face resistance in India, especially in the field of livestock farming, due to opposition from cattle breeders.

Thus, according to the author, India's dairy board is right in importing Gir bull genes from Brazil so that milk output gets a boost.

Topic: Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce

On the Policy regarding Stocking and Export of Agricultural Commodities

News: The article discusses the drawbacks of the measures that have been taken to maintain foodgrain stocks and prevent food inflation India. It also suggests a way forward in this regard.

Background:

Wheat stocks in government warehouses are currently at a 7-year-low. According to the author, this is not a concern currently, but may become one in the future.

What measures have been taken by the govt to maintain stocks and prevent food inflation?

1. **Export Curbs:** Banning wheat and non-basmati white rice exports.
For more on **Ban on Rice Exports**, [read here](#).
2. **Stocking Limits:** Not permitting large retailers and traders to hold more than 1,000 tonnes of wheat.
3. **Sale of Buffer Stock in Open Market:** Selling grain from the [Food Corporation of India](#)'s stocks in the open market (which keeps the prices in check).
4. **Usage Restrictions:** There have been curbs on diversion of cane juice and intermediate-stage molasses for ethanol production by sugar mills.
5. **Allowing Imports in certain cases:** In the case of pulses and edible oils, imports have been allowed at nil or low duties to deal with supply-side challenges.

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However, this policy hasn't been followed in the case of wheat, rice and sugar. This might be due to political pressure (as the growers of these crops are politically more organised and don't want the price of their crops to go down due to cheap imports).

What can be the emerging challenges?

In the case of wheat, if the yield of the current wheat crop (due for harvesting from March-end) is low, it will lead to supply challenges.

What should be done?

1) **Not putting Export or Stocking Controls:** Allowing imports (like in the case of edible oils and pulses) without applying export and stocking controls is required in all agri-commodities.
2) **Policy Consistency:** India's farm sector has suffered from lack of policy stability and predictability. This impacts investments in processing, warehousing, marketing and research.
3) **Long-Term Vision:** A strategic vision for Indian agriculture, going beyond just focusing on short-term issues like food inflation, is important.

On India's Agricultural Export Sector – Export potential

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

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

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

India's export basket includes:

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

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

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

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

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What are the government initiatives undertaken to boost agriculture exports?

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

What should be done?

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

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

Topic: Issues of buffer stocks and food security

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

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

What is India's current Cereal status?

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

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

1. **Decreasing Per Capita Consumption:** Cereal consumption per person has been dropping, with figures showing a decrease from 15.3 kg per month in rural areas in 1977-78 to 11.3 kg in 2011-12.
2. **Changing Dietary Habits:** Urbanization, higher education levels, and diversification in food intake have contributed to reduced cereal consumption.
3. **Increased Export:** There's a significant rise in cereal exports, with 23 million tones in 2020-21 and 32 million tonnes in 2021-22.
4. **Underestimation in Feed Usage:** Experts suggest that the Economic Survey overestimates cereal 'net availability' due to a low allowance for seed, feed, and wastage (SFW- 5%,5%,2.5% respectively), set at 12.5%. They argue the 5% feed component is underestimated. Doubling it to 10% could decrease the cereal surplus by about 15 million tonnes, yet a significant surplus would persist.
5. **Industrial Uses of Cereals:** There's a possibility of increased industrial use of cereals, for products like beer and biscuits, which might not be fully accounted for in consumption estimates.

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6. **What are the implications of this Cereal Gap?**
7. **Agricultural Policy Challenges:** The cereal surplus creates a challenge for policymakers to balance farmer incomes and market demands, questioning the effectiveness of current agricultural policies.
8. **Potential Resource Misallocation:** With declining per capita consumption (from 15.3 kg to 11.3 kg monthly in rural areas between 1977-78 and 2011-12), the surplus suggests possible overinvestment in cereal production.
9. **Impact on Global Trade**: India's increased exports, reaching 23 million tonnes in 2020-21 and 32 million tonnes in 2021-22, indicate the surplus's role in shaping India's position in the global cereal market.

What should be done?

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

Subject: Science & Technology

Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Governance of AI technology - How AI is changing what sovereignty means

News: The article highlights the imperative for ethical governance of AI technology, focusing on human rights amidst digital sovereignty, misinformation, and privacy challenges.

What is AI technology?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a way of making a computer, a computer-controlled robot, or software perform human-like tasks. The term was coined in 1956 by John McCarthy. It refers to the ability of machines to perform **cognitive tasks** like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making. For more information on **AI technology,** read here.

What opportunities does AI technology provide?

1. **Good Governance:** Initiatives like the UN's ethical AI framework aim for good governance and just development, stressing respect, diversity, and ecological sustainability.
2. **Market Growth:** The free market approach to AI, particularly in the U.S., has significantly fostered industry growth. For instance, the social media industry's global prominence is projected by the Business Research Company to reach $454.37 billion by 2027.
3. **Human Rights Focus:** The EU's model prioritizes a human rights-based approach, aiming for an equitable and human-centric digital economy. This showcases AI's potential to align with and promote human dignity and rights.

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4. **Consumer Benefit:** AI drives advancements in big data analytics and the Internet of Things, providing customized services and products to meet specific consumer needs and preferences.

What challenges are faced in the governance of AI technology?

1. **Digital Sovereignty:** The shift from territorial to digital sovereignty complicates international governance, leading to challenges in managing data and information across borders.
2. **Misinformation and Privacy:** AI's capacity to manipulate information and erode privacy is a significant concern. The spread of disinformation and erosion of decisional privacy are key issues needing stringent governance.
3. **Diverse Regulatory Approaches:** The clash between different regulatory models, like the U.S.'s techno-optimistic model and China's state-driven approach, creates a complex landscape for harmonizing AI governance globally.
4. **Technological Control vs. Human Rights:** Balancing technological advancement with human rights is a persistent challenge. The EU's human rights-based approach highlights the difficulty in ensuring AI supports inclusive and sustainable development without infringing on personal freedoms and dignity.

For information on **Challenges in regulation of AI,** read here.

What initiatives are being taken for the governance of AI technology?

1. **UNICEF-led Initiatives:** Establishing ethical guidelines for AI, focusing on human rights, diversity, and ecological sustainability, aiming for good governance globally.
2. **US free market approach:** Promoting a free digital model, allowing AI industries to grow under market forces, evidenced by significant industry growth.
3. **EU human rights-based approach:** Implementing a strategy that respects human rights as a precondition for inclusive and sustainable development, promoting a human-centric digital economy.
4. **China state-driven regulatory model:** Adopting a regulatory approach that combines political control with technological advancement, influencing developing nations and setting a distinct governance style.

