

# 9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



4<sup>th</sup> Week

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Features :

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

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## GS Paper 1

### Subject: Indian Society

#### Topic: 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.

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?

**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.

**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.

**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.



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.

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.

## 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?

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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.
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?



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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.

## 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.

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

## 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 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 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:



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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?
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.



## 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 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.

## Topic: Issues relating to poverty and hunger

### 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?

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 Mukh 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 Mukh 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 Mukh 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:

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 in 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.

## 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.

## Subject: International Relations

### Topic: India and its Neighborhood - relations

#### 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.
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.

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

#### 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?

## 9 PM Compilation for the Month of January [Fourth Week] 2024

- 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 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 inward-looking 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”**.

## GS Paper 3

**Subject: Indian Economy**

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

**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.

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.

#### 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%.**

#### 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.

### 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).
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.

## Subject: Agriculture

### 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 fertilisers.

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?

**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?

**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?**

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.

## Subject: Science & Technology

### Topic: Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

#### 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?

- 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.

### Issues with EVs, and possible hybrid solution

**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.

#### 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.

## Subject: Environment

### Topic: 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.

## Subject: Internal Security

### 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

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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.
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.