For information on the **Status of regulation of AI in India and across the globe,** read here.

Way forward:

As AI continues to evolve, the challenge is to ensure its alignment with human values and rights. The global community needs to address the use of AI in warfare, misinformation, and surveillance, striving for a future where technology supports rather than undermines human dignity.

Improving Battery Technologies for Speedy EV Adoption

News: The article discusses the working of the lithium battery in Electric Vehicles. It also highlights the issues plaguing Li-ion batteries and discusses the efforts being made to improve EV batteries

What is the current status and future potential of EV adoption in India?

EV sales recorded a 50% growth in 2023 compared to 2022. It comprises 6% of vehicles registered in 2023. The future growth of EV adoption is dependent on advances in battery technology (better cost, longer range, faster charging and improved safety).

How does the lithium battery work?

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a. Lithium-ion battery consists of two electrodes (an anode and a cathode) separated by a liquid electrolyte.
b. Lithium atoms in the anode give up electrons which travel to the cathode through an external wire — this stream of electrons provide the current which powers the motor of the vehicle.
c. Simultaneously, lithium ions (now positively charged from loss of an electron) travel through the electrolyte to reach the cathode.

Why is lithium the material of choice for EV batteries?

1. Lithium has a high tendency to give up its electron.
2. Its small size enables the ions to efficiently travel between electrodes through the electrolyte.

This means lighter and smaller batteries with the ability to store large amounts of energy can be made.

What are the issues with Li-ion batteries?

1. **Energy Density:** Its energy density, while high compared to earlier battery technologies, is low in comparison to petrol.
2. **Long Charging Time:** Batteries are slow to charge (compared to filling petrol at a pump).
3. **Affordability:** There is a need to make batteries more affordable and increase their life-span.
4. **Environmental Concerns:** These are primarily related to the mining of lithium and other elements (such as cobalt, nickel).

What are the efforts being made to improve EV batteries?

The efforts toward improving the EV battery can be broadly classified into three approaches:

1. **Changes in the electrodes:** An ideal electrode should be lightweight, store a lot of lithium; and be made of materials that are cheap, non-toxic and easily available.
2. **Deploying sensing and control infrastructure:** For instance, a Battery Management System (BMS) consists of sensors to measure parameters such as temperature, voltage, current, etc. This continuous monitoring can increase safety, extend battery life and speed-up charging.
3. **Solid-State Lithium Battery (SSB):** It seeks to replace the liquid electrolyte used in EV batteries (highly flammable). Also, it provides sufficient structural stability and good separation between the anode and the cathode, thereby replacing the carbon scaffolding used currently. This can greatly reduce the battery's weight and improve charging speed.

What are India's prospects in EV batteries development?

1) **Presence of EV Ecosystem:** India has an expanding market, start-up-friendly environment, friendly government policies, and successful home-grown EV companies (Ather, Ola Electric).
2) **R&D for Innovation:** Fundamental research in material science at premier universities (IIT- Madras and Mumbai) and government research labs promotes innovation.
3) **Semiconductor Industry:** The semiconductor industry in India is also contributing advanced sensors and processors that will power the next generation of BMS.

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Issues with EVs, and possible hybrid solution

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News: The article discusses the benefits of hybrid vehicles in India's decarbonisation journey. It also highlights the challenges in the faster adoption of Battery EVs.

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What are hybrid vehicles?

Hybrid vehicles have both an internal combustion engine (running on fossil fuels) and an electric motor (running on clean electric energy).

What are the benefits of hybrid vehicles?

Hybrids are the more practical medium-term solution for India's decarbonisation efforts because:

1) **Less Polluting:** According to research, currently overall carbon emissions are lower in hybrids compared to both electrics and petrol/diesel vehicles. For instance, a hybrid is at least 16% less polluting than the corresponding EV.
This is because a vehicle emits not just tailpipe emissions, but also emissions from crude mining, refining, and power generation as well.
2) **Less Costly:** Hybrids are also beneficial from the cost-of-ownership perspective.

What are the issues with Battery Electric Vehicles?

1) **Issues with Upfront Subsidy:** The experience in Norway, USA and China shows that the electric push works only through state subsidies. However, the problem is that it will benefit mostly the middle or upper middle classes, who usually buy four-wheeler BEVs.
2) **Charging Infrastructure:** India has only about 2,000 public charging stations currently. India also faces a unique challenge in building charging infrastructure because two- and three-wheelers' charging infrastructure is different from four-wheelers.
3) **Electricity Source:** In India, the energy grid is still mostly dependent on coal-fired thermal plants. This means India is effectively using fossil fuels to power EVs, thus the objective of lowering emissions will not be achieved.
4) **Supply Chain Vulnerabilities:** More than 90% of global Li production is concentrated in a handful of countries, which is also the case for other key inputs such as cobalt and nickel. Thus, there is a need to diversify India's dependency on Li-ion batteries in the EV mix.

Topic: Indigenization of technology and developing new technology

Self-reliance in India's defense sector -Public versus private challenges

News: The article outlines the Indian Ministry of Defence's approval of over ₹1.42 trillion for purchasing DRDO-developed weapons systems. It discusses the role of private companies in increasing domestic defense production and the efforts to decrease dependency on imports.

What is the meaning of "Acceptance of Necessity" (AON)?

Acceptance of Necessity" (AON) is the initial approval given by the Ministry of Defence for the procurement of defense equipment. It marks the beginning of the detailed procurement process, including requests for information, proposals, evaluations, and final contract awarding. It's essentially a green light from the MoD indicating that the procurement plan is necessary and can proceed through the acquisition procedure.

What does self-reliance in India's defense sector entail?

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1. **Emphasis on Domestic Production:** India is focusing more on DRDO-developed systems in its pursuit of self-reliance under the "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" initiative. Industry bodies report that **80-90% of Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) relates to Indian companies.**
2. **Increased Private Sector Involvement:** Private companies like Bharat Forge and Tata are gaining expertise and influence in defense by fulfilling production orders and partnering with DRDO on projects like the Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System.
3. **Growth in Defense Exports:** The private sector's role in defense exports is expanding, with a **notable increase in export figures to ₹16,000 crore this year**, reflecting a substantial growth trajectory in the sector.
4. **Reduction in Imports:** The initiative aims to decrease dependency on foreign technology, though challenges remain in acquiring advanced capabilities domestically. The Ministry of Defence reported a **reduction in defense imports from 46% to 36.7% since 2018-19.**

What challenges does India's defense sector face?

1. **Lengthy Procurement Process:** The defense acquisition involves multiple stages, often stretching over years, delaying the actual deployment of systems. Apart from this, the private sector's involvement is challenged by bureaucratic delays and hesitance in adapting quickly to defense needs.
2. **Technological Gaps:** Despite increased domestic production, certain advanced technologies still need to be imported due to gaps in local capabilities, as seen with sophisticated platforms like the fifth-generation stealth fighter.

Way forward:

To progress, India should continue enhancing its domestic defense capabilities, notably in technology, where private sector growth and exports are promising, as seen with companies like Bharat Forge. Simultaneously, balancing strategic foreign acquisitions is vital to address immediate needs and technology gaps, ensuring a robust and self-reliant defense sector.

The problem with India's science management

News: The article discusses the issues with India's science management.

Scientific advances leading to deployable technologies are important for sustained economic progress for any nation.

What steps are being taken in this regard?

The government has tried to overhaul India's science establishment through the following steps:

1. Setting up of [National Research Foundation (NRF)](#)
2. **Restructuring of the DRDO**.

What are the issues with India's science management?

1. **Low R&D Expenditure:** India's expenditure on R&D is very low (around 0.7% of GDP, compared to 3.5% for USA and 2.4% for China).
2. **Slow Progress in Key Fields:** Fields such as India's **space programme, nuclear energy, genomics, robotics, and AI** are witnessing slow progress.
3. **Public Sector Dominance:** This leads to issues related to governmental bureaucracy, such as slow

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approvals for funding.

4. **Long-Term Funding Issues:** Commitment to long-term steady funding of critical projects is missing.

5. **Issues with Senior Scientists in Leadership Positions:** Some of the issues with their working include micromanaging institutions' accounts, and a lack of accountability.

6. **Concentration of Power:** Since only a handful of institutions (like IITs) had exclusive access to scientific equipment, abuse of power happened by those in control. Appointments, awards, foreign accolades and support from the system became their monopoly.

Why is the assumption that only scientists can lead scientific institutions incorrect?

1. **First**, **administering of a complex organisation** cannot be performed as a side-project of a 'working' scientist. Also, there is a difference between a good scientist, who is generally driven by individual considerations, and a good administrator, who must be organisationally driven.
2. **Second**, **scientists are not trained** to prioritise between time, cost, or precision, in making administrative decisions.
3. **Third**, **there is scope for conflict of interest**. Being an academic within the same institution in which one has administrative control can lead to an abuse of power.

What should be done in this regard?

1. **International Best Practices:** For instance, universities in USA follow a separation of administrators and scientists in their science administratin.
2. **Constituting a Central Service:** Scientists could be selected and trained as part of an all-India science administration central service.

The administrative setup of a science establishment is its core. Without addressing these concerns, India's science establishment will continue to do injustice to its economic and strategic aspirations.

Topic: Awareness in the fields of Space

On ISRO's XPoSat Mission - Meet ISRO's new X-ray eye in the sky

News: The article discusses the details of the recently launched XPoSat Mission by ISRO.

Black holes and neutron stars have remained a mystery. However, because of their immensely strong magnetic fields, these celestial bodies emit highly energetic X-ray light, which can be used to study their properties.

For this purpose, on January 1st, 2024, ISRO's PSLV put into orbit the **XPoSat (X-ray Polarimeter Satellite)** - the country's first space observatory to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays.

This is the world's second space mission to study the polarisation of cosmic X-rays, after **NASA's IXPE**, launched in 2021. XPoSat operates in a frequency band different from NASA's mission.

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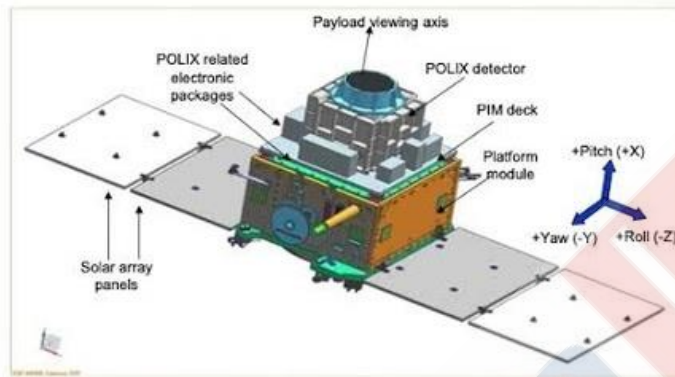
Figure 3.Source: ISRO.

What are X-rays?
X-rays are electromagnetic waves. These are generated by movements of electric charges when the electric and magnetic fields in its vicinity are disturbed.

What are Polarised X-rays?
In electromagnetic waves like X-rays, the electric field oscillates or varies in strength and direction as the wave propagates. The direction and nature of this variation in the electric field depend on the motion of the electric charge responsible for generating the wave.

For instance, as the X-ray wave travels, if the electric charge responsible for producing the X-ray is in motion (such as an electron accelerating), it affects the way the electric field changes as the wave moves.

Sometimes these variations acquire **directionality (variations in a particular direction)**, which is when these X-rays are described as being "polarised".

Stars mostly emit unpolarised light, however it is different in the case of stars with very large magnetic fields. Electrons in those objects spiral around the magnetic field lines and emit X-rays. The electrons' motion provides the X-rays with some directionality, making them polarised.

Measuring the polarisation of X-rays can enable astronomers to understand the nature of these polarised X-ray emitting-objects, such as **pulsars** or **regions around blackholes**.

Note: Pulsar: A pulsar (or pulsating radio source) is a neutron star that rotates quickly and releases two polarised radio lights. The beams create a unique timing and polarisation signature as they burst across space. Pulsars are among the few celestial objects that emit circular polarised light.

Why is it difficult to study X-rays from space?
1. Their high energy makes them impossible to focus with lenses, like ordinary light.
2. The Earth's atmosphere absorbs most of it.

How will XPoSat Mission study X-rays?
1. The main instrument aboard, the payload called **POLIX (Indian X-ray Polarimeter)**, aims to study a special property of X-rays in space. POLIX is shaped like a cubical cylinder. At its core lies a disc of beryllium. Detectors kept along the walls collect X-rays after their scattering from the metallic disc. POLIX's beryllium disc will let astronomers probe lower energy X-rays than what the NASA instrument is capable of.

2. The other instrument (**XSPECT**) aboard XPoSat will study timing and spectral properties of X-ray emitting objects in space.

With this venture, ISRO has signaled that it has the expertise and maturity to contribute to all aspects of planetary research.

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On ISRO's C58 mission - Sign of the future

News: The article discusses ISRO's C58 Mission.

What are the recent initiatives of ISRO?

ISRO has launched the following scientific missions since its success with Chandrayaan-3:

1. **Aditya L-1** space probe to study the Sun.

2. **X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat)** to study polarised X-rays emitted in astrophysical phenomena.

What is the XPoSat Mission?

On January 1, ISRO launched the XPoSat, in a two-part mission, onboard a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) on its C58 flight.

XPoSat is only the **second space-based experiment** to study **X-ray polarisation**. It does this at higher x-ray energies than the other, NASA's Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer.

Payloads:

1. **POLIX payload:** It will track X-rays in the 8-30 kilo-electron-volt (keV) energy range and observe emissions from around 50 sources in 5 years.

2. **XSPECT payload:** It will study X-rays of energy 0.8-15 keV and changes in continuous X-ray emissions.

Together, they will help ISRO study intense X-ray sources such as pulsars and black holes.

What is the second part of the C58 mission?

After launching XPoSat in a 650-km circular orbit around the earth, the fourth stage of the rocket lowered itself into a 350-km-high orbit and unfurled solar panels.

It thus became a satellite and an orbiting testbed for the **10 payloads** it carried (such as a tantalum-based radiation shield, a nanosatellite, a device to measure ultraviolet radiation, etc.).

The C58 mission embodies the combined dreams of seasoned scientists, enthusiastic science students, and India's private space industry.

On the Aditya-L1 mission and ISRO outreach

News: The article discusses the details of the Aditya-L1 mission and the need for public outreach by ISRO.

On January 6 the Aditya-L1 spacecraft was guided by ISRO into its orbit around the **L1 Lagrange point**, from where it will have a clear view of the sun for its expected lifetime of 5 years.

What is the L1 Lagrange point?

ISRO picked the L1 Lagrange point — **1.5 million km from the earth** (one of five Lagrange points in the earth-sun system).

This is because at a Lagrange Point, the gravitational influences of the two bodies interact such that a smaller body here will not experience a net pull towards either. So, Aditya-L1 can stay at L1 while expending little fuel.

What are the instruments present on Aditya L1?

Aditya-L1 is an observatory-class solar mission that will study the sun with the following instruments:

1. **VELC**, a coronagraph to study the uppermost layer of the sun's atmosphere;
2. **SUIT**, an ultraviolet imaging telescope;
3. **SoLEXS and HEL1OS**, to study solar flares and coronal mass ejections;
4. **ASPEX and PAPA**, to study the solar wind and plasma;
5. **Set of digital magnetometers** to measure properties of the magnetic field around the spacecraft.

For more on the **Aditya L1 Mission**, read here and here.

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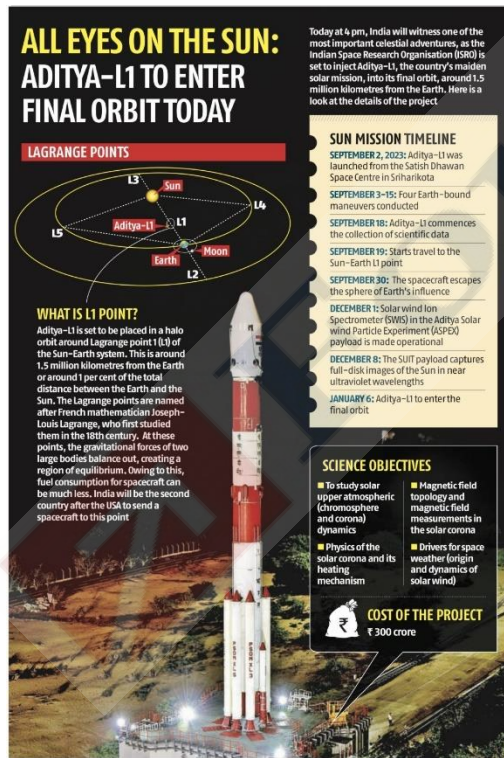**Forum IAS**

What more should be done by ISRO?

Expansion of public outreach efforts: This can be done by hosting open days focused on specific missions and communicating on new results at regular intervals.

India's space mission plan for 2024- Space research: Glory and beyond

News: The article discusses India's advancements in space research, including its solar observatory Aditya-L1 and other missions planned for 2024. It explains the motives behind space exploration, highlighting nationalism, economic growth, technological development, and international prestige as key drivers.

What is India's space mission plan for 2024?

1. **Aditya-L1:** Observing the solar atmosphere and contributing to the understanding of space weather from a unique vantage point at the Sun-Earth Lagrange point 1.
2. **XPoSat:** India's first X-ray Polarimeter Satellite, dedicated to studying cosmic radiation and understanding high-energy processes in stellar and galactic systems.
3. **Gaganyaan-1:** Laying the groundwork for future manned spaceflights.
4. **Mangalyaan-2:** Orbiting Mars again to continue exploration and research.
5. **NISAR (NASA-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar):** A collaboration with NASA for Earth observation, highlighting the importance of international partnerships.
6. **Shukrayaan-1:** Exploring Venus to expand knowledge of the solar system.

ALL EYES ON THE SUN: ADITYA-L1 TO ENTER FINAL ORBIT TODAY

Today at 4 pm, India will witness one of the most important celestial adventures, as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to inject Aditya-L1, the country's maiden solar mission, into its final orbit, around 1.5 million kilometres from the Earth. Here is a look at the details of the project.

LAGRANGE POINTS

WHAT IS L1 POINT?
Aditya-L1 is set to be placed in a halo orbit around Lagrange point 1 (L1) of the Sun-Earth system. This is around 1.5 million kilometres from the Earth or around 1 per cent of the total distance between the Earth and the Sun. The Lagrange points are named after French mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange, who first studied them in the 18th century. At these points, the gravitational forces of two large bodies balance out, creating a region of equilibrium. Owing to this, fuel consumption for spacecraft can be much less. India will be the second country after the USA to send a spacecraft to this point

SUN MISSION TIMELINE
SEPTEMBER 2, 2023: Aditya-L1 was launched from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota
SEPTEMBER 3-15: Four Earth-bound maneuvers conducted
SEPTEMBER 18: Aditya-L1 commences the collection of scientific data
SEPTEMBER 19: Starts travel to the Sun-Earth L1 point
SEPTEMBER 30: The spacecraft escapes the sphere of Earth's influence
DECEMBER 1: Solar wind Ion Spectrometer (SWIS) in the Aditya Solar wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX) payload is made operational
DECEMBER 8: The SUIT payload captures full-disk images of the Sun in near ultraviolet wavelengths
JANUARY 6: Aditya-L1 to enter the final orbit

SCIENCE OBJECTIVES
■ To study solar upper atmospheric (chromosphere and corona) dynamics
■ Magnetic field topology and magnetic field measurements in the solar corona
■ Physics of the solar corona and its heating mechanism
■ Drivers for space weather (origin and dynamics of solar wind)

COST OF THE PROJECT
₹ 300 crore

COMPILED BY SHINE JACOB

How does space research benefit India?

1. **National Security and Prestige:** Successful missions like Aditya-L1 not only enhance India's global standing and national pride but also position it as a competitor in the global space race, traditionally dominated by powers like the U.S., Russia, and China.
2. **Economic Growth:** The Indian space economy, valued at $8.4 billion, is projected to expand to $44 billion by 2033. This growth is fueled by rising investments and a burgeoning number of space startups.
3. **Technological Advancements:** Missions necessitate technological advancements, specifically in the miniaturization of electronic components essential for spacecraft. These innovations extend to wider industries, significantly impacting the development of semiconductors and integrated circuits.
4. **International Collaboration:** Projects like NISAR with NASA show the growing importance and benefit of international partnerships in space exploration.
5. **Start-up Ecosystem:** A significant increase in space startups from 1 in 2014 to 189 in 2023, receiving investments worth $124.7 million, indicates a booming sector fueled by space research.

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Subject: Environment

Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

On the Issues with Climate Change Treaties

News: The article discusses the issues with climate change treaties and the steps that can be undertaken to tackle them.

A detailed article on **UNFCCC COP28** can be read here.

According to the author, the Dubai Agreement, as part of the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28), will not have much impact on combating climate change.

What are the issues with climate change treaties?

1) **Voluntary Commitments Not Working:** Voluntary commitments entail no accountability. For instance, at the formation of the UNFCCC in 1992, all countries committed to preventing climate change, but emissions have continued to rise.
2) **Issues with Economic Models:** Economic models that intend to identify optimal climate policies often underestimate the benefits of emissions reductions and overestimate their costs.
3) **Not Considered Important:** In a world of urgent challenges, policymakers and the public have limited attention for climate change.
4) **Non-Cooperative Unilateral Approaches:** For instance, EU's **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).** This prevents cooperation.

What should be done to tackle the issues with climate change treaties?

As shown by the **Montreal Protocol** (which bars participating countries from trading in ozone-depleting chemicals (CFCs)) with non-participating countries) and **MARPOL** (access to ports is restricted to ships that meet certain technical standards), the following steps can make climate change treaties more effective:
1) **Targeted Approach:** Agreements should aim at achieving progress in narrow, but crucial, economic sectors. For instance, the Montreal Protocol, which protects the stratospheric ozone layer.
2) **Legal Obligations:** Unlike the voluntary commitments made at each climate-change COP, these two treaties established binding obligations that can be enforced through international trade markets.
3) **Positive Feedback Loop:** The more countries that agree to participate, the higher the pressure on others to join.
4) **"Common but Differentiated" Responsibilities:** To succeed, international climate agreements must be compatible with countries' economic strategies. They should include provisions whereby richer countries agree to help poorer countries in terms of finance or technology.

These steps should be replicated for other major emissions sources. For instance, Aluminum production.

Through these changes, the world will have a better chance to achieve rapid and equitable transition to net-zero emissions.

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

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

Background:

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

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

A trade-off is a decision that involves losing something in exchange for gaining something else. It can also be defined as a compromise between two things.
The problem of air pollution involves making choices based on **multiple trade-offs between development and environmental preservation**.

Who should make these decisions?

According to the author, it is not the scientists (academia), or environmental activists that should make these decisions, but the politicians (governments).
The job of **academicians** is to generate and present evidence so that these trade-offs are done in an informed manner. Whereas **activists** have already made the trade-offs (generally pro-environment) which derails further discussion.
The **political class**, given that they are the chosen representatives of the people, should be the ones to make decisions regarding trade-offs. Unfortunately, they have been unable to do so.

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

1) **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor:** It segregated traffic to expand road space for public transport at the cost of private four-wheelers. It resulted in increased speed of public transport, increased travel time of private cars and improved pedestrian safety.
However, it was deemed a failure and discontinued. This was because the car-using-middle-class rejected this trade-off between the inconvenience and the multi-fold benefits of using public transport.
2) **Odd-Even:** Despite a lack of clear evidence of its usefulness and the severity of public inconvenience, it is considered a politically acceptable alternative, perhaps due to its short period.
3) **Smog Towers:** The lack of effectiveness of smog towers has not prevented them from being installed and actively pursued even now. These promote a public perception of politicians being sensitive to the concerns of the people.

How can the crop-burning issue be addressed effectively?

1. **Multifaceted package:** Given the complexity of the problem, it will need a package of **technical, regulatory, fiscal, and informational interventions** to succeed.
2. **Right Marketing:** The solution needs to be marketed well so that all stakeholders feel that an effort is being made and all are contributing their share to the solution.
3. **Right Political Narrative:** This can only be done by setting up the right political narrative, which is being hampered due to the fear of the political fallout of such decisions.

What is the role of the public in this case?

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

Challenges to India's Climate Goals

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

A detailed article on **UNFCCC COP28** can be read here.

The 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) concluded with a statement calling for the **phase-out of fossil fuels**.
However, achieving these climate targets will be difficult without immediate and decisive action by India, the **world's third-largest greenhouse-gas (GHG) emitter**. India accounted for **7.6% of global GHG emissions in 2022**.

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

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

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

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

What should be done?

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

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

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

What is Project Tiger?

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

For more information read here

How Did the Wildlife Laws Evolve?

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

What are the implications of legal changes in Wildlife Laws?

1. **Expansion of Tiger Reserves:** From nine reserves in 1973 to 54 in 2022, covering 78,135.956 sq. km across 18 states.
2. **Increase in Tiger Population:** Due to enhanced protection, tiger numbers rose to 3,167-3,925 by 2022.
3. **Challenges in Implementing the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA):** Though recognizing forest-dweller rights, the implementation has been problematic, leading to disputes over land use in tiger reserves.
4. **Lacked buffer area:** Under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, India designated 26 tiger reserves across 12 states as Critical Tiger Habitats (CTHs), covering 25,548.54 sq. km, 91.77% of which are CTHs. However, except for Odisha's Simlipal, these lacked Buffer Areas until mandated by a 2012 Supreme Court order.
5. **Relocation and Rehabilitation Challenges:** Relocation and rehabilitation under wildlife conservation laws like the LARR Act face challenges. Despite legal mandates for fair compensation and resettlement, the process often lacks transparency and adequate compensation, leading to disputes and dissatisfaction among relocated communities.
6. **Conflict with the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) Directives:** The NTCA's 2007 directive for delineating CTHs conflicted with the FRA's provisions, complicating the balance between tiger conservation and community rights.

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7. **Fixed compensation:** The Union and State governments offer ₹15 lakh, increased from ₹10 lakh in 2021, for either cash or relocation under the Project Tiger 2008 guidelines. However, this doesn't fully cover the legal requirements for compensation, resettlement, and relocation under LARR Act

What should be done?

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

Need for a detailed air quality management plan in India

News: This article discusses India's challenges with air pollution and proposes a detailed plan. It suggests creating an advanced air quality framework using science, technology, and policy to monitor and manage air pollution more effectively across different regions of India.

Why is there a need for a detailed air quality management plan in India?

1. **Severe Air Pollution:** Indian cities are grappling with high levels of air pollution, as highlighted during events like COP 28.
   For information on **COP 28** read here.
2. **Mixed Results from Existing Plans:** The National Clean Air Action Plan (NCAP) launched in 2019 shows mixed results, indicating the need for more effective strategies.
   For information on NCAP read here.
3. **Health and Climate Risks:** Air pollution in India, caused by fossil fuel combustion, industrial processes, and biofuel burning, poses health risks and contributes to climate change.
4. **Diverse Climatic Conditions:** India's varied micro-environments and climatic conditions make a one-size-fits-all approach ineffective.
5. **Lack of Comprehensive Data**: Current efforts are mainly urban-focused, and there's a lack of systematic emissions inventory and monitoring.
6. **Baseline Pollution Levels:** Research by NIAS shows baseline levels of pollutants like PM2.5 are higher than WHO guidelines, emphasizing the need for localized standards.

What has been done to address air pollution in India?

1. **Implementation of National Clean Air Action Plan (NCAP):** Launched in 2019, the NCAP was India's major initiative to reduce air pollution levels in its cities.
2. **Establishment of Air Quality Monitoring Networks:** Enhanced monitoring systems have been set up in urban areas to regularly track air pollution levels.
3. **Research Initiatives by NIAS**: The National Institute of Advanced Studies conducted research to establish baseline levels of major air pollutants in various climatic zones.
4. **Technology Integration for Emission Tracking:** In Bengaluru, drone-based artificial intelligence was used for the first time to identify emission hotspots, a step towards precise pollution source identification.
5. **Policy Formulation at Urban Levels:** Focused efforts on analyzing and managing air pollution in urban areas, acknowledging the severity of pollution in these regions.

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6. **15th Finance Commission Funding:** Allocated funds to states specifically for air quality management, encouraging state-level initiatives and actions.

What should be done to address air pollution?

1. **Strengthen Key Input Parameters:** Before developing an air quality early warning system, focus on reinforcing two critical aspects: **creating a detailed inventory of emissions and conducting comprehensive air-shed mapping**. This foundational work is essential for accurate forecasting and effective management of air quality.
2. **Tailor Strategies to Diverse Environments:** Address air quality in rural, urban, and industrial areas with strategies specific to each region's climatic conditions.
3. **Incorporate Advanced Technology:** Incorporate Advanced Technology entails using innovative tools in air pollution management. This includes drone-based AI for pinpointing emission hotspots, as demonstrated in Bengaluru, and CubeSats, small satellites offering detailed environmental monitoring, crucial for air quality analysis in India.
4. **Expert Collaboration:** Form a consortium of domain experts, health scientists, and policy specialists for integrated air quality management.

Conservation efforts at India's Corbett Tiger Reserve - Revival of the tiger

News: The article highlights the successful conservation efforts at India's Corbett Tiger Reserve, notably the increasing tiger population.

About Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR):

Jim Corbett National Park was **established in 1936 as Hailey National Park**- the **first national park in India.** It was **declared as a Tiger Reserve in 1973**. It is the first to come under the Project Tiger initiative.
The CTR is situated in the Shivalik hills of the Himalayas while administratively it spreads over Pauri Garhwal, Nainital and Almora districts of Uttarakhand State in India.
It boasts the **highest density of tigers globally**, with **260 tigers recorded in 2022, up from 231 four years prior.**

What are the reasons for the increase in tiger density in Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR)?

1. **Digital and Intensive Patrolling:** Adopting electronic-eye under project E-eye and increasing foot patrols to curb poaching and monitor wildlife movement.
2. **Habitat Management:** Meticulous management of grasslands and water resources, including the development of palatable grasses and waterholes, supports the prey base necessary for tigers.
3. **Strategic Corridors:** Establishment of wildlife corridors facilitates movement and reduces inbreeding, contributing to healthier tiger populations.
4. **Community Initiatives:** Introduction of the "**Living with Tigers**" initiative and beehive fencing project "**Corbee Honey**" to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts and promote community involvement in conservation.
   Note: The "Living with Tigers" initiative is an **awareness program in villages and schools around reserve,** focusing on cultivating safe practices and behaviors amidst human-wildlife conflict scenarios.
5. **Cultural Importance:** The tiger's role in India's religious and mythological iconography has fueled a nationwide drive to conserve it. It led to increased public and political support for tiger conservation initiatives.

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What are the challenges in the management of Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR)?

1. **Human-Wildlife Conflict-** The increasing number of tigers poses challenges in managing human-tiger conflicts and ensuring sufficient territory for each tiger.
2. The protection work is risky, often facing dangers from wild animals. Adequate field staff and ensuring their safety is a constant challenge.
3. Maintaining diverse ecosystems, including 27 types of grasslands and water sources for a robust prey base.
4. Ensuring animal movement and gene pool exchange through corridors is complicated by **habitat fragmentation** and **increasing infrastructure** like roads.
5. **Balancing tiger conservation with the ecotourism and safety of local communities** requires continuous effort and innovative projects like "Living with Tigers."

What should be done?

1. Boost field staff numbers and safety measures for effective patrolling and incident management.
2. Continue to develop and maintain wildlife corridors and safe animal crossings to ensure healthy gene flow and reduce territorial disputes among tigers, as well as conflicts between tigers-elephants, and humans tigers.
3. Implement a grassroots strategy involving "willing cooperation" from villagers, as emphasized by Salim Ali.

Climate Change induced Temperature Rise - IMD's 2023 report is a wake-up call

News: The article discusses how 2023 was India's second-warmest year, causing various weather issues and affecting the economy, agriculture, and employment due to climate change.

How did the year 2023 bring a grim retrospect from the India Meteorological Department (IMD)?

1. **Temperature Rise:** 2023 was marked as the second warmest year since 1901, with the average temperature 0.65°C above the long-term mean.
2. **Extreme Rainfall:** December 2023 saw rainfall 60% above normal, making it an exceptionally wet month, except in the north and Northeast regions.
3. **Tropical Storms:** The Indian Ocean experienced six tropical storms, significantly higher than usual, with three escalating to severe cyclonic storms, indicating a rise in extreme weather events.
4. **El Nino Contribution:** The unusual weather patterns and increased global temperatures were partly attributed to El Nino, underscoring the broader impact of climate change.

How is climate change going to impact India?

1. The Reserve Bank of India's 2022-23 Report on Currency and Finance projects a potential 2% loss in GDP and a decline in living standards for half the population by 2050. It particularly emphasizes the loss in productivity in major sectors such as agriculture and construction due to increasing heat stress.
2. The World Bank predicts India will face over 40% of global job losses due to heat-induced productivity decline by 2030.
3. It is bad for poorest populations, as evident by skyrocketing prices of essentials like vegetables (tomatoes, onions, potatoes, chilly, and cumin) due to erratic weather impacting production.

What should be done?

1. Accelerate strategies to reduce carbon intensity in GDP by 2030 due to increasing climate challenges.
2. Allocate sufficient funds for both mitigation and adaptation to climate impacts.

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3. Prioritize renewable energy sources over thermal power to meet 2030 targets and reduce coal dependency.

Subject: Internal Security

Topic: Money Laundering and its prevention

Virtual Digital Assets Regulation in India - Why did FIU IND act against virtual asset providers?

News: The Financial Intelligence Unit India (FIU IND) has issued Show Cause Notices to 9 offshore Virtual Digital Assets Service Providers (VDA-SPs) for not complying with the PMLA regulations. The FIU IND has also requested the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to block URLs of these entities.

What are Virtual Digital Assets?

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) defines a virtual asset as "*A digital representation of value that can be digitally traded, transferred and used for payment or investment purposes*".

Read More.

How Virtual Digital Assets regulated in India?

1. **PMLA Compliance:** India brought Virtual Digital Assets Service Providers (VDA SPs) under Anti Money Laundering/Counter Financing of Terrorism (AML-CFT) regulations of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002 in March 2023.
   For more information on Counter Financing of Terrorism, read here.
2. **Register with Financial Intelligence Unit India (FIU IND):** VDA SPs must register with FIU IND and comply with reporting and record-keeping obligations. Till now, 31 VDA SPs have registered, but several offshore entities serving Indian users remain unregistered.It highlights the challenge of enforcing compliance in the virtual digital assets space.
3. **Government Enforcement:** India aims to enforce PMLA on both domestic and offshore entities, aligning with global cryptocurrency regulations.

What is the view of the Bureau for International Settlements (BIS) on the regulation of VDA SPs?

1. **Regulatory Options:** The BIS observed three main strategies for regulating crypto: outright ban, containment, and comprehensive regulation.
2. **Challenges of a Ban:** It noted that outright bans may not be effective due to the pseudo-anonymous nature of crypto assets, potentially leading to reduced market oversight.
3. **Containment Strategy:** The containment approach aims to control interactions between crypto markets and the traditional financial system, yet it may not fully address the vulnerabilities of the crypto market or mitigate financial stability risks.
4. **Need for Regulation:** BIS suggests that regulation, although challenging, may be necessary to address the inherent risks in the crypto market and maintain financial stability.

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Way forward:

The way forward includes stricter enforcement of AML laws, ensuring both domestic and offshore VDA SPs comply. It involves balancing regulatory strategies to manage the crypto market's pseudo-anonymous nature and maintain financial stability.

Terminology used:

Financial Intelligence Unit India (FIU-IND)- Established in 2004 to serve as the primary national organization in charge of gathering, analyzing, and disseminating data about improbable financial transactions.

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas

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

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

Background:

Recently, in a terror strike in the Rajouri-Poonch districts resulted in martyrdom of 4 soldiers. This was followed by the death of 3 civilians allegedly in the military's custody.
In this backdrop, the Director General of Police, J&K, emphasized on the number of terrorists killed.
According to the author, it cannot be denied that neutralizing terrorists is a crucial objective of security operations. However, it should not become the only factor, especially in the present context of a lower number of terror incidents.
For more on this terror attack, read here.

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

1. According to the author, terrorists cannot be eliminated to the last man.
2. The number of 'kills' as parameters of a successful counter-terror campaign **addresses only the symptoms**, and not the broader underlying causes.
3. This approach may lead to **prioritizing the ends (number of kills)** with a total disregard for the means.
4. **Based on mala fide considerations** such as primacy of short-term gains, competitive career environments, and a false sense of glory.

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

What should have been the approach?

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

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Challenges faced by the Indian Army- What India's Army Chief needs to do in the face of two-front threats

News: The article discusses the annual media briefing held by the Indian Army Chief on January 11. It covers India's military strategic security issues, including border management, internal security challenges, and the Army's modernization efforts. The focus is on General Manoj Pande's recent briefing and his views on these topics.

What are the current security challenges faced by the Indian Army?

1. **In Manipur:**
   Decreased violence, but recovery of only 30% of 5,000 stolen small arms.
   Persistent ethnic conflicts and potential for spreading instability.
2. **At the Indo-Myanmar Border:**
   Volatile situation with infiltration challenges due to **Free Movement Regime**.
   Smuggling of narcotics and contraband across the border.
   Only 20 Assam Rifles units were available for border sealing.
3. **Challenges in Jammu & Kashmir:**
   Acknowledgment of tactical setbacks with 20 soldiers lost in recent ambushes.
   Need for new approaches in the long-standing counter-insurgency campaign.
4. **Northern Border with China:**
   High operational preparedness required along the Line of Actual Control.
   Ongoing efforts to return to the pre-2020 status with China.
   Trust deficit leading to continuous robust military deployment.

How is the Indian Army addressing these challenges?

1. **In Manipur**, the Army collaborates with central and state agencies to restore stability, addressing the decrease in violence but facing the challenge of unrecovered stolen arms.
2. **On the Indo-Myanmar border,** the Army and Assam Rifles work together to manage security threats, despite the Free Movement Regime complicating border control.
3. **In Jammu & Kashmir,** the Army is adapting tactics and learning from recent setbacks, including 20 soldiers lost in ambushes.
4. **Along the China border**, the Army maintains a high operational readiness and robust deployment, focusing on returning to the pre-2020 status and managing the trust deficit.

What should be the way forward?

Moving forward, the Indian Army should continue its efforts in current operations, especially in areas like Manipur, along the Indo-Myanmar border, Jammu & Kashmir and China border. Simultaneously, it is important to focus on integrating new technologies and preparing for climate change impacts. This dual approach of consolidating current strategies while embracing innovation and environmental considerations will be crucial for future readiness and effectiveness.

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Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate

Increase in BSF operational jurisdiction- Limits and borders

News: The article discusses a dispute between Punjab and the Indian central government about increasing the Border Security Force's (BSF) operational area from 15 km to 50 km in Punjab.

What changes have been made by the October 2021 Centre notification under the BSF Act?

1.The BSF's operational jurisdiction was expanded from 15 km to 50 km from the border in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam.
2.In Gujarat, the BSF's jurisdiction was decreased from 80 km to 50 km.
3.For Rajasthan, the operational area of the BSF remained the same at 50 km.

How does the BSF operate?

1. **Preventing Trans-Border Crimes:** The BSF's primary role is to stop unauthorized entries and exits across India's borders.
   However, the BSF does not have authority to investigate or prosecute offenders. It has to hand over those arrested, and the contraband seized from them to the local police.
2. **Coordination with Local Police:** They work closely with the police for law enforcement, especially in border areas.
3. **Search and Seizure Operations:** The BSF conducts searches and seizures, especially in cases where offenders penetrate deep into the country.

What are the different arguments related to this dispute?

Arguments from the States (Punjab and West Bengal)

1. **Expansion Oversteps Powers:** expansion from 15 km to 50 km infringes on their jurisdiction over law and order. Using Article 131, Punjab filed a lawsuit against the Union government, claiming that the increase in jurisdiction violates the Constitution. State governments are constitutionally responsible for maintaining public order and exercising police powers.
   Note: Article 131 vests the Supreme Court with original jurisdiction over disputes occurring between states or between states and the Centre.
   For more information read here
2. **Violation of Federal Principles:** The move is seen as a breach of federalism, where state powers should be respected.
3. **Legislative Action:** Both states have passed resolutions in their assemblies opposing the BSF's expanded jurisdiction.

Arguments from the Central Government

1. **Enhanced Border Security:** The increase to 50 km is justified to improve border patrol effectiveness.
2. **Standardizing Operations:** The expansion aims to unify the operational area across different states for consistency.

Perspective of the Supreme Court

1. **Legal Examination:** The Supreme Court is reviewing whether the expansion encroaches upon state government's domain.

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2. **Constitutional Balance:** The court is assessing the balance of powers between the central and state governments under the constitutional framework.

Way forward

The way forward involves a balanced approach respecting both national security needs and state autonomy. Effective consultation between the central and state governments, along with the Supreme Court's guidance, can lead to a solution that upholds constitutional principles and federalism.

Issues with CAPFs-Don't neglect the central armed police forces

News: The article discusses the issues facing India's Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) such as leadership selection, training neglect, and over-deployment. It emphasizes the need for better planning and policies to improve their discipline, morale, and combat effectiveness.

About central armed police forces (CAPFs):

The Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in India are seven security forces **under the Ministry of Home Affairs.** They used to be called "Central Para-Military Forces" but changed their name in 2011. The seven are Assam Rifles, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Indo Tibetan Border Police, National Security Guard, and Sashastra Seema Bal. Each has its own cadre of officers but **led by Indian Police Service officers.** Battalion Strength: Notable numbers include CRPF with 246 battalions, BSF with 193, ITBP with 56, and SSB with 73.

For more information on **CAPFs,** read here.

What are the key issues with CAPFs?

1. **Leadership Adhocism**: Selection processes for leaders are often ad-hoc, leading to unqualified appointments and widespread resentment. For example, officers without CAPF experience have been appointed to lead forces.
2. **Delayed Leadership Appointments:** Key positions like the director general (DG) of BSF remained vacant for five months after the retirement of VK Johri in 2020, indicating a lack of timely decision-making and planning.

What is the impact of these issues?

1. **Decreased Morale:** Leadership issues and adhocism lead to a loss of respect and loyalty among personnel, crucial for effective operations.
2. **Professional Standards Decline:** Constant deployment and training neglect have resulted in falling professional levels, comparable to state battalions from decades ago.
3. **Ineffective Leadership:** Officers unfamiliar with CAPF realities, like senior IB officers appointed as directors general, struggle to command and address force-specific challenges.
4. **Operational Delays:** Vacancies in leadership, such as the DG of BSF and SSB, leave units directionless, hindering responsiveness and strategic planning.
5. **Overall Security Risk:** These compounded issues threaten the integrity and efficiency of India's internal security apparatus, potentially weakening the country's response to internal and border security threats.

What should be done?

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1. **Structured Leadership Criteria:** Implement clear guidelines for leadership roles, requiring field experience in CAPFs or equivalent positions for eligibility.
2. **Timely Appointments:** Plan and execute succession for leadership positions without delays, akin to the imperative continuity seen in military leadership.
3. **Dedicated Training Units:** Ensure each battalion has a company exclusively for training to uphold and improve combat readiness and professional standards.
4. **Commission for CAPF Reform:** Establish a commission dedicated to addressing the myriad problems within CAPFs, offering both short-term fixes and long-term strategies.
5. **Better Career Planning:** Avoid using CAPFs as a dumping ground for officers from other services and ensure that leaders are chosen for their aptitude and experience with CAPF challenges.

